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President's Report to the 2009 Annual General Meeting

Once again, it has been a year of some frustration and exasperation at many of the decisions made by government at all levels, and I am sorry to again be reporting to you in that vein. But - although it is sometimes depressing to go over our disappointments, and that it is often easy to wonder why we bother - I am sure you agree that doing something about our environment at least feels better than doing nothing. Here are some of the issues that the Committee and our [Member Organizations](#) have been involved in over the last twelve months.

1. Channel Deepening and its impacts

In September, amidst considerable PR hoopla, the PoMC claimed that its contentious channel deepening project had concluded – although it omitted to report that Yarra dredging will actually continue until the end of the year, and in fact maintenance dredging – mainly in the Yarra – is due to start now until 2011.

In the wake of the major dredging activities, we are seeing many more reports of beach erosion, particularly at the southern end of the Bay.

Beaches at Portsea and Sorrento have reduced markedly, as have McCrae, Dromana and the fragile cliffs where Safety Beach meets Mt Martha appear to have suffered increased wave attack.

The Bellarine Peninsula has also suffered what appears to be an increased rate of beach and cliff erosion, some roads and car parks are under wave attack, and parts of Portarlington have been flooded twice since The Rip has been deepened. It seems likely that this is related to the extra water that flows into the Bay on every high tide. The first channel deepening EES Panel hearing in 2004 heard that an extra 20 million cubic metres of water would enter the Bay on every tide. Since then, the 2007 SEES final depth at the Entrance was increased to 19.1 metres, and on the last day of the 2007 SEES Inquiry, PoMC admitted that the final depth at the Entrance may well continue to increase, to around 22 metres, as a result of ongoing erosion and rock scour over the next 30 years. So – it seems pretty likely that 20 million cubic metres of extra water is very much underestimated.

It is infuriating that our State Government knowingly and deliberately added to the threats of climate change induced increasing sea levels by allowing more water to enter our shallow Bay, which also has much low lying land on its coast, which accommodates much valuable coastal infrastructure and significant vegetation communities.

And - in view of the recent Federal Government House of Representatives report *Climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities*, which identifies that hundreds of thousands of houses on the eastern seaboard of Australia are under threat from sea level rise, its decision to push ahead with channel deepening, (and now wait who knows how long for bigger ships to arrive) looks even more reckless. This leads me on to:

2. Friends of Edithvale Seaford Wetlands

The recent report *Climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities* has also made the most recent application to Kingston City Council for a 28 house lot residential subdivision abutting the wetlands look increasingly reckless. FESW have consistently opposed such a development since 2004, but it seems to keep popping up like a bad penny.

Surely now it is time for the Federal Government to determine, using the ample evidence in their recent report, to determine where it is appropriate to develop and where it is not.

Planning issues

During August a delegation from PPCC Inc. met with [Professor Michael Buxton](#) of RMIT Planning Department. Our topics were:

- Coastal development
- Population issues
- Threats to native vegetation

Professor Buxton appeared to be as frustrated as many of us are about the State Government's planning extravaganzas, saying that the State Government is just not listening to him or anyone anymore. His only solution seemed to be to keep writing letters to **Government, and to form a "mega" group** of the numerous disaffected community and environmental groups.

3. Point Nepean

In June the Federal Government handed over the remainder of Point Nepean to the State Government, and it is now being managed by Parks Victoria, who we hear intend to abandon the plans that the previous Point Nepean Community Trust had developed for the area. It is not wise however to assume that the plans for various commercial activities and respite care options can now be shelved. We have come to learn that this State Government is in the thrall of developers - perhaps as much as the Howard Government was when entertaining development options for Point Nepean. Developers must still be salivating at the opportunities that they see for exploitation of the last remaining wild remote land on the Peninsula.

And - **it hasn't taken long for that prophecy** to eventuate. Whilst writing this speech, I read in *Business Age* on Monday 9th November, that Parks Victoria has approved Portsea Polo holding its annual marquee event at the heritage-listed Quarantine Station in the National Park. Portsea Polo has quickly begun entrenching themselves by signing a three-year naming rights agreement with the brewer Stella Artois. What next for the Point, and other National Parks?

4. Marinas

We acknowledge the incredible efforts that FBA has put in over many years to opposing the outlandish **plans for a marina at Oliver's Hill**, and with marina expansion plans afoot around the Bay it is timely to consider what has recently occurred at the Blairgowrie marina in the last month (and said to be state of the art when built only 10 years ago).

A significant "tombola effect" has developed on the west of the pier, rendering the previously lovely swimming beach almost useless as it is almost impossible to get wet before you hit the first row of **boats. The Yacht Club doesn't want to pay for the sand removal so there it stays.**

And - in the last few weeks - two of the massive floating wave attenuators at the west end of the marina developed large cracks, and eventually broke open, spewing polystyrene into the Bay, fouling beaches as far away as Safety Beach.

Photos:

Foreshore rangers from abutting reserves have been diverted from their normal duties to assist in the clean up - no doubt at community expense.

During the year, we were advised of a new interest group likely to have an impact on the coastline of the Bay. The group is called **"Recreational Fishing and Trailer boat owners advocacy and support group"**

Some of its objectives as stated in its media release are:

- To push for improvements to existing boat launching facilities throughout Victoria
- To argue for boat launching sites throughout Vic and, especially to argue the case for **more boat launching access to Victoria's oceanic waters.**

It appears that this group is backed by the boating industry as their media release states that the manufacture of boats and trailers for recreational fishing is estimated to be in excess of \$1 billion per annum. Combine this group with the marina developers, Yacht Club **builders and there won't be much** left of our natural coastline.

5. Seaford Lifesaving Club and Café/Restaurant

PPCC Inc. appeared at VCAT on 4th August to oppose Frankston City Council's proposal to amend the planning permit for the SLSC by deleting Clause 21, which stated:

"No grease trap may be used to service the café/kiosk. The types of food to be sold from the café and kiosk must be restricted accordingly"

This Clause was put there by councillors to assure residents that the kiosk could not become a restaurant. However, FCC has now knowingly leased the building to a restaurateur, in full knowledge of the restriction on the types of food to be sold – restrictions that they had developed to deal with residents concerns about commercialisation of the Seaford foreshore. FCC appears to have devised this cunning scheme, knowing that eventually they could approach VCAT to have the permit condition overturned, so too bad for the residents! Needless to say, VCAT rejected our plea for Condition 21 to remain – **so the small kiosk will now likely become the latest fashionable "coastal dining experience"**. Meanwhile all the other Seaford food outlets, and there are plenty of them, are required to make their living on the landward side of the Nepean Highway, and without the unparalleled amenity afforded the lessee of the FCC's SLSC building.

What's more, the clear direction of the VCS- that developments on the coast should be coast dependent is being blatantly flouted, and our decision makers, FCC and VCAT and the State itself, are facilitating the subversion of reasonable coastal policies which took years to develop.

6. Container Deposit Legislation

During the year, PPCC Inc. supported the Victorian Greens proposed CDL legislation and we also recently made a submission to the Federal Senate Committee Inquiry into CDL.

Disappointingly however, the Victorian government recently announced that it will not be supporting CDL, and state environment ministers last week were unable to agree to support an Australia-wide, state-based CD legislation, in spite of powerful evidence that in SA, since the deposit has been increased to 10 cents, return rates are as high as 80%. Once again, it seems the issue has been hijacked by the vested interests in the food and beverage industries who claim that CDL would increase the cost of food and drinks. This facile argument of course ignores the cost to the community of the environmental pollution created by the manufacture of new containers from raw materials and the cleaning up of massive amounts of the dumped items in our waterways – mostly still sporting the advertising of the companies who try to have us believe they have no responsibility for the massive amounts of their advertising material once dumped!

7. Southern Peninsula Aquatic Centre proposal on Rosebud Foreshore

The current draft *Rosebud Activity Centre Structure Plan Report* claims that a foreshore location for an Aquatic centre (including a gymnasium, café, and large sealed car park) **is in line with "activity policy directions"** and would contribute to the concept of the "heart of Rosebud".

The accompanying *Rosebud Foreshore Coastal Management Plan* states that a process is currently underway to confirm within a year a foreshore location for an Aquatic Centre within the Village Green Activity Node – which is coastal Crown land. The Plan identifies the Department of Sustainability and Environment as a potential source of further funding for capital work within the foreshore reserve and lists incorporating an Aquatic Centre facility within the Rosebud Foreshore Reserve (without compromising coastal values and public access!) as one of its objectives.

A foreshore location for an Aquatic Centre now appears to have **been 'front of mind' for planners since 2005**, with considerable funds and consultants' reports dedicated to that outcome, so these well developed plans must have been seen by DSE. In a recent letter to DSE, we asked what involvement DSE had had so far in the planning process for a foreshore location. Wayne Malone DSE Manager PP Coasts replied that no formal CMA application for consent has been received from Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, implying that DSE had not been involved to date. We have now asked for details of other discussions between MPSC and DSE on the plans for a pool on the Rosebud foreshore. We have not had a reply.

It is not credible however that MPSC could have progressed so far in planning for the pool and other non-coast dependent proposed modifications to the Rosebud Foreshore without advising, consulting or otherwise involving DSE, and we expect DSE would have communicated with MPSC on many occasions regarding the proposal to locate an Aquatic Centre on the Rosebud foreshore.

Again, given the clear direction enunciated in the VCS that developments on the coast should be coast dependent, and all we now know about imminent sea level rise, and especially given the history of structural failure of a previous pool on the Rosebud foreshore - it is impossible to understand the rationale for the aggressive push from traders and Council for a foreshore location for a swimming pool.

Finally – one thing is certain - that the current decision making process has been seriously subverted by industry lobbyists and developers. It is no longer possible to expect than an EES or Planning Inquiry might recommend against a contentious development.

As with many planning and environmental issues, it is my view that such important issues should be decided by referendum - by the people whose lives will be affected making the decision. It seems fairer by far to live with a decision made by the majority of our fellow citizens than by a small coterie of faceless unrepresentative vested interests that currently have their hands on the levers of control over our priceless environmental assets.

We need frank and open community debate about how decisions are made on so many critical issues facing us and I look forward to hearing your views on that.

Len Warfe
President
Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc.