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PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 2013 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

With the recent change of Federal government, it appears there will be changes to how our environment will be managed, and it looks likely that some federal powers will be handed over to State governments. They in turn seem happy to hand over their responsibilities to the corporate sector.

The Victorian government is now calling for privatization and commercialization in our National Parks. A recent article in *The Age* reports that up to two-thirds of National Parks land could be placed under long term leases. 99-year leases are being offered to encourage commercial development. One such is Point Nepean National Park, where expressions of interest for 99-year commercial leases have recently closed, having been marketed locally, nationally and internationally. Wilsons Promontory and the Grampians are also on the list.

Under new provisions, the “responsible” Minister will be able to make decisions without Parliament passing an amendment to the National Parks Act. At a time when the world’s natural systems are under such attack from human impacts, this is a totally irresponsible direction for governments to take.

In an August 2013 open letter to Premier Dennis Napthine, the former Governor, John Landy, and other prominent Victorians such as Professor Michael Buxton and Nobel prize-winner Professor Peter Doherty, urged the government to abandon moves to open up our National Parks for tourism development.

Professor Buxton also said that National Parks are more crucial than ever in conserving biological diversity and landscapes, and he says “... *but on a broader level what worries me is this is part of a systematic destruction of the conservation state and environmental policy by the government*”.

The title of the open letter says it all: “**Our National Parks- a betrayal of Public Trust**”

I put it to this meeting - how do we counter such betrayal by State and Federal governments? Everything that we have upheld in the past is now under attack.

Housekeeping, briefly:

- **[Associations Incorporations Reform Act 2012](#)**

Recent changes required associations to ensure compliance with the Act. The Committee checked [our Constitution](#) and determined that we do comply.

- **The Draft Victorian Coastal Strategy**

The 2013 draft has been released, and submissions are invited until 4 December. We note the latest version seems to have diluted reference to the Precautionary Principle. In 2008, it appeared in the overarching principles and policies. In the latest Draft it only appears once in an Appendix. Hard copies can be obtained from the Victorian Coastal Council or downloaded from [its website](#).

- **General Meetings**

Instead of holding our April Ordinary General Meeting this year, we held a joint meeting of the Committee and our Members. The meeting was judged a success by attendees, who were able to get an update on various issues around the Bay that we have been involved with. We think we will repeat the exercise in 2014.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Dog Walking in Mornington Peninsula National Park

PPCC Inc. made a submission to the Parks Victoria review of dog walking in the Mornington Peninsula National Park. Even though 52% of submissions preferred a total ban or more restrictions, only 7 km of the 60 km of National Park beach has been allocated as NO DOGS. Unfortunately this does not auger well for the already threatened hooded plover, which nests in a rudimentary sand scrape and abandons its nest if it perceives a threat, which of course includes dogs and humans.

Coastal erosion

Accelerated coastal erosion has been noted around the Bay, especially at Portsea, in Point Nepean National Park, Dromana, Mt. Martha and Mt. Eliza and elsewhere.

A report commissioned by government and prepared by the company Water Technologies and reviewed by CSIRO, has now confirmed a link between deepening The Rip and the loss of beach at Portsea. A pyrrhic victory for PPCC Inc, Blue Wedges and others labelled as naysayers, knuckleheads and jihadists.

Beaumaris Fossil Site

MBCL Inc. member, Judy Fields, worked with Museum Victoria to prepare an impressive submission to the Federal Government in support of listing the site on the National Heritage Register. PPCC Inc. also relied on Judy's research in our submission in support of the listing. Bayside City Council did not support the nomination, but local Federal member, and Attorney-General, Mark Dreyfus, did.

Talking of fossils; recently found buried in the sandstone cliffs of Sorrento back beach was the largely intact remains of a giant wombat like creature, the size of a rhinoceros, and estimated to be 40,000 years old. All the more reason to protect our coastline from developers!

Frankston Central Activities Area Draft Structure Plan

The Plan proposes that the area between the Nepean Highway and the coastline, including Kananook Creek, should have a "preferred" building height of 32 to 38 metres. In support of our member groups in Frankston, PPCC Inc. made a submission to Frankston City Council outlining our concerns.

Such tall buildings would cast shadows across Kananook Creek and other public spaces; potentially altering the aquatic ecology of the creek. Rather than discretionary controls, where potentially even higher than 38 metre heights might be approved, mandatory height limits should be set. The purported high demand for sea views and the more profitable 12 storeys plus developments would result in excessive heights and overdevelopment in this significant landscape precinct. Views from the beach and foreshore would be diminished by what could turn out to be a continuous block of high rise buildings.

The sea view, the public realm and the sensitive waterway must be protected for the enjoyment of all Victorians, and future generations, not just for the financial benefit of a few developers and the few residents that might purchase an apartment facing the beach.

Jet skis and boating zone at Frankston

In support of FBA Inc, we have exchanged several letters with Transport Safety Victoria (formerly Marine Safety Victoria) and Parks Victoria regarding what locals say is unsafe pile locations and little community consultation over their placement. The location of the 5 knot markers only 200 metres from shore in what is often very shallow water perversely allows boating activities into shallower water, whilst swimmers are seeking deeper water (past the marker buoys) in order to be able to actually swim. The latest response from PV states that swimmers are free to swim beyond the piles, completely missing our point that they would then be swimming in a boating zone.

Mt. Eliza coastal land rezoned

Along with our Member Organization, MEAFEC Inc, we first raised [this issue](#) with DSE in 2003. Former Mt. Eliza councillor, Leigh Eustace, has also pursued it since 2007. Finally in 2013, the coastal land, adjoining Moondah Beach near Osprey Ave, was rezoned from Farming Zone to PPRZ. The matter was further complicated when the adjoining landowner, Solomon Lew, built a swimming pool on it, which has since been removed.

We have former Cr Eustace to thank for continuing to push Mornington Peninsula Shire Council to take legal action against Mr Lew, and for the entire parcel of land being returned to its proper foreshore status.

Brighton Beach bathing boxes

In August, we lodged an objection to Bayside City Council's proposal to build 10 additional bathing boxes at Dendy Street. The Council's rationale was that they would use funds from the sale of licences to occupy the boxes to fund other foreshore refurbishments.

We submitted that forfeiting public space to fund other foreshore works is poor public policy. The logical conclusion of this management philosophy is that in future, public services might only be funded if public assets are forfeited. We say there are more than enough existing heritage boxes to maintain the area's historical significance, and that building more would reduce the real historical significance of those that remain.

Arthurs Seat tip

Although PPCC Inc. was not directly involved in this issue, it is worth a mention. In an all too seldom show of their powers, the EPA has said NO to a developer. The Ross Trust owns a disused quarry on the northern face of Arthur's Seat, and had proposed to turn the massive hole into a tip. Run off and leachate from the tip would have entered Port Phillip Bay via Sheepwash Creek at Safety Beach. After a massive campaign of opposition from locals, and the rejection by the EPA, Ross Trust has decided to abandon the proposal. For once the environment and its supporters have had a win.

Proposed Aquatic Centre on Rosebud foreshore

We have not had to make any formal submissions on this in the last 12 months, as it seems to have reached a welcome hiatus, but we have been keeping an eye on the matter. In December last, Council narrowly voted to accept the proposed Coastal Management Plan, which includes the Southern Peninsula Aquatic Centre on the foreshore. Following that however, a newly elected Mornington Peninsula Shire Councillor, Hugh Fraser, successfully moved to defer the project to at least 2017 via a debt reduction strategy motion to reduce current debt of \$45 million to \$20 million.

The current cost of the project is approx. \$40 million. Pool supporters may have been out-manoeuvred. However, recent sea level rise predictions of even higher sea level within this century should surely lead any responsible planner to recommend against multi-million dollar projects so close to the coastline.

In the 2012 public meeting on the issue, our now Environment Minister, Greg Hunt MHR, sent an impassioned address in support of the pool on the foreshore. He reasoned that even though the site is between the beach and Point Nepean Road (and only metres from the primary dune) it is not really on the foreshore, and even if 800 mm of sea level rise were to occur, it wouldn't be happening until late in the century. So much for the Precautionary Principle!

Queenscliff foreshore car park

GEC Inc. has been campaigning against the Searoad Ferry operator's proposal to expand the car parking area into the vegetated public foreshore and beach. The proposal involves removal of extensive coastal vegetation and hard paving for an additional 139 car spaces. As with so many proposals, it brings to mind Joni Mitchell's words: *We paved paradise to put up a parking lot.*

Blairgowrie Marina expansion

Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron has put up a proposal to double the size of the existing marina to a total wet and dry storage for 363 boats. This includes an additional 119 new wet berths plus an extension of the existing wave screen by approx. 300 metres to the west.

The proposal was assessed via a Panel Hearing and PPCC Inc. lodged an objection in July 2013. The Panel Hearing, chaired by Nick Wimbush, was held earlier this month. We appeared alongside our Member Organization, Nepean Conservation Group Inc, and its Secretary, Dr Eddy de Jong, made an excellent submission using some compelling photos of the existing damage caused by the marina, and likely physical and visual amenity impacts from its proposed expansion.

Though all the paid expert witnesses produced by the BYS agreed with the proposal to expand the facility, one witness, Scott Chidgey, a marine scientist, stated that the pleasure boat industry was significant in the spread of exotic organisms around the Bay. He also said that in the last 25 years the Bay has been degraded from once being pristine, and it is largely due to the shipping and boating industries.

FBA member Kath Hassell

Kath has worked hard for many years to protect Frankston beach and foreshore from greedy developers and unthinking councillors. In August she was awarded the Victorian Coastal Award for excellence in recognition of her outstanding individual achievements. She was presented with the award by Environment Minister, Ryan Smith.

Finally

As I have said before, the current decision-making process has been seriously subverted by industry lobbyists and developers. It is no longer possible to expect an EES or Planning Inquiry to recommend against a contentious development.

Such important issues should be decided by referendum - by the people whose lives will be affected. It seems fairer by far to live with a decision made by the majority of our fellow citizens rather than by the vested interests that currently have control over our priceless environmental assets.

We need more emphasis, not less, on protecting that special part of the world where the land meets the sea. It will be our last line of defence against climate change.

Thank you again for the part you all play in protecting that precious place, and please let us know when you need our support for your local issues.

Len Warfe
President
Port Phillip Conservation Council Inc.