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Re: CAPEL SOUND FORESHORE RESERVE DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc. is a federation of 15 coastal conservation groups. Our association is dedicated to the preservation of the scarce remnant vegetation on the coastal fringes of Port Phillip, especially its eastern shoreline.

As such we wish to provide comments and suggestions in relation to the Foreshore Reserve Management Plan. We also wish to compliment the committee on your recent program of environmental weed removal, and look forward to restoration of these areas to their original vegetation cover.

We also draw your attention to our Policy No. 16 at www.vicnet.net.au/~phillip/policy16.pdf which outlines in detail our views on the matter of camping and caravanning on the coastline of Port Phillip Bay. We commend the Policy to you and suggest that you adopt its intent, rather than what is outlined in your current Management Plan for the foreshore you are responsible for managing in a sustainable manner into the future.

OPENING COMMENTS

It is time to turn our minds to a more appropriate set of community values for our coast and foreshore so as to ensure that we still have our priceless asset into the 21st Century. We need a courageous plan from your Committee of Management which does more than pay lip service to the natural environment, whilst pandering to vested commercial and other outmoded and entrenched sectors of the community.

Government has developed some good policies and legislation to protect our natural coastal areas. Paradoxically, even though government has provided an excellent framework of legislation, policies and protocols for managing our precious environment, all levels of government, and those who act on behalf of government, fall short in implementing and enforcing existing policy and legislation to protect the environment. Everywhere it seems the vast will of government and its constituents is being cowed into submission by the shrill demands of a noisy minority of vested interests, which in the case of your foreshore responsibilities includes campers and boatshed occupants. This is an unhealthy, undemocratic state of affairs.

Coastal Crown land around Australia has recently been discovered for what it has always been - a priceless, irreplaceable asset. In the Capel Sound area, and throughout most of the Peninsula, our foreshore is a critically narrow section of land - suddenly highly prized by our community. By world standards we are fortunate indeed to still publicly own the vast majority of our coastline and foreshore.

Communities want to preserve our natural coastal assets. It is time to implement the will of the majority as a real working model – it is no longer adequate to produce 21st Century local management plans for our coastal assets which reproduce and reinforce land management practices of the 20th and even 19th Century.

We've had it good – and behaved appallingly for a long time in our public foreshore reserves: We cut down important foreshore vegetation so that we can take our cars right up to the beach with us (then complain about hot cars and lack of adequate shade), we destroy foreshore and cliff areas to construct car parks and private sheds on public land (then demand taxpayer/ratepayer assistance when bathing boxes, boatsheds and caravans are damaged by natural weather events), and we continually damage or remove mature foreshore vegetation on public land to "improve" private views, (then complain about salt spray, sand and wind buffeting our coastal homes and shopfronts) etc.

In other areas of public life we have had to rein in our excesses for the benefit of the majority. We are no longer able to blow smoke over non-smoking patrons in restaurants, or drive home after a boozy party. It is illegal to behave thus. It is time to apply the same logic to our publicly owned natural surroundings, reining in our behaviour to suit the fragility of what we have left. This means changing the way we behave when we visit the coast, and changing what we expect to see when we visit the coast – no different from realising that we had to change our thinking about drink driving, smoking in public, speeding, seat belts, crash helmets, water restrictions, incinerators, building heights – the list is endless. These public issues and activities now have legislation and enforcement to cover their management - which has improved our collective quality of life.

Likewise, changing the way we think about our foreshore, what we think it is for, and what we should be allowed to do on it, (rather than just doing more of the same with a few little cosmetic concessions) will also improve our collective quality of life now and for those generations to come. We should no longer feel comfortable when we do things which we know will stress or damage our precious foreshore. Many of the ongoing activities and some of the “initiatives” in your plan will place additional stress on parts of the foreshore, and will cause discomfort and inconvenience for the wider community.

Your current plan however entrenches highly damaging, and unsustainable activities such as camping and expansion of the boat ramp activities, and will in no way enhance or sustain the Foreshore Reserve.

We now wish to address some specific sections of the plan:

VISION: To manage the Reserve to *enhance and maintain its natural values, whilst providing for a range of recreational opportunities within a sustainable environmental economic and social framework* uses the language of countless other documents currently churned out by consultants to government, and in reality some of your aims are incompatible with one another, and some are certainly incompatible with your Vision. Most obviously, it surely is not possible to improve access to the beach and foreshore for all users, and improve opportunities for a safe and enjoyable walking experience through the Reserve if it is to be further cluttered with camping and caravan infrastructure year round.

BAYTRAIL

There must come a point at which this narrow fragile section of remnant foreshore cannot accommodate any further growth in visitor numbers if it is to be managed sustainably. What number of walkers and cyclists do you see as optimal, and how do you plan to maintain or restrict growth of walking/cycling visitors to meet this number?

Bicycle riders do not have an inalienable right to cycle around the entire coastline of Port Phillip Bay if it will be to the detriment of the coastline and our fragile foreshore. There are sections of the coast where it is not possible to construct a bicycle road between the coastline and the coast road. In our own region, The Esplanade at Mt. Martha clearly cannot accommodate cyclists along the foreshore. Surely we are not expected to destroy the integrity of our few outstanding and ancient topographical and vegetation features merely so that bicycle riders can cycle on flat ground right around the Bay? Areas such as Brighton, where the foreshore is already highly compromised and cannot accommodate further infrastructure are negotiating to move sections of the bicycle road inland - it is possible to come up with a different solution to the dominant view of how things should be done.

We urge the Committee to consider the long-term viability of the foreshore - *its sustainability*. It can be strongly argued that any further destruction of significant remnant foreshore vegetation merely to further “Define” a bicycle road -for a narrow user group- is at odds with government’s own coastal policies for retention of foreshore vegetation and habitat - for the widest possible user group – the entire public, and all other organisms that rely on the area for habitat.

CAMPING AND CARAVANNING

We are amazed that you can justify adherence to your overall Vision: *to maintain and enhance the natural values of the Reserve*, whilst promoting year round expansion of an already unacceptable practice, for an insignificant number of people, on this tiny, fragile area. It is obvious that camping and caravanning places enormous stress on this area and that natural vegetation has diminished dramatically over the years. Natural regeneration of vegetation has been stifled by the presence of tents, caravans, cars, boats, trailers, carpets, constant foot traffic, and regular cutting and damage by occupiers who believe that preventing a possible scratch on their caravan or car is more important than survival of indigenous vegetation.

This type of use is a relic from a bygone era that is no longer applicable or acceptable. With increasing population, and more of that population wanting to recreate on the narrow foreshore reserves it cannot be supported that sections of the Reserve be allocated for the exclusive use of a minority of the population, albeit paying a fee- but too low a fee to reflect the real costs of their occupation.

Adverse impacts are numerous, including loss of vegetation and natural values, building and expansion of access roads, water supply, power lines, toilet blocks and carparks – all facilities your plan indicates you wish to “upgrade” (read expand)

Increased traffic congestion created by the large numbers of people, cars and boats jammed into the area, and the 60 Km per hour speed limit through the area, along with numerous entrances to this short section of foreshore make the whole area a risk to pedestrians, cyclists, beach users, campers and passing motorists’ safety. In short, it is a health and safety time bomb waiting to explode – and we have no doubt that it will be the public who will meet the costs of compensation **when, not if** a serious or fatal accident occurs.

Your Plan states that “sullage disposal from camp sites has the potential to contaminate the ground water of Capel Sound and pollute the marine ecosystem. Modern caravans/mobile homes are increasingly dependent on mains pressure appliances, which in turn require piped sullage disposal rather than the traditional bucket disposal to gully trap”. You then go on to highlight a number of ineffective options to manage this outrageous impact such as:

- Camper education
- Dump points
- Waste storage tanks
- User friendly detergents encouraged

None of these proposals is realistic, especially in the unhappy event of camping being expanded in the area. Your suggestions are irrational and not in accordance with your vision to retain and enhance the natural values of the area. How can you risk polluting the ground water and marine environment merely to poke a few more people onto the foreshore.

This is a sorry indictment of the continuation of this outmoded practice of squatting for several weeks on the foreshore. You are condoning illegal practices, which are a substantial threat to the health of persons who occupy the site, and those who pass through the area on their way to the beach, or park near the road drains. We are appalled that you can continue to condone, implicitly or explicitly, such blatant breaches of health and safety regulations. You are condoning third world standards, which you would probably be appalled to witness on an overseas tour.

If you acted to vigorously enforce the relevant regulations (as you have the right and indeed the responsibility to do) many of these inconsiderate, unlawful, undesirable persons would leave our area – a most desirable outcome, and a positive step towards rehabilitation of the area. We urge you to enforce all available regulations to reduce the presence of these persons on our fragile coast.

These few campers are of a similar mindset to the Easter Islanders, who several hundred years ago destroyed their idyllic environment because of their irrational beliefs. In the end the last tree on Easter Island was cut down, and the Island civilization collapsed. Likewise, it seems the campers cannot see that what they are doing is destroying the very thing they want.

A walk through the camping area underscores just how unattractive, unsustainable and egocentric the camping fraternity is. Public access to the beach is difficult, and because of the close living quarters, one feels like an intruder when passing through the area.

Significant damage is caused by campers tramping over the dune at any point that suits, and there is no reason for that behaviour to alter, in spite of any good intentions in your Plan. Erosion from the beach into the camping area seems likely in the near future as the beach berm moves inland, and the beach narrows. What do you plan to do when campers no longer have solid ground to park on? Construct more sea wall perhaps– harden the coastline and create a physical barrier between the land and the sea so as to save an anachronistic, inconsiderate, unsustainable practice for a handful of selfish people? We remind you that the major effect of a hard barrier between the land and the sea is loss of beach! The future indeed looks grim for this section of beach and foreshore if campers and caravans and their recalcitrant occupants are permitted to stay.

In contrast, Parks Victoria declared the McCrae foreshore a Conservation Zone and since the summer of 1996-97 camping and caravanning has not been allowed in Zone 6 of the McCrae foreshore. Access to the beach has been confined to a small number of paths, and the regeneration of indigenous vegetation has been impressive. Very few boatsheds and the removal of campers contributes to a picturesque entry to the McCrae village - in contrast to the section of Capel Sound foreshore which hosts campers.

During summer the Reserve transforms into a "shanty town" of tents, caravans, boats, cars and trailers – with shanty town health standards to match. Coastcare volunteers who work on the McCrae Foreshore Conservation Zone receive regular compliments from the many users of that area. How many compliments do you receive from the public about your camping area?

The costs of maintaining the McCrae Conservation Zone is minimal compared with the ongoing maintenance, cleaning, restoration, portion of Ranger and CoM costs etc. that you must dedicate *annually* to upkeep of the camping facilities in Capel Sound. The "intangible" cost to the community of poor township image caused by this "shanty town" on our outskirts is worth contemplating – We regularly hear comments from residents and visitors alike, who are aghast at the visual assault of foreshore camping.

We predict that if you removed camping/caravanning from Capel Sound Foreshore you would not suffer a long term financial loss. What is more, you would be doing the area a great service by removing a ghastly eyesore for several months of the year. Instead of constant management and intervention, the site would require much less intensive management, and would be a source of enjoyment to the entire community – rather than very few. With future 'Greenhouse' weather events, channel deepening and other adverse events, we predict that your ongoing costs of maintaining the camping area will become prohibitive. In light of the prediction that we will have wetter and stormier weather (Global warming), with consequent increased erosion and storm damage to buildings etc. we feel sure you have underestimated the costs of maintaining this area into an uncertain future.

The Mornington Peninsula Leader January 27th 2004 featured an article about caravaners at the Anthony's Nose Caravan Park. Mr. and Mrs. McFarland were interviewed about their annual journey to the Dromana foreshore - from Abbotsford (a mere 70 kms away). As Mrs. McFarland stated, *"It is a place metres from the water. People pay millions of dollars for a view like this"*. This is precisely why we are so appalled at your continued encouragement of this outmoded, unsustainable activity. It is now the 21st Century, we have irrefutable evidence that our coastlines are being depleted by our over use and over development, and there is fierce competition for access to our coastline. We are extremely lucky that this land is still in public ownership, and that it is not commanding million dollar prices. We all still have the right to access most of our coast, however your outmoded management practices in this area is denying the wider public our rights to enjoy the coast – the asset we all own.

A handful of campers on your stretch of foreshore has had a pretty good go at the area for decades – and have caused great damage - it's time that they gracefully withdrew, or be evicted.

VEHICLE ACCESS AND CAR PARKING

We note your ongoing commitment to existing foreshore car parks, but it is unclear whether your intention is retain the notional number of "car spaces", reduce or increase them. Unless you intend to reduce the capacity of existing car parks, your aim is at odds with the overarching philosophy of the Victorian Coastal Strategy, and the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council Coastal Action Plan. Both of these documents have had wide public consultation and input into their drafting, and both documents recommend that opportunities should be identified for reducing car parking on the foreshore. The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council Coastal Action Plan sensibly recommends increased car parking behind the commercial area in those townships where the commercial strip hugs the coast.

Workers in nearby commercial outlets use the foreshore for parking. This is not a valid use of our scarce foreshore reserve. Nearby workers should be provided with parking spaces by their employers in purpose built car parking on the south side of Pt. Nepean Rd.

For perhaps 4 to 6 weeks, for perhaps 4 to 6 hours per day – a total of 252 hours (*at a generous 6 hours per day, 7 days per week for 6 weeks – the weather is rarely that consistent*) - foreshore car parks are at peak capacity. For the remaining 8,508 hours per year, foreshore car parks are most often empty, ugly and wind blown.

These desolate car park areas, so rarely fully utilised, should be reclaimed and revegetated for passive recreation space such as picnicking and barbecuing, which as your plan suggests is highly competed for by many foreshore users. Increased habitat area is also badly needed for our threatened local species, and a car park reclamation and vegetation program would be of significant benefit to local fauna.

The more you think about it, it makes absolutely no sense to retain the existing amount of car parking on such a narrow, sensitive and highly prized section of our coast. The Victorian Coastal Strategy and Mornington Peninsula Shire Council Coastal Action Plan support this view. *We do not need to treat our cars to a visit to the beach!*

PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT OF OLD LEONARD STREET BOAT RAMP AS A CAR PARK AREA.

Though the proposal is to reduce the area to a maximum 6 car spaces, because of poor visibility when existing the carpark it should really be closed and re-vegetated. Cars contribute to traffic congestion in a stretch of Pt. Nepean Rd. which is already difficult to enter and exit.

BOATSHEDS AND BATHING BOXES

Although some assert that these structures are 'icons' of the Bay, the sheds are regularly vandalised, thus rarely used to store items of any value, such as a boat. Areas in front of the sheds are well used by the owners, who often treat the area as their own, mowing grass, removing vegetation, constructing sunbathing decks and retaining walls of treated pine, stone, rubble, railway sleepers or other recycled building material. Others are poorly maintained and are a risk to other beach users, their masonry walls are subject to salt damage, requiring repeated rendering, whilst lighter weight structures are also subject to storm damage.

These sheds are on public land. They are occupied by a handful of people, for a tiny proportion of the year. The occupants pay a minuscule annual fee to enjoy unparalleled beach accommodation and access, which is being denied to the wider public. The garish appearance and poor structural standards of these sheds would not be tolerated in our private residential areas, so why do we tolerate them in our beautiful and scarce coastal areas? Because we have been hoodwinked by some recent slick marketing into thinking that they are cute and iconic!

You may remember that in recent years a Rosebud resident was directed by Council to remove his children's cubby house on his own property because a handful of neighbours found it unattractive. Clearly, there is strong public opinion about what is and is not visually acceptable in our environment. The only difference between the cubby house and boatsheds is that the community has not been fed a torrent of marketing guff about how wonderful cubbyhouses are. Conversely, the public has been forced to tolerate, and even subsidise via our council rates a plethora of twaddle about how boatsheds contribute to the "local culture". There is nothing culturally attractive about being forced to squeeze between two occupied boatsheds when trying to access the beach, especially when the doors are flung open and there are unwelcoming occupants inside, or picking your way through the rubbish and debris strewn around by these selfish people.

The popular myth peddled by boatshed owners that the public can also make use of boatsheds for shelter and shade is pathetic, and could only be true if sheds were left unlocked and the public were able to enter these 'private' structures on public land. If the boatshed is occupied, members of the public do not even feel welcome trying to squat against the outside of a shed to obtain some shade – silly really given that the public are the real owners of the site, and the occupiers are the real squatters. If boatsheds weren't there cluttering up the foredune, intact foreshore vegetation could provide much more accessible and suitable shelter for the public – available for everyone to access. Boatshed owners also remove vegetation from around their sheds to 'improve access', thus further reducing any shelter vegetation for the public. Intact vegetation also provides the added advantage of keeping the beach and foredune intact, rather than the sad diminution of the beach that we have witnessed over the years as a direct result of the lack of intact foreshore.

It is time to act in the best interests of the vast majority of residents, who are *obviously not, and never will be* boatshed owners, by commencing a program of removal of any boatshed which sustains 50% damage or is in a consistent state of disrepair. Both the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and the DSE's policies on Boatshed and Bathing boxes on our coast provide very clear justifications for the removal of structures which are unsafe for the public or which contribute to coastal erosion. You have been handed excellent management tools for the reasonable removal of these terrible structures from our beautiful coast– please use them.

Through years of community consultation and input, government has developed clear and equitable policies for the management of our coast. The intent of these policies is not to pander to noisy minorities, but to deal fairly and with sound environmental principles with all persons who wish to use our beautiful beaches. The boatshed owners are in the minority – beach users are in the majority. It is a numbers game and as simple as democracy!

It is time that these sub standard sheds were removed from our coastline. Several other areas around the Bay have removed boatsheds from their coastline, without any adverse tourism or broader economic ramifications, and with considerable positive environmental outcomes. The foreshores of Sorrento, Sandringham, Seaford, Aspendale, St. Leonards to name a few, are now free of these ugly, elitist structures and now provide a much more accessible foreshore and beach with a higher level of amenity for the whole community.

Would anybody claim that Sorrento is suffering from a lack of tourism due to the removal of boatsheds from their foreshore? Boatsheds were removed from Sorrento foreshore in the 1950's in response to ongoing storm damage to the coast, and enlightened community attitudes, which correctly identified the sheds as occupying valuable space on a narrow, fragile foreshore reserve.

At the very least, and as a first step towards removal of these sheds, we request that their annual fees be increased significantly to move towards reflecting the real cost of maintaining these inappropriate, substandard structures on our coastline – structures which are hazardous to the environment and the public.

TOILET FACILITIES

Toilet facilities on our coastal reserves should blend into the landscape setting. In our opinion, foreshore toilet facilities are too large, providing multiple numbers of toilet bowls, for both men and women, and grossly overestimates the number of users who might need to use the facilities at any one time. How often would two or more people need to use a toilet at exactly the same time? We think the answer to these questions would be "very rarely or never".

If two people happen to approach the toilet at exactly the same time is it reasonable for one person to perhaps have to wait a short time before using a toilet? Is it reasonable for able-bodied people to use a disabled toilet if there is no disabled person requiring it? We think so, and is probably no different to the standards on offer in most people's homes! This thinking provides an opportunity to rationalise toilet facilities.

It is entirely reasonable to ask users to perhaps wait a small amount of time, on a small number of occasions on the few weeks of the year that our foreshore is really busy.

REMOVAL OF PINE TREES

PPCC supports your proposal to remove all pine trees from the reserve and their replacement with appropriate indigenous vegetation.

In conclusion:

We trust that you will consider our comments and suggestions carefully in refining the plan to more closely reflect what needs to be done to ensure that the Reserve flourishes throughout the 21st Century and into the next.

Yours sincerely,



Len Warfe
President
Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc.