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PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 2010 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thank you all for your attendance and ongoing support, and especially welcome to our new delegates and deputies – Jeff Yugovic from MEAFEC Inc. and (possibly) Graeme Lyell from FBA Inc. Welcome also to Neil Blake, Port Phillip Bay Keeper, our Guest Speaker for this evening.

My report usually focuses largely on the east coast of the Bay however one of our long term Member Organizations, Geelong Environment Council Inc, has been keeping us informed of issues on the western side of the Bay. Although GEC Inc. usually can't attend our meetings, they are very active in their local community and keep us informed of their activities. Their most recent report will interest you, I am sure – and many similar issues face us all around the Bay.

Queenscliff Harbour

Much of the once public land at Queenscliff harbour is now occupied solely by the Queenscliff Harbour redevelopment and its industrial buildings and car parking, with a 49-year lease over the area. And the last part of land not already occupied by the lessee is now the subject of a dispute between the community and the harbour developers, Queenscliff Harbour Pty. Ltd.

Parks Victoria intend to spend \$2 million to provide even more car parking for the harbour including filling in of the slipway used by Cayzer's boat builders and demolishing 3 historic buildings despite the area being covered by a Heritage Overlay. There is a huge bitumen car park as part of the new development, which is under-utilized most of the time, however the Queenscliff Ferry operator is now requesting that nearby dunes and foreshore vegetation be removed to provide more car parking for his enterprise. If granted, this would further disenfranchise locals and turn the already massive bitumen car park into a sand and wind-blown wasteland.

GEC Inc. has requested that Parks Victoria modify the 49-year lease with the Harbour Company to bring more equity for locals.

Port Bellarine Marina

The old proposal to develop a marina and the usual accompanying housing development at Point Richards has resurfaced. This proposal was the subject of the [Port Bellarine Act 1981](#) and although the project did not proceed at the time, the Act remains, and is now being re-activated. The proposal is currently being examined by government and it has been determined that an EES is required. GEC Inc. has major concerns about destruction of seagrass beds, dredging of Corio Bay and damage to a large area of shoreline wetlands.

Stocklands development, Point Lonsdale

Planning Minister Madden has approved Stage 1 of this development, however Stage 1 does not include any of the proposed bulldozing of ancient sand dunes to fill in the existing lakes that is earmarked for the next stage of development. Further testing of ground water drainage into Laker's Cutting is required before this phase can proceed in approx. 18 months. GEC Inc. and a group called Lonsdale Coastal Spaces have made a comprehensive nomination for an extension

to the RAMSAR boundaries of the area. The Federal Environment Minister agreed, but would not proceed because the State government would not agree to extend the RAMSAR boundaries.

Bird population decline

There has been a large decline in bird numbers in the Brisbane Ranges and Anakie Gorge; likely due to the food chain being destroyed by fire and the loss of hollows in old trees. 60% of Australia's native birds nest within 1 metre of the ground, yet it is understorey that DSE proposes to destroy in its fuel reduction burns. GEC Inc. has lobbied DSE about its fire plans for the Otways, which include large scale burns aiming to achieve 80%+ of the area burned.

Some 1,000 acres of the Eastern Otways foothills is earmarked for burning, which is immediately adjacent to the National Park. Some 2,000 acres is proposed to be burned next year.

Furthermore, GEC Inc. reports that every planned burn in the Angelsea/Airey's Inlet area in the last 3 years has vastly exceeded the planned size by at least a factor of 12.

This year has been wet and ground litter has been able to break down, which should reduce the need for such a major burning - but it seems the Department of Sustainability and Environment is oblivious to these factors or pleas to reconsider its fuel reduction regime.

A fixed percentage to be burned is inappropriate as a large part of the Otways is rainforest or wet forest that has not been burned since white settlement. Burning wet forests turns them into dry forests, which burn more readily.

Turning to issues on the Eastern side of the Bay ...

At least two more marina proposals are looming – the reheated Mornington Yacht Club's proposal, which has been twice rejected in the last 20 years, has again raised its ugly head. Recently the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (MPSC) decided to proceed with the Planning Scheme amendment – rezoning public foreshore and seabed to facilitate the proposal, as part of the Environment Effects Statement process set to start in February next year. Beaumaris Motor Yacht Squadron Ltd has also been granted approval to commence an EES for the expansion of its operations on the Beaumaris Bay foreshore and seabed.

Aquatic Centre on Rosebud Foreshore

Last year I reported that the MPSC had identified a foreshore location for Rosebud's proposed swimming pool/leisure centre complex. Despite open support from local MPs and councillors for the proposal, so far DSE has resisted the campaign to grant approval for the foreshore site.

Rickett's Point

Yet another proposed intrusion into our dwindling coastal spaces is the proposal by a group Marine Care Ricketts Point Inc, who propose Archway signage and interpretive signs for a plant identification trail, a marine boardwalk and viewing platform, an open air amphitheatre/outdoor education area, an underwater marine viewing facility, a bus turning circle and redevelopment of the Beaumaris Surf Life Saving Clubhouse. Where would it all fit?

Notably a similar proposal for the Rye foreshore went nowhere about 10 years ago, despite fervent support from local MPs and Councillors ... Perhaps sense will prevail?

Channel Deepening

Opening of the Rip has coincided with accelerated beach erosion in many parts of the south of the Bay. On 15 June Minister Gavin Jennings announced a \$6 million investment in beaches and boat ramps. \$2.75 million alone is being spent at Elwood with the dumping of 40,000 cubic metres of East Gippsland quarried sand.

Other beaches included in the \$6 million allocation are Portarlington, Geelong's Eastern Beach, Clifton Springs, Half Moon Bay and Blairgowrie.

Just as these works had been announced however, the sudden and dramatic disappearance of Portsea beach and the collapse of the pier's retaining wall created so much media attention that the priority list was quickly re-jigged to move Portsea to the top of the list. Despite Portsea beach never needing "renourishment" in living memory, in the last 18 months it had deteriorated so much that there would soon be no beach. It's currently been replaced by massive bluestone boulders and numerous bulldozers, and a fleet of trucks has carted granitic sand from Warragul through the Peninsula to Portsea for many months. As fast as it is dumped it is quickly removed by the increased swell from Bass Strait that is now hitting the south coast. The high clay content of the granitic sand has turned Portsea's once clear water into a milky stew. It's unlikely this will suit the weedy seadragons that used to hang around the pier. DSE however says that the water quality is good and that there has been no smothering of reefs nearby. Locals disagree.

DSE states that the massive bluestone wall is "temporary" to protect workers and their equipment as they excavate to Chart Datum to construct a 150 metre long sandbag wall against the land and then refill the beach with sand. We understand over \$2 million is being spent on these works.

Cliff stability has also been an issue at Mt Eliza, Mt Martha and Safety Beach, with the coast road closed near Ellarina Road, Safety Beach, for 6 weeks while the road was rebuilt.

It is therefore very disappointing that the Chair of the Central Coastal Board, Liz Johnstone, in the August edition of *About the Bays* wrote:

"Although much work is being achieved by DSE and local government in partnership, it became clear that the combined effects of ageing infrastructure, increasing levels of use and expected levels of service, accelerated impacts of coastal processes associated with changing seasonal cycles and urbanized catchments are presenting significant strategic challenges for coastal managers".

And yet the biggest dredging project ever undertaken in the Bay is ignored by the CCB as one of the possible, indeed likely, causes of some of the identified problems in her report.

In summary

As I seem to say every year, it has been a rather disappointing year for conservationists around the Bay, with little evidence of government embracing its own Victorian Coastal Strategy and low impact sustainable conservation of our coastline. Instead it seems to focus on high cost, high impact projects as a rear guard response to the impacts of humans on the coastline.

However as I also said last year, we are still extremely privileged to be the conservationists that have ensured our own small sections of the coast are well cared for.

The demands being made by developers and the corporate sector are becoming shriller and more unpalatable to the broader community. And we can be proud that our local battles continue to at least modify some of the excesses of the developers.

There remains however the ongoing challenge to ensure that we can retain the intactness and quality of our much-loved Bay and coastline in the face of what will be very different future.

Thank you all for playing your part in that.

Len Warfe
President
Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc.