



About the Bays

The Newsletter of the Central Coastal Board

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Coastal Issues in Port Phillip and Western Port

FROM THE CHAIR

This edition of *About the Bays* focuses on the recently released Victorian Coastal Strategy. This document identifies the critical challenges facing our coastal and marine environment - largely associated with a changing climate and with continued population growth. It recommends a policy framework and accompanying set of actions to guide coastal managers over the next five years.

Many of you would have participated in the preparation of the strategy and responded to the draft strategy circulated last year. The final strategy improves significantly on the circulated draft and previous strategies in terms of its scope, structure and clarity. For the first time the International Panel on Climate Change projections about likely sea level rise have been considered. I hope that the strategy assists you in your understanding of how the coast is managed, what the key challenges and policy drivers are, and assists you in undertaking your role or activity on the coast.

Liz Johnstone
Chair

SPECIAL EDITION ON VICTORIAN COASTAL STRATEGY 2008

Introduction to the new Victorian Coastal Strategy

The *Victorian Coastal Strategy (VCS) 2008* is the State Government's policy commitment for coastal, estuarine and marine environments in Victoria. It provides a long-term vision for the planning, management and sustainable use of our coast, and the policies and actions that Victorians will need to implement over the next five years to help achieve that vision.

It is a framework to assist in the development and implementation of other locally and regionally specific strategies and plans such as management plans, Coastal Action Plans, and Planning Schemes.

The *VCS 2008* is established under the *Coastal Management Act 1995*, and is the third strategy to be produced since 1997 - they are required to be reviewed every five years.

The *VCS 2008* builds on previous strategies and identifies and responds to three significant and priority issues affecting Victoria's coast: climate change, population and growth, and marine ecology integrity.

The Victorian Coastal Council developed the *VCS 2008* by:

- comprehensively reviewing relevant documentation, in particular the 1997 and 2002 Victorian Coastal Strategies
- conducting significant social and economic research, and

- seeking community and stakeholder feedback to the *Draft Victorian Coastal Strategy 2007*, and through various consultation meetings and submissions.

More than 50 consultation sessions were held at 18 locations across the Victorian coast, and 174 written submissions were received to the *Draft Victorian Coastal Strategy 2007*.

The Strategy builds on the *2006 Coastal Spaces Recommendations Report* to manage coastal population and growth by consolidating urban development in existing settlements and protecting the non-urban landscapes in-between.

The *VCS 2008* gives direction for planning and managing the impacts associated with the range of activities in the coastal zone which includes:

- marine environment including the nearshore marine environment, the seabed and waters out to the state limit (5.5 kilometres offshore from the high water mark)
- foreshore which is generally coastal Crown land 200 metres from the high water mark
- coastal hinterland which is private and Crown land directly influenced by the coast or directly influencing the coastline, and land within critical views of the foreshore and nearshore environment, and
- coastal catchments, that is rivers and drainage systems that feed into the coast, including estuaries.

The *VCS 2008* is given effect in Planning Schemes through clause 15.08 'Coastal Areas' of the State Planning Policy Framework. This clause was amended with the release of the *VCS 2008* to update the reference to appropriate coastal land-use planning policy in the Strategy.

The Victorian Coastal Council is planning a series of information sessions about the *VCS 2008*: to be held towards the end of March in Melbourne and regional locations.

To register your interest in these sessions email your details to enquiries@vcc.vic.gov.au or phone (03) 9637 9456.

In addition, the Victorian Coastal Forum planned prior to the Coastal Awards night on 23 April will be an opportunity to learn more about the *VCS 2008*.

Issue 1 - Climate Change

The *VCS 2008* directly responds to climate change. It provides a framework for action and ensures that decision makers will be better informed on how to manage climate change risks and likely impacts on the coast.

Over the medium to long term, climate change poses real and serious threats to our coast. During this century, it is likely the Victorian coastline will be impacted by sea level rise and increased frequency and severity of storm events leading to inundation and erosion. It is also predicted that

higher temperatures will increase bushfire risk along the coast, and increase sea temperatures, changing sea currents. Further acidification of the ocean will affect the marine environment.

In the face of such threats, there are essentially three possible adaptation options: protect, accommodate or retreat. In this instance, Government adaptation strategies are taking a precautionary approach; that is planning for likely future circumstances even if full scientific certainty is not possible. The fundamental assumption of the *VCS 2008* is that we have to plan for an average rise in sea level of 0.8 metres by 2100.

The Strategy includes specific policies and actions to ensure that new development is located and designed so that it can be protected from climate change risks and impacts and coastal hazards such as:

- inundation by storm tides or combined storm tides and stormwater (both river and coastal inundation)
- geotechnical risk (landslide)
- coastal erosion, and
- sand drift.

The *VCS 2008* addresses the issue of climate change by:

- applying the policy of planning for sea level rise of not less than 0.8 metres by 2100
- completing, as a matter of urgency, a coastal vulnerability study and incorporating the findings into relevant policy, planning and management frameworks, and
- establishing a climate change scientific research and data system and ensuring planning and management frameworks and actions respond quickly to the best available current and emerging science.

Issue 2 - Population Growth

Victoria has experienced unprecedented population growth along the coast, which combined with tourism, is placing pressure on many coastal communities and environments.

The *VCS 2008* will help balance growth with the needs of the environment. It does not suggest prohibiting development along the coast. The *VCS 2008* builds on an earlier government commitment to plan and manage coastal population and growth by:

- consolidating urban development to existing settlements and urban areas, and
- protecting non-urban landscapes between settlements.

The *VCS 2008* aims to ensure that population growth and development is balanced and informed by the values and characteristics of particular coastal communities.

The *VCS 2008* addresses the issue of population and growth by:

- planning and managing for coastal population growth and increased visitation so that impacts do not cause an unsustainable use of coastal resources
- balancing growth and visitation with the need to respect the unique values and character of coastal areas and coastal settlements, and
- strengthening community understanding and capacity to respond to future patterns of change, particularly those communities experiencing rapid change.

Issue 3 - Marine Ecological Integrity

Victoria's marine environment supports a wide range of highly valued uses including fishing, aquaculture, recreation, tourism and shipping. These all depend on the sustained ecological integrity of our marine ecosystems, but can also place it at risk. The threats vary across the bays and open coast, but include exotic species, unsustainable harvesting of particular species, physical changes to habitats, seismic impacts, over-use, and input or re-suspending of nutrients, toxins and sediment. These threats to marine biodiversity are not well understood and can often go unnoticed. In addition, the interactions among threats can be complex and difficult to predict.

There has been much progress in both scientific understanding and management approaches for Victoria's marine environments. Climate change is likely to pose new threats to marine biodiversity, with possible effects including inundation and storm surges (in the nearshore), increases in seawater acidity, changes in catchment input patterns and changes in seawater temperature.

The policies and actions outlined in *VCS 2008* will address the issue of marine ecological integrity by:

- improving our understanding of marine ecosystems values through substantial research and monitoring programs
- coordinating planning and management of the coastal catchments in response to the increased understanding of the values of marine ecosystems, and
- managing the pressures from increased urbanisation and the intensification of agricultural and commercial development within coastal catchments which threaten the integrity of marine ecosystems.

Implementation of the *VCS 2008*

The development and implementation of the *VCS 2008* relies upon positive collaboration by many groups and individuals. Coastal sustainability requires a long-term commitment and vision, as well as strong partnerships, involving all levels of government, communities and businesses.

This strategy will be most effective where it is translated and given effect at regional and local scales through coastal action plans, regional catchment strategies, local planning schemes and policies and management plans, for example.

To assist this process, the Department of Sustainability and Environment will establish a co-ordinating committee with interdepartmental and lead agency representation to provide for a cross government approach to implement the *VCS 2008*.

The Central Coastal Board is mindful that the challenges facing this region and the bays can differ from the outer coast, and will work closely with the VCC to support implementation in this region.

CURRENT PROJECTS

Community Capacity Building

Because the Australian Government has identified the Western Port Ramsar site as a priority coastal hotspot, the Coastal Capacity Building project has been extended to focus on improving collaboration and partnerships

amongst established community groups, as well as developing the capacity of new groups to undertake priority Natural Resource Management (NRM) projects in the area.

The first step in achieving this will be a forum for agencies and community organisations, scheduled for 5 May 2009 (date to be confirmed).

The forum will:

- develop targeted initiatives aimed at conserving and/or improving the site's ecological character
- share information/learnings concerning NRM projects relevant to Western Port
- develop strategic partnerships to address priority targets relevant to Western Port, and
- work with established NRM extension programs and staff to foster increased community awareness/engagement and on-ground initiatives to help conserve priority natural assets that currently are not areas of focus or activity.

The areas being focussed on include:

- seagrass meadows and associated seadragon communities at Flinders
- saltmarsh and mangroves at Yaringa, French Island and Churchill Island Marine National Parks
- Koo-Wee-Rup EVC complex
- remnant swamp paperbarks near Lang Lang and Tooradin
- Marine Special Management Areas at Bass River delta, San Remo, Rhyll and Summerland Peninsula.

The CCB is establishing a reference group for the project. If you would like your group or organisation to be represented or would like to attend the forum, please contact CCB Project Officer, Catharina Greve, phone 03 8627 4724, email catharina.greve@dse.vic.gov.au.

Western Port Welcomes Waterbirds

Western Port is one of the three most important sites in Victoria for waterbirds and is recognised as a wetland of international significance for migratory shorebirds. For over 35 years volunteers have monitored shorebirds and other waterbirds in Western Port. Their counts suggest long-term declines in some species and more sophisticated statistical analyses are needed to understand population trends and focus management attention.

The CCB has supported a new project, called *Western Port Welcomes Waterbirds*, to develop an effective, well-targeted management program that works with land managers and local communities to ameliorate the threats.

The project has a number of tasks:

- establish the importance of high tide roosts and feeding areas
- map key habitat areas for the community and site managers
- understand the future impact of sea level change on waterbirds
- targeted social research to determine the level of understanding of waterbirds and the main threats.

This work will then inform management programs of key habitat areas for migratory shorebirds and other waterbirds in Western Port. It will make a valuable contribution to Australia's obligations under international conventions and agreements.

Two public information sessions are planned for April to raise awareness of the project and encourage greater participation. Details on these information sessions will be available in early March from our website www.ccb.vic.gov.au, or email ccb@dse.vic.gov.au or phone (03) 8627 4724.

Central Boating Coastal Action Plan

The Central Coastal Board (CCB) facilitated two meetings of the Boating Coastal Action Plan (BCAP) Implementation Committee in September and December 2008.

The meetings identified the need to determine the progress of the Region Wide Implementation Actions and past and planned improvements to existing boating facilities listed under the boating regions.

The CCB has done additional surveys to:

- identify the location of current re-fuelling facilities in Port Phillip and Western Port, and
- determine the current level of fees derived from moorings and boat launching at local boat ramps/trailer parking fees at boat ramps (in conjunction with the Association of Bayside Municipalities).

Please contact CCB Project Officer, Catharina Greve, phone 03 8627 4724, email catharina.greve@dse.vic.gov.au for information on this project.

AROUND THE COAST

\$2 million Boating Infrastructure Fund - close 6 March 2009

This \$2 million fund is a State government program supporting boating safety and to improve the amenity and usability of boating infrastructure for both recreational and commercial boaters.

Individual grant-based projects - initiated by local government, government agencies, waterway managers or committees of management - are funded.

100 per cent funding is provided for projects that develop and upgrade boat ramps, jetties, floating pontoons, trailer parking, lighting, navigation aids and signage, wash down bays, fish cleaning tables, webcams and weather stations, dredging and improvements to selected infrastructure.

The program is administered by Marine Safety Victoria (MSV) and is in addition to the \$5 million offered each year under the Boating Safety and Facilities Program.

For more information please contact MSV's Grants Administration Team on freecall 1800 337 222 or by email msv.grants@transport.vic.gov.au.

Future Coasts Update

Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is collecting high resolution digital elevation model (DEM) data for both sea depth and elevation on land – within a range of 20 metres below and 10 metres above sea level. The DEM provides the base layer for modelling storm surge and coastal processes using different sea level rise scenarios.

The available topographic DEM now extends from the South Australian border to Western Port including Port Phillip Bay and Western Port region. See the Future Coasts webpage www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/futurecoasts. Project stakeholders can view the range of Vicmap products at www.dse.vic.gov.au/vicmap.

This information will be combined with modelling sea level rise, storm surge, inundation and erosion to identify how the coastline is likely to change over time to inform where longer-term adaptation work should be focussed. A Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tool will also be developed to help identify areas along the Victorian coastline that are at greatest risk from sea level rise and storm surge.

Tools will be progressively developed to support local government and land managers in day-to-day decision-making and for strategic planning along the coast.

For more information about the Future Coasts project, or to register for newsletters and Special Bulletins email your details to: climatechange@dse.vic.gov.au.

UPCOMING EVENTS

COAST 2009 - the Australian Coastal Councils Conference

COAST 2009 is an important event for coastal councils, researchers, policy makers and others with a stake in the future of the Australian coast. It will address:

- the impact of climate change and associated legal liabilities
- the need for effective emergency management planning
- effects of the global financial crisis on local economies, and
- the ageing of coastal communities.

The conference will feature the launch of the Australian Coastal Alliance which aims to be an information and communication interface between coastal councils, government agencies, research organisations and other relevant stakeholders.

The conference will be held at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre, Western Australia on 3-4 March 2009. For more information see www.seachangetaskforce.org.au.

Visit www.dse.vic.gov.au/coasts for a list of activities and locations or call the *Summer by The Sea Hotline* on 136 186 during office hours. This is also the central phone number for activities that require bookings.

About the Bays is published on a bi-monthly basis. To receive a copy of the newsletter contact:

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