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BEYOND THE WAVES:

Exploring the social value of surfing to the Surf Coast community

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
SURF COAST SHIRE COUNCIL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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SURFING AND THE SURF COAST SHIRE

Surfing has been an integral part of the Surf Coast community since its inception in the early 20th century. The Surf Coast Shire is home to the iconic Bells Beach, Great Ocean Road and Surf City. While surfing is an identifiable aspect of the community the uniqueness of surfing has been difficult to capture. On the one hand, it is considered a sport, yet many individuals express that their experience of surfing goes beyond that of a sporting pursuit. The Surf Coast Shire in conjunction with Victoria University conducted a study exploring the impacts of surfing at a social level and the key social values that are held by the surfing community.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed methodological approach, incorporating both face-to-face interviews and an online survey.

Ten face-to-face interviews were conducted with people who surf within the Surf Coast Shire and either visit or reside within the region. The in-person interviews were conducted with five males and five females who ranged in age between sixteen and sixty. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds, had varying surf experience, rode different surf crafts and worked and studied in separate industries and institutions.

The online survey construction and questions were guided by the key themes that were identified following the analysis of the in-depth interview. The survey was



conducted using the online platform 'survey monkey' to target a larger sample size and to quantify the key values that were determined by the interview responses. The questions were predominantly close-ended to enable the quantification and categorization of the results. One hundred and fifty participants took part in the survey with a percentage of thirty-six female and sixty-four male.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Surfing strengthens family relationships**
88% of respondents highly value or value time spent surfing with their family

68% of respondents found surfing very important or important for maintaining strong family relationships
- **Surfing creates and enhances opportunities for strong social connections and relationships within the community to exist**
79% of respondents have a high or moderate percentage of personal relationships that have been formed through surfing

34% of respondents have been given opportunities for employment through networks established by surfing
- **Surfing creates a sense of surf community: social cohesion, feeling secure in the community and a sense of belonging with like-minded people**
90% of respondents experience a strong or moderate feeling of surf community within the Surf Coast Shire
- **Surfing creates an opportunity for people to feel connected to the environment and to be involved in conservation efforts**
99% of respondents stated that surfing strengthened their connection to the environment

89% of respondents are highly influenced or influenced to conserve and protect the environment through their involvement in surfing
- **Surfing promotes a healthy and holistic lifestyle and contributes to an overall feeling of wellbeing and happiness**
88% of respondents are influenced by surfing to live a more healthy and holistic lifestyle

95% of respondents stated that surfing is extremely important or important for their happiness and wellbeing

91% of respondents are highly influenced, influenced or moderately influenced to eat healthier and nutritious foods through their involvement in surfing
- **Significant value of surf clubs: builds social relationships and provides skill development and networking opportunities that result in employment**
78% of surfing club members highly value or value their involvement within a surfing club

72% of surfing club members found that their involvement within a surfing club gave them networking opportunities

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- Surfing influences individuals' life decisions e.g. career or place of residence
- Surfing and being a 'surfer' is an integral component of an individual's identity
- Surfing is a tool for youth engagement and development
- Surfing is a male dominated sport and measures must be taken to address this gender inequality and inequity
- Accessibility to the beach, surfing and surf-related equipment is a key issue for those who come from a low socio-economic status and/or are located inland
- Surf Industry practices and procedures can contradict the strong environmental and environmental conservation values held by the majority of surfers.
- Factors that could negatively impact on the valued Surf Coast surfing community are: escalation of conflict between local surfers and foreign surfers; conflict between different riders of surf craft and a changing surf community due to an influx of surfers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider undertaking further surf-related studies
- Work with stakeholders to ensure surfing, surfers themselves and the local surf industry promote gender equality and equity
- Incorporate surfing into Surf Coast Shire Council plans, services and programs
- Utilise surfing as a tool for youth engagement and development
- Consider providing funding and in-kind support for surfing and surf-based programs
- Engage with the surfing community and seek to understand Council actions that could strengthen and undermine the strong feeling of surf community
- Recognise the health and wellbeing benefits of surfing by including it in Council health and wellbeing programs
- Engage surfers in Council's environmental discussions and decision-making processes
- Work with stakeholders to ensure surfing is accessible and inclusive for all Surf Coast community members
- It is essential that Council engages with the surfing community and understands potential social factors that could undermine the strong feeling of surf community
- Utilise the health and well-being benefits of surfing and include it in specific Council health and well-being programs
- Council needs to engage surfers in environmental discussions and decision making processes
- Council should work with stakeholders to ensure surfing promotes accessibility and inclusion for all Surf Coast community members

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
Table of Contents	5
Glossary of terms	5
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Research rationale	7
1.2 Aim and objectives	7
2. Background	9
2.1 Literature Review	9
2.2 Context	10
3. Research approach	11
3.2 Data collection methods	11
4. Findings	12
4.1 Social Connections	12
4.2 Environmental Connections	15
4.3 Health and Well-being	16
4.4 Surfing Clubs	17
4.5 Additional Findings	19
4.6 Case Studies	20
4.7 Discussion of findings	23
4.8 Additional Observations	24
5. Recommendations	25
5.1 Implications of findings	25
References	28

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

In the context of this research and in relation to surfing the term *social value* is defined as the worth surfing can bring to a community in the forms of social capital. *Value* in this study will not be measured in economic terms rather it will be measured in the ability surfing has to promote social contact and community involvement among people.

The word *surfing* refers to the act of riding a surfboard on the waves produced by the ocean. Surfing can be used as a general term for many ocean based activities but for the sake of this research, surfing includes: stand up surfing, stand up paddle boarding, body boarding, body surfing and knee boarding. The research will exclude similar ocean based activities such as surf life saving, kite and sail boarding and recreational water-based exercising. Surfing is further defined as going beyond the realm of a typical sporting pursuit to encompass a more holistic experience that many surfers describe including spiritual, psychological and social components.

The term *Surf Coast* refers to the region in southwest Victoria, located approximately 100 kilometers from Melbourne. This research recognizes the full scale of the Surf Coast Shire including the areas of Lorne, Anglesea, Winchelsea and Torquay, but the basis of this research will take place along the coastline centered on the town of Torquay.



Photo: Surfing Victoria

1. INTRODUCTION

“Only a surfer knows the feeling”:

It is a common phrase, uttered in explanation to challenging questions, often asked by non-surfers about why people might enter the water, risk shark encounters, surfboards to the head and extreme cold or heat conditions just to catch one wave. What is it about that one wave that keeps us going back for more? What is it about that one wave that entices almost 2.5 million Australians into the ocean? (Surfing Australia, 2010)

Torquay and the Surf Coast, home to the iconic Bells Beach, is world-renowned for surfing. It has a history steeped in wave riding, establishing itself as one of the key pockets of identifiable surf culture and community in

the world. In 1956 the modern Malibu had its inaugural inception into Australian waters at Torquay back beach during a demonstration by the Hawaiian Olympic team. Over fifty years later, the Surf Coast is home to the longest running surf competition, two of the world's leading surf brands, a dedicated surfing reserve and the only accredited surf museum. Even the name of the local municipality, the Surf Coast Shire, speaks for itself.

But how can we go beyond these visible elements of surfing to capture the true essence of surfing and what it means for the community? The concept of surfing is nebulous. It can be loosely applied in a variety of contexts by a diverse range of people, all whom call themselves surfers. Whilst each of them may take to the waves for a different purpose, they can all be united under the collective surfer identity. For those who do



not surf, surfing may seem like a simple phenomenon to explain - the physical act of riding along the face of a wave. To surfers however, surfing goes beyond the surface. It is this unseen, often hard to describe multi-faceted dimension of surfing and surf-based experiences that intrinsically links surfers to their own tribe and to the environment within which they immerse themselves.

1.1 RESEARCH RATIONALE

This study was conducted to explore the concept of surfing at a social level. It combines two relatively new and limited fields of knowledge; the social value of sport, in this case specifically surfing, and studies that focus on surfing. The purpose of this study was to contribute to existing knowledge in both of these fields by enquiring and describing the experiences of surfers to further

understand the impact surfing has on both an individual and a community by drawing these out into identifiable themes. In conjunction with the Surf Coast Shire, the following question; “what is the social value of surfing to the Surf Coast community?” was constructed for the basis of the research.

The Surf Coast Shire acknowledges the strong role surfing plays within its municipality and engages surfing and surfers in local events, environmental planning issues and economic opportunities. In 2014, the Surf Coast Shire conducted a study into the economic value of the surf industry to the Shire. The report found that the surf industry was a major contributor to the Surf Coast economy making up one quarter of the local industry and supplying 2, 034 local full time or equivalent jobs (AEC Group, 2014).

The Surf Coast Shire seeks to further understand the impact of surfing, especially at a social level, as there is very little tangible evidence that suggests its value to the community. As a local council, the Surf Coast Shire is responsible for providing services, implementing programs and policies, managing local issues and planning for the community's needs. The results of this study will bridge the gap in knowledge surrounding one of the Surf Coast Shire's most identifiable aspects of social capital to determine what measures can then be put in place to support this significant contributor to community health and wellbeing. The study will also determine whether there is the need for a larger scale research project, to provide tangible evidence of surfing's contribution to society.

1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The research design process and study was guided by one overarching aim; to explore the social value that surfing brings to the community located in the Surf Coast Shire region in southwest Victoria.

To achieve the aim, two objectives were established to ensure the research project met the stated requirements of the Surf Coast Shire, and that the focus of the study remained in scope:

1. Identify the key social value themes of surfing that arise from the data collection process
2. Draw conclusions about the social value of surfing on the Surf Coast and develop recommendations and implication of findings for Council and other organisations and groups



2. BACKGROUND

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review encompasses studies exploring two concepts relating to the study of the social value of surfing. It will begin by drawing on existing works that focus on surfing. These works predominantly relate to the correlation between surfing and the social, but will also encompass a multifaceted dimension of surfing literature. It will then expand from surfing studies to studies that incorporate sport and the social, specifically the social value and impact of sport at both an individual and community level.

Many studies have attempted to categorise the phenomenon of surfing, to identify a term that is flexible in its nature and meaning. Pearson (1979) defines surfing as a play-sport. He argues that play-sports can be generalised by having two main features: 1) they are often associated with the development of a piece of equipment and the application of that piece of equipment into an environment that presents a sustained challenge to participants, and 2) the space in which the play-sport is located in must generally be readily and freely available. On the other hand, Wheaton (2004) suggests that surfing could sit under the life-style sport umbrella. She articulates that it is often more about the style of life that is central to the meaning and experiences of the individual. Participants seek a distinct, often alternative lifestyle that gives them a particular and exclusive social identity. Ford and Brown (2006, pg 7) explain surfing as “the interplay of mind and body, thought and emotion, and image and experience.” This study recognises that surfing is open to interpretation to those who surf and may take on many forms to various individuals. It is therefore important to determine how these theories influence the thinking about surfing and its social value in a community.

Arguably one of the most groundbreaking studies of its time Pearson’s ‘Surfing Subcultures of Australia and New Zealand’ paved the way for studies that explored the complex and intangible subculture, social interactions and impacts that arise through an individual’s involvement in surfing. Pearson (1979) found that surfers, to an extent, are socialised into their own unique subculture creating informal norms that govern interactions between surfers at surfing locations. He argues that these are extremely valued components of the surfing subculture. Silva and Ferreira (2014) further add that the subculture of surfing can lead to high levels

of social wellbeing that is often associated with an intrinsic value.

They would argue that to determine the social value of surfing, it is critical to understand exactly what this intrinsic value is. This study seeks to explore this.

The intangible nature of surfing has been a recurring theme in this research. At a social level it is hard to identify both direct and indirect results that occur from surfing and people’s involvement in surfing. Lazarow, Miller and Blackwell (2009) suggest that surfing can be a ‘social fabric’ that is able to bring diverse groupings of people together and is a feature that can define communities. Ford and Brown (2006, pg 163) further add ‘while participants may find it difficult to verbally express such [sensibilities], there is in surfing... a sense of a shared embodied knowledge which takes on the form of a feeling of *communitas*.’ The application of surfing into a community development context has also arisen substantially, with an increase in the use of surfing as a tool for indigenous participation and engagement (Rynne & Rossi, 2012, *Surfing In Victoria*, 2012) and for understanding the complexities and power relations that affect gender equality in the surfing environment (Franklin, 2009; Olive, 2013).

Much of the scope of surfing literature is centered on non-social subject matter. In the context of this particular research, the AEC Group (2014) investigated the economic value of surfing to the Surf Coast Shire and found that the surf industry is a key contributor, both directly and indirectly to the local economy. Other surf-based studies incorporated further economic themes or explored environmental and tourism components of surfing (Silva & Ferreira, 2014; Hill & Abbott, 2009; Martin & Assenov, 2002).

The social side of sport is one of the driving forces that encourages participation amongst people uniting an otherwise individualistic society with a common identity and passion. ‘It is claimed as a generator of a certain system of general values and as practical activity of various population groups as an effective factor of socialization’ (Lubysheva & Mochenov, 2015, pg 94). The more opportunities there are to connect a higher number of sport participants the more prevalent community ideals of trust and reciprocity become (Granovetter, 2005).

From the social value of AFL clubs (Hoye et al, 2014) to the developmental and social benefits special needs children receive from E-karate (Ebesugawa, Wensley & Murphy-Sims, 2010), sport specific studies have shown



the various benefits and impacts that arise at both an individual and community level. Sport as a form of social capital is not a new concept. Through the involvement in sport community connectedness is increased, social networking opportunities are established, health and well-being levels are increased and barriers that threaten social cohesion are transcended (Hoye et al, 2015; Hoye et al, 2014; Spaaij, 2012).

2.2 CONTEXT

The Surf Coast Shire was established as a renowned surf region in the period of the 1950s when modern surfboard equipment was bought to Torquay by the Californian Olympic team. This sparked an interest in the art of surfboard riding and the establishment of some of the worlds first pioneering surf brands such as Rip Curl and Quicksilver. Since the emergence of surfing, the Surf Coast region has seen a significant increase in the amount of surfers who call the beach and the local towns their home. Surfing is not just a sport for the local surfing community, it is a way of life that provides a strong sense of identity and culture and connects surfers to each other and the natural environment.

Surfing has a lack of hard facts and figures attached to it. At both a national scale and in a more local context there are very limited research findings that produce well founded participation rates. The 2010 Participation in exercise, recreation and sport survey concluded that there was a 1.2% total participation rate for surf sports within Victoria. It is expected that the Surf Coast Shire would experience a higher total participation rate than the state average as it is located on the coastal fringes and has a higher percentage of residents who engage in surf sports.

3. RESEARCH APPROACH

3.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Ten face-to-face interviews were conducted with people who surf within the Surf Coast Shire and either visit or reside within the region. The in-person interviews were conducted with five males and five females who ranged in age between sixteen and sixty. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds, had varying surf experience, rode different surf crafts and worked and studied in separate industries and institutions. To adhere to consent regulations the names of the entities that the participants were contacted through will remain nameless, but they were referred using contacts within surfing clubs, schools, surf industry and word of mouth within the Surf Coast Shire.

The aim of the in-depth interviews was to have an informal discussion to listen to the stories and experiences of people who surf. The ten participants represented different demographics within the Surf Coast Shire and there was an effort to include variances in age, gender, background, profession, surf ability, experience and rationale behind surfing to obtain a diverse scope of narratives. The interview was unstructured and conducted with limited pre-determined questions to flow in the direction of the thought of the informant. The responses were then tabulated to identify reoccurring themes that arose and translated into social values.

Through qualitative data analysis of the in-depth interview responses six key social values were identified by a high percentage of the participants. These six values were identified as being;

- Strengthens family relationships
- Creates opportunities for strong social connections and relationships within the community fostered by a common passion for surfing with like-minded individuals.
- Promotes a healthy, holistic lifestyle and contributes to an overall feeling of wellbeing and happiness.
- Creates an opportunity for people to feel connected to the environment and to be involved in conservation efforts

- Creates a sense of surf community: social cohesion, feeling secure within the community, a sense of belonging with like-minded people
- Significant value of surf clubs: builds personal social relationships and provides skill development and networking opportunities that result in employment

SURVEY

The survey construction and questions were guided by the six key themes that were identified following the analysis of the in-depth interview. It is here that I acknowledge myself as a passionate surfer and that I have a subjective interest on this particular topic. To ensure my impartiality I took steps to ensure I did not influence the objectivity of the study. I detached my own experiences from the data collection techniques and used the responses of the in-depth interviews to formulate the questions and areas of investigation for the survey. Research findings should not be based on the personality, beliefs or values of the researcher, instead the researcher should remain distanced from the nature of their study to ensure their findings are not susceptible to prejudice (Payne & Payne, 2004). The survey was conducted using the online platform 'survey monkey' to target a larger sample size and to quantify the six key values that were determined by the interview responses.

The questions were predominantly close-ended to enable the quantification and categorization of the results. One hundred and fifty participants took part in the survey with a percentage of thirty-six female and sixty-four male. Respondents ages ranged from twelve to sixty-nine and the age group with the highest amount of responses was the thirty-five to forty-nine age group. Forty percent of participants did not live permanently within the Surf Coast Shire whilst sixty percent were permanent Surf Coast residents. Out of the towns on the Surf Coast the highest percentage of respondents resided in Torquay (twenty-three percent) closely followed by Jan Juc (twenty percent).



4. FINDINGS

4.1 SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

FAMILY

I really cherish my boys taking surfing on and growing up and me going surfing with them. That's been an amazing experience. We (my two sons and I) are very close because of it. It's a central part in our lives.

The study found that family ties are strengthened when two or more family members participate in surfing. In regards to the in-depth interview all ten respondents commented on surfing being an integral part of their relationship with immediate and extended family who also surf. One participant articulated, "It was that love of surfing that was instrumental (for my husband and I), it is a very fundamental part of our relationship". The respondents had varied answers on which family members they spent time surfing with but it was a consistent theme of over half of the informants being introduced to surfing and surfing with their father.

Interview participants had different explanations about why they thought surfing was able to strengthen their relationships with family members and why it was important to them.

I think it (surfing) bought us closer for sure because we were able to share a hobby. I think it was pretty satisfying for him to pass on a skill and be able to share that kind of skill together.

Dad got my entire family (three sons and mum) involved in surfing because he enjoyed it so much. Surfing with the family is fun!

My Dad and I have a consistent bond through surfing. He is able to understand my life decisions and supports them because he knows where I am coming from.

The online survey results showed that 42% of respondents were influenced by their family members to take up surfing. 76% of respondents had either immediate or extended family members that surf, with fathers (39%), sons (34%), daughters (32%) and brothers (29%) being the top four family members who participants surfed with. 76% of participants highly valued and 12% valued their time spent surfing with their family. Respondents showed that surfing was an important activity to helping maintain strong family relationships with 68% finding it very important or important.

PERSONAL

The social side of things are great and if you live in a small community like Torquay you get to make a lot of friends and you get close to people and you socialize with them. I think all my friends are surfers, we've got that passion in common still. All those connections that is my life I guess, personally all my connections have to do with surfing.

All ten interview respondents spoke of the important role surfing plays in regards to their personal relationships. Respondents explained that surfing was able to connect them to like-minded people, to people who share a similar love and passion that goes beyond the physical act of just riding waves. "I think it helps bring you to like-minded people. It brings you into close friendship circles."

Those interviewed expressed that this like-mindedness was extremely important to them and was a crucial aspect in their personal relationships.

Most of my relationships have been through surfing. I met my partner resulting in the birth of our son. It is important because you know people are like-minded.

All my best friends and the most important people in my life I've met through surfing and being in the water. I suppose we do it for the same reason to have fun and get away from reality. It's like it's what drives us all.

Respondents described that the surfing environment, whether it be recreational or competitive, is a space that provides opportunities for the creation of social connections to occur. "All my friends are from surf competitions. I've met some amazing people...."

Respondents also articulated that there was an intrinsic social component to surfing that goes beyond just being a physical activity. Part of the reason why some people enjoy surfing so much is because it enables them to connect with others.

I also like it (surfing) because it's social, I like surfing with my friends.

I really enjoy sharing the fun of surfing with other people. It is more enjoyable when you are out there with people.

In the online survey, respondents showed that surfing impacted on their personal relationship network with 79% having a moderate or high percentage of personal relationships that had been established through their involvement in surfing. Survey participants also demonstrated that they highly valued (59%) and valued (27%) the personal relationships that they made through surfing. A recurring theme that has arisen throughout this study has been the opportunity to connect to people who share a similar passion and drive for surfing. 90% of respondents agreed that surfing has been able to connect them to people who are like-minded with 84% saying that this is very important or important to them. It was also acknowledged that the surfing environment creates an invaluable space to establish social connections with 50% of respondents articulating that without surfing they would not be able to have the same opportunity to create personal relationships with people. Whilst the majority of respondents have not used social connections fostered through surfing at anything more than a personal level, 34% of respondents have been given opportunities for employment through networks created by surfing. Responses on these opportunities have been varied and include;

I got my job at Quiksilver through a friendship I made in a surf car park.

I run a small business in Torquay and the relationships help promote my business.

In a roundabout way I would say yes. Through the people I have met surfing they have inspired me to look into studying natural and alternative medicine - I am now studying Chinese Medicine thanks to the influence of many people I have met through surfing. At the end of the course I hope to be practicing in a clinic or establish my own.

SURFING COMMUNITY

There are a high number of people in the surfing community; it's almost a social event. They go to the beach, check the waves and most of the time the waves aren't any good but they'll all go out anyway- all get out and surf whatever is there, they must really enjoy it to get into the freezing cold water, wrapped in rubber. I think it is pretty amazing.

Respondents expressed that surfing provides a sense of community and a collective identity for people that do surf and with whom they share a similar passion. This sense of community was identified to exist at both a local level and global level.

This (Torquay) is a surfing community, people come here because they have identified with the surfing lifestyle. It's always a perception that it's free and easy and it's always nice to walk along the beach and commune with nature, plus the industry is the hugest employer on the Surf Coast. The Surf Coast would have to be one of the strongest pockets of surf culture and industry in the world I would have thought.

It's a universal club because most surfers travel. It's a worldwide community who support each other, a good sense of community throughout the world for people who have a common passion.

One of the recurring and dominant themes that did arise was the sense of safety that respondents felt by being part of a surf community. This resonated more with young people and parents of young surfers who felt that they were able to surf independently at a young age because of the duty of care fellow surfers displayed.

It (surfing) was a good upbringing, a way to feel safe within the community. I knew if I was at the beach and someone gave me a hard time I knew someone from the long board club then everything was going to be all right. Especially in a big town like Newcastle when I was 16 it was nice to have that network of people you knew.

As my son grows older and I grow older that sense of surf community will become stronger because I'll maybe feel comfortable at leaving him at the beach because he knows all of the kids and families that surf at Jan Juc every evening.

Respondents had varying views of belonging to the Surf Coast community. Some participants positively described their experiences and observations as being part of a collective of people who cared about similar issues and shared the same passion.

Being able to paddle out or just stand around on the beach with total strangers but getting some instant connection gives a feeling of belonging. Of great importance is how the surf collective is now openly involved & able to contribute to many social issues; environmental awareness, natural disaster aid, mental health, etc. More voices more awareness more action.

A number of respondents commented on the significant growth that surfing and the Surf Coast, in particular Torquay and Jan Juc, has experienced over the past few decades. They identified that this has had a significant impact on the feeling of surf community.

It's definitely changed. At the start it felt very much like everyone was out there for the same reason and you would have fun together. There wasn't much aggressiveness in the water. I think these days it's definitely changed and it's about how many waves and turns you get. That community feel has gone away a bit. In the past there was a lot more of that. It's kind of sad I suppose.

There's a strong surf community in Portland. It's probably a bit more tight knit as opposed to here and that's probably mainly due to the numbers. Torquay has a lot more numbers of surfers in the water. There are a lot more faces that you don't know. That's why potentially there is a stronger sense of community there as opposed to here.

The online survey found that 90% of respondents agreed to experiencing a strong or moderate feeling of community amongst surfers in the Surf Coast Shire. The scale of importance to feeling part of a surf community was of extreme importance to 22% of respondents, of importance to 40% of respondents and of moderate importance to 24%. Respondents were given seven options that related to the way in which they benefited from being part of a surfing community and asked to tick all that applied to them. The top three benefits that resulted from respondents being part of a surf community were identified as; contributes to happiness and well-being (81%), connection to like-minded individuals (74%) and sense of belonging (72%).

4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL CONNECTIONS

It does connect to the land a lot. It's such a spiritual thing. We (Indigenous) are spiritual minded anyway through our culture so it's like two peas in a pod. It is a big thing for me and I also find a lot of the kids who I do mentor and pursue surfing find it really comfortable and they sort of tap into their spiritual source through surfing. I use it when I go surfing by myself, just to be out in the elements and spiritually you feel free.

A strong theme that arose from all ten interview participants was the way in which surfing was able to strengthen their relationship to the environment. It was identified that surfing is able to create a much-needed connection between humans and the natural world through each surfer's involvement with the ocean. Whilst all informants talked strongly about this, the experiences and meanings varied significantly from person to person.

Even at Jan Juc I am surfing there and going wow the beauty of this environment is unbelievable. I also teach life lessons about the environment to my kids down there, picking things up and if they see something that is dead or injured they learn from that.

I love being the only one out in the water. Having no one there, either early in the morning or late at night and having no one else to share it with but yourself, that's pretty special. Or if you see a dolphin or something that just makes your whole week.

Respondents also commented on how surfing influences them to conserve and protect elements of the environment. In most cases this feeling was directed specifically at the ocean but some participants articulated that their feelings of environmental conservation extended to other natural habitats.

Surfing is about having a connection to the ocean. It's a humbling experience that brings me back to a place where we are at one with nature. Once you have that passionate awareness for a natural element it spreads to other places- the forest, the desert. It's a good wake up call to know how fragile our environment is and it's worth protecting because we've got kids we're passing it down too.

I love the ocean so much and with everything that is going on with the environment and the ocean being at threat it makes me think that I want to keep surfing and keep the ocean healthy and look after the environment.

The results from the online survey reiterated the strong views that were held by the interview participants with 99% of survey respondents stating that surfing strengthens their connection to the environment. At a level of influence towards protecting and conserving the environment 59% acknowledged that surfing highly influences and 30% influences their desire to look after the natural world.

4.3 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

When I was 23 my brother got me off the boogy board and onto a surfboard. That was a good time for me because I was partying loads and I was looking for a way to stop being hung over and messed up most weekends. I'd go to bed at a reasonable time and get up and go surfing. It was a bit of a lifesaver. Yeah it definitely influences your lifestyle heaps.

Six out of the ten interview participants commented on how surfing influenced them to live a more healthier and holistic lifestyle. One recurring theme that arose was the ability of surfing to engage young people in an all-encompassing, natural and healthy environment. Respondent's experiences highlighted that surfing was able to minimize their involvement in drug and alcohol use and partying, and prevented them from idle indoor physical and mental inactivity.

As a kid I didn't want to go out and drink alcohol all night because I wanted to go surfing the next day. I didn't want to go out and hang down the street or get into drugs and that type of stuff. I didn't want to be doing anything else other than going to the beach.

Responses from the online survey showed that 88% of the respondent's lifestyle is very influenced or influenced by surfing. As a surfer 39% of participants are always motivated to live a healthy lifestyle whilst 51% are usually motivated to live a healthy lifestyle.

FITNESS

For me it's good having something to do 2-3 times a week, its good for your fitness. It doesn't feel like you're doing hard exercise when you are, it's an adrenaline rush. I hate going for a run. Surfing is the ultimate exercise, perfect for that. And its fun!



Photo: Surfing Victoria

Whilst findings on the correlation between fitness and surfing were stronger in the online survey responses, four interview participants spoke of the positive impact surfing has on their fitness. From these four participants it was identified that they highly preferred to use surfing as a tool for maintaining their fitness levels, this was mostly due to the enjoyment factor that arose from their time spent surfing.

91% of online survey respondents suggested that they utilize surfing as a tool for fitness. The level of effectiveness amongst participants for using surfing to maintain fitness levels was highly effective (39%) and effective (43%). 82% of those surveyed found that surfing motivated them to further exercise to achieve maximum fitness levels that would benefit their overall surfing ability.

WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS

You can make it social or you can make it solitary. The feeling is a peak experience- it's like when everything is in what you are doing and you have a massive feeling of elation as you are doing it. I just need to be in the water rinsing everything off and then I can start again because it's like a cleanse sometimes. . It just illustrates that it is important, it makes me happy.

Another strong theme that arose amongst interview participants was the health and wellbeing benefits that surfing gave them. All ten interview participants described that their surfing experience acted as an opportunity for mental cleansing, to clear any negativity, doubts or worries and to re-establish a positive and driven state of mind. This element that arose through their involvement with surfing was highly regarded and an area which they acknowledged was valued immensely.

When you feel down to be able to go out and surf it clears any negativity and gives me a moment to start again. Surfing is joy and pleasure. I come out of a surf happy and think of situations differently. It gives me a lot more of a positive outlook because I am already thinking positively and happy

You feel fulfilled, like you are empty in a good way and you have everything off your back. It's just therapeutical. Pretty much every time it is a leveling out and spiritual feeling and being able to reflect on that. Just shut down all worries and problems.

Online survey responses backed-up the interview participants findings demonstrating that surfing is extremely important or important to 95% of respondents for their happiness and wellbeing. 94% of those surveyed stated that surfing generally makes them a happier person.

EATING HABITS

Through their involvement in surfing, respondents identified that they are highly influenced (29%), influenced (45%) and moderately influenced (17%) to eat healthier and nutritious foods.

4.4 SURFING CLUBS

Seven out of the ten interview participants commented that they were a current member or had been a member of a surfing club. Those participants that had been involved in a surfing club expressed that they highly valued their time spent as a club member and identified two key themes that arose through their involvement; social networking and skill development.

Of the online survey respondents, 47% were a current member or had been a member of a surfing club whilst 53% had no involvement with surfing clubs. 20% of respondents were members of the Surf Coast Longboard Club, 38% were members of the Torquay Boardriders Club and 56% were members of various other surfing clubs situated around Victoria and Australia. 41% stated that they highly valued their experience of being a member of a surfing club whilst 33% valued and 19% moderately valued their experiences. Respondents were given five different options and asked to choose the top two aspects that were most important to them as surfing club members. The top two responses were to meet people (76%) and to be involved in the community (75%).

SOCIAL NETWORKING

There's a whole bunch of kids who grew up with my boys and they are all working in the surf industry now. And it's probably got a lot to do with these connections that they've made earlier on in the club that got them into the jobs they've got. All being groms they worked in surf shops and moved their way up the food chain. And it's probably got to do with that community aspect that's important.

Of the respondents that had been a surf club member or currently was a surf club member all described a number of experiences that led to the establishment of social networks. These social networks varied in nature from person to person. The three key outcomes that arose from surfing club social networking opportunities were; friendships, employment and interactions with people of different demographics.

Without the club I wouldn't have met my best friends, without the boardriders and surfing. It's good because you'll be out in the water and you'll notice people from boardriders it's like well if I injure myself or I do hurt myself they are going to be there. It's kind of a good feeling, knowing that you are always safe and someone is looking out for you I suppose.

I never would have met the people that I had met if it wasn't for that (club) foundation. Even been as good of a surfer because of them. They always helped me out. It resulted in international people coming over for contests and then they invite you go over and do contests where they are from. That put me in contact with my current sponsor and employer and log riders in Malibu and set the progression of how my life has gone. If it wasn't for that network of people I wouldn't be where I am today.

I'm always interacting with guys and girls that are over 50 or 60. They are the majority of our club. There are just so many different people there and everyone is different and I meet heaps of people who aren't the same age as me.

Responses from the online survey found that 95% of respondents acknowledged that their involvement as a surfing club member gave them an opportunity to interact with people of different ages and backgrounds that they normally wouldn't interact with. The social connections that respondents made through their involvement in their surfing club was highly valued or valued by 78% of those surveyed. 72% articulated that their involvement in surfing led to networking opportunities.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

All but one of the interview participants that was an existing or current surf club member spoke of their surfing club experience being a platform for skill development. Whilst surf judging skills was the dominant skill that participants were able to learn, coaching, communication and administrative skills were also frequently talked about.

First of all that networking opportunity to work in the industry for a start. Also you can learn how to judge a surf event, coach people, take photos. All those kinds of things as well as if you get on the committee or are interested in being on the committee you can learn administration skills and how to run a club and be a treasure or secretary and organize events. There's lot of opportunities to learn new things and make new connections.

Judging and commentating are two skills, which I have picked up being at the Longboard club. It's also good being able to work with people, often who are a bit older than me.

Through their involvement in surfing clubs, respondents were asked to identify the key skills that they were able to learn and acquire. These were judging skills (64%), coaching skills (24%), photography and video skills (20%), administrative skills (22%), leadership skills (31%), communication skills (49%), learning how to interact with different people (47%) and event management skills (36%).

4.5 ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

IDENTITY

Surfing means everything. I don't know who I would be without it. Just being in the ocean has transformed me into the person that I am.

The surfer's identity is an integral part of being a surfer. Six out of ten interview participants spoke strongly about the significant role surfing plays in their lives. From their stories and experiences they expressed that surfing is an ingrained and often unconsciously thought of component that makes up who they are. An aspect so highly valued that they didn't know who they would be without it as it means and gives them everything they need. "It gives me everything I need, my family and my friends, comfort, fun. I don't know what I would be doing without it to be honest."

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Victorian Indigenous Surfing program use surfing as a driving tool for life skill focuses like healthy lifestyle, employment pathways, mentoring and leadership and nurture competitive pathways. We've got development squads where we have kids and we develop them into surf coaches and through that time we mentor and support them through their other life goals and plans. Nearly every one we have lost because they have gone onto employment or future studies, they've gone somewhere in life.

Through a combination of direct and indirect experiences six out of ten participants described the ability surfing has to engage and connect young people. It was expressed that surfing enables children, teenagers and young adults to immerse themselves in the natural world in an environment that is constantly changing and is made up of driven and athletic role models. It was also identified as a tool to involve and use for disengaged youth to provide alternative career and education pathways.

I was working at Oberon where all the Torquay kids went and I put together a VCAL surf based education that helped engage quite a few kids in high school. From there I was approached by SEDA to run the program. I've been running it for 6 years and I think there has been nearly 60 kids go through it. I do know that most of

those kids, nearly every single one of them whether they finished the program or not, is in some form of employment and mostly full time employment or full time study.

It keeps kids driven, it keeps them in the water. As a kid I didn't want to go out and drink alcohol all night because I wanted to go out surfing the next day.

I've always loved surfing and never really connected through school. When they combined the two I thought it was a really cool idea. It's basically why I went there.

INFLUENCES LIFE DECISIONS

100% every decision I have made has pretty much revolved around surfing really or a lot of decisions that I make. Haywood is a town that is about 25 km from Portland so its 20 minutes drive from where I grew up in Cape Bridgewater. I have been to Haywood about twice in my life because it's inland. And I've been to Europe 20 times, I've been to Hawaii 15 times, from a personal note I live on the coast. I have no aspirations to go inland. Ever.

The various unembodied and unique elements of surfing influence those who do surf to live a particular lifestyle and to make life decisions centered on their connection to surfing. Seven out of ten interview participants articulated that their pathway was dictated by surfing. The context of this influence varies from person to person including career and place of residence choices and travel.

It's guided my life decisions. Travelling, getting divorced. I know how great life can be and surfing shows you that. Being in the ocean life can be this great and these are the amazing things you feel so don't settle for anything else.

We ended up living where we did because of the surfing community there and the people who surfed. And then when we were leaving Tasmania we were like lets go to Jan Juc because it's got good surf. There was family here but we could never not live where there is no surf.

4.6 CASE STUDIES



Anthony Hume

Anthony grew up around the ocean, body boarding with friends and fishing with his Dad and family. Although his Dad used to surf Anthony didn't start surfing until he was surrounded by friends who also surfed in his first few years at high school. Anthony has formed valuable friendships with people he has met through surfing.

During his teenage years he enjoyed both surfing with friends from school and going on camping and fishing trips with his Dad, where if the surf was good he would go out and surf. The camping trips played a significant role in connecting both father and son.

As an indigenous Australian Anthony finds surfing enables him and the children and adults he mentors to tap into their spiritual source through surfing. It gives him the opportunity to be out in the elements, to look at the landscape and to feel spiritually connected.

Being in the ocean enables Anthony to level out, to reflect on the spiritual feeling he experiences and to shut down all worries and problems. "If I want

to single something out it's not the surfing side of things it's the opportunities that I have gained through surfing that stay with me. Helping the disadvantaged kids and putting a smile on their face through what I love very much and being able to use that to create something that great for someone that is finding it hard, to make them feel good is something very important to me."

Anthony's passion for surfing has penned his career pathway, the majority of his employment has been surf related. Anthony is currently the Indigenous Aquatics Officer at Surfing Victoria and manages the Victorian Indigenous Surfing program, a program that utilises surfing as a driving tool for life skill focuses like healthy lifestyle, employment opportunities, mentoring and leadership and competitive pathways. Anthony and his team focus heavily on the cultural elements of surfing and use that within their program to enable participants to feel comfortable about their Indigenous identity and heritage and to provide a diverse range of opportunities for participants to take part in.



Meg Sweeney

Meg began surfing at the tender age of four. Hailing from a surfing family many special occasions were spent in the water with grandparents, parents and siblings. Surfing is just the family thing to do, enabling her to spend cherished time with various members of her family.

Surfing gives Meg pure happiness, and she especially enjoys it when she is out surfing with her best friends and family. She became a member of the local boardriders club at a young age and through her involvement with the local club developed highly valued friendships, learnt new skills and enjoyed the community feel it brought her. She feels comfortable surfing in the Surf Coast region because she knows that if she gets injured or feels threatened someone from the surf community will be looking out for her. She has however noticed a slight transformation in the local surf community due to an influx in surfers and a change towards a more selfish attitude.

Meg is in the under 25 demographic and has found surfing established her desire to work within the surf industry. For several years she has been working at

Quiksilver, something that she thinks wouldn't have eventuated had she not been so passionate about surfing.

Meg enjoys both the solitude of surfing and the social aspect of surfing. Having a solo surf, immersed in the natural environment, increases Meg's connection to the natural world. It also renews her energy and clears her head after a bad day. Meg also appreciates the people she has met through surfing, the majority of her closest relationships have been formed through surfing and a like-minded love for the ocean.

While Meg has stopped competitive surfing she still enjoys the social and environmental aspects and believes it contributes to her health, well-being and fitness. Surfing gives Meg everything, family, friends, comfort and fun. Without surfing Meg doesn't know who she would be or what she would be doing and feels lucky to have access to the Surf Coast region and such high quality breaks.



Belinda Baggs

Belinda grew up watching her Dad surf. As her confidence in the ocean grew it was a natural progression from strong swimmer to taking to the waves on a surfboard. She surfed religiously before and after school and spent her time surfing with her Dad and with friends that she had made through the local longboard club. As a young girl growing up in Newcastle she relied on the network of people she knew through the local club to feel safe and secure while at the beach alone, knowing that if someone gave her a hard time a longboard club member would be there to help her.

Belinda appreciates surfing and acknowledges that it strengthens her connection to her family. As she grew up, surfing strengthened the bond between Belinda and her Dad. Her Dad was always supportive of her decisions and understood her because he could relate to where she was coming from. As a mother Belinda also enjoys spending time with her son at the beach and taking him surfing. One of her most cherished moments in life was watching her son surf for the first time.

A high proportion of Belinda's relationships have been formed through surfing. She finds it important

to know that people are like-minded. When Belinda was younger she was more heavily involved in the boardriding club scene and while she has now taken a step back from competitive surfing the people that she met, both personal and professional, through those channels enabled her to be where she is today. Belinda is an ambassador for Patagonia, a company that resonates strongly with her environmental and social values. Being a surfer has led to Belinda having a passion for the ocean, which has also extended to other elements of the natural world.

While Belinda has lived in a number of iconic surf destinations she relocated to the Surf Coast because she fell in love with both the landscape and the waves and the local people that reside in the region. Through her social network she was able to transition smoothly at a professional level to the Surf Coast surf industry and at a personal level.

The actual act of surfing gives Belinda a recharge on life and helps her to think of situations differently and in a more positive light. Surfing means everything to Belinda and gives her a strong sense of identity and purpose in life.

4.7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The described experiences, stories and responses from the interview and survey respondents identified a number of key themes that show the social impact of surfing within the Surf Coast Shire. It is also important to note that through analysis of the findings, the themes that were determined were multidimensional and incorporated non-social elements.

Through recreational and competitive channels surfing creates an opportunity for the establishment of strong social connections and relationships and for a collective surf community and identity. The majority of social connections initiated through surfing occur at a micro level, often between small groups of surfers at one time. Through these interactions people are given increased opportunities to create new social networks, which are most common in the form of personal and family relationships but can also result in employment, skill development and corporate networking. Surfing, either through recreational involvement or inclusion in surfing clubs, also enables inter-generational contact to occur, and amplifies prospects for people of different ages, gender and backgrounds to come into connection with each other.

The essence to the social side of surfing is captured in its ability to create a sense of like-mindedness and of a shared understanding of people who identify themselves as surfers. Through these small-scale interactions, which often occur at different beaches and locations on a weekly basis, a sense of community connectedness and inclusion arises between people that are directly and indirectly linked to surfing. This sense of community also generates the notion of a safe and secure environment in which surfers of all ages feel protected by fellow surfers at their local beaches, and decreases feelings of social isolation. Whilst it was identified that surfing could contribute to increased societal tension the main body of data concluded that surfing can initiate social cohesion. This feeling of social cohesion arises in the form of a diverse range of community members who experience a sense of belonging and are willing to interact closely with each other on a day-to-day basis to benefit the community.

Surfing provides a much-needed opportunity for surfers to immerse themselves in the natural environment. The Surf Coast is home to a pristine coastline, being free and easily accessible as a natural resource. It is this access to a conserved ocean sanctuary that resonates with local surfers and produces a positive experience of surfing, strengthening their sense of connection to the natural world. Surfers on the Surf Coast are passionate about safeguarding their local waterways and are influenced by surfing to actively engage in efforts of marine conservation and environmental protection.

Through their involvement in surfing individuals and communities are motivated to implement healthy eating habits, engage in physical activity and make beneficial lifestyle choices all of which contribute to improved overall health levels. Surfers on the Surf Coast experience health benefits through surfing with increased fitness levels and healthy eating habits. Surfing is also a key component in producing enhanced feelings of mental well-being and happiness. Surfers use their involvement in surfing and immersion in the ocean as a tool for mental cleansing and to wash away negative mindsets, stress and worry. The very essence of surfing also encourages surfers to partake in a way of life that is holistic and natural. Individuals experience decreased desires to be involved in the partying scene, consume drug and alcohol substances and to restrict themselves to indoor physical inactivity. A community is a collective of individuals, when these individuals show improved levels of health and well-being the result is in an active community whose overall health levels benefit the various components that lead to a productive and cohesive society.

4.8 ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

At the conclusion of the study a number of observations arose. These observations need to be considered in the findings and recommendations of this study to ensure surfing is equitable to all and thoroughly represented within the Surf Coast Shire.

- Surfing is a male dominated sport and measures must be taken to address this gender inequality and inequity . This includes within the beach environment, the promotional advertising and sexualised image of women and in areas of decision-making and executive roles
- Accessibility to the beach, surfing and surf-related equipment is a key issue for those who come from a low socio-economic status and/or are located inland
- Surf Industry practices and procedures can contradict the strong environmental and environmental conservation values held by the majority of surfers. While there are a select number of surf companies who uphold strong environmentally friendly practices and morals there are also a significant number who fail to incorporate sustainable and effective policies and procedures that mitigate negative environmental impacts. The connection between surfing and the natural world is of high importance to surfers, as is the preservation of coastal assets. The surf industry needs to reflect surfer's values and begin to incorporate sustainable and environmental friendly practices and procedures.
- Factors that could negatively impact on the valued Surf Coast surfing community are; escalation of conflict between local surfers and foreign surfers, conflict between different riders of surf craft and a changing surf community due to an influx of surfers.



Photo: Surfing Victoria

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The research findings suggest surfing plays a pivotal role in the Surf Coast community and to the many individuals who surf. At the commencement of this study it was acknowledged that it would act as a 'taster', designed to explore at a small scale the social value of surfing and to provide tangible themes that could further be investigated. Having completed this particular study, combining observational skills and analysis of the findings with the new knowledge that has been created, two key areas have arisen and are put forward as implications of the study findings; further study and recommendations for identifying surfing as social capital.

FURTHER STUDY

As stated above, this research was conducted to act as a small-scale exploratory study to test the potential impact surfing has at a social level. I am confident in the conclusive nature of the findings of this research that surfing has significant social value to both individuals and the community of the Surf Coast Shire. In saying this, I put forward the idea of a larger scale study to incorporate a bigger sample size that exceeds one hundred and sixty participants. These participants need to be representative of the Surf Coast Shire's population of surfers and of the different geographical locations and towns within the Surf Coast Shire region. Whilst this particular study focused specifically on surfing and surfers as participants it would be more encompassing to conduct a comparative study that contrasts surfing to another sport or communal activity that produces social capital, for example AFL, the local men's shed or the Anglesea Art House.

This study does acknowledge that surfing plays a strong role within the community. It also sees the potential that similar sport, recreational and creative activities have in producing comparable results and is interested in how surfing might relate to these activities. It would also incorporate a broader scope to include non-surfers and to hear the stories and experiences of how they are indirectly affected by living in a strongly identified surf community and culture, and to understand if they are involved in similar activities, how this impacts them at a social level and if it has any correlation to the social capital produced by surfing.

The findings from this study produced seven key social values; social connections (including family, personal and surf community), environmental connections and conservation, health and wellbeing, the benefits of a surf club, youth engagement, identity and influence of life-decisions. Whilst these themes are all linked to the social impact that is bought about by surfing they are quite broad in nature and scope. Further studies could incorporate either an all-encompassing element, such as this study, or it could identify from the seven key findings one specific area to focus on. For example those in the youth engagement sector could evaluate the effectiveness of using surfing as a tool for providing an alternative pathway to mainstream education or those in health and wellbeing could conduct a study precisely looking at how surfing can be used as therapy for those who suffer from mental health issues. Total participation rates of surfers on the Surf Coast are unknown and would act as a valuable measuring tool to determine how many people engage in surfing. This data would complement the Surf Coast Shire's economic value of surfing study and the social value of surfing study.

IDENTIFYING SURFING AS SOCIAL CAPITAL

This study has shown the significant impact surfing has on producing social capital. There are a number of processes that can be implemented by the Surf Coast Shire and various local and non-local bodies to utilize this new information. Through a detailed analysis of the study's findings a list of recommendations have been outlined below.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Work with stakeholders to ensure surfing, surfers themselves and the local surf industry promote gender equality and equity

Surfing is a male dominated sport across the spectrum from recreational participation to competitive surfing, surf industry employees to those who hold decision-making and executive positions. The Surf Coast Shire Council needs to acknowledge the current reality and commit to balancing the gender inequalities with key stakeholders by providing opportunities, funding, development, encouragement and programs that promote women in surfing and surf-related fields. While the focus will be projected to women and girls in surfing it is essential that men and boys still experience inclusion within the surfing sphere and are included in any current or future interventions.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Incorporate surfing into Surf Coast Shire Council plans, services and programs

The results from this study show the various ways in which surfing can contribute at an individual level and a community level. Council should seek to work with the research outcomes to implement specific council programs that are tailored to meet the needs of its community members. The Surf Coast Shire has a wide range of programs and services that span several departments. Whilst this study is not relevant to each sector, Council service areas pertaining to a) youth engagement and development, b) community development, inclusiveness and engagement, c) health and wellbeing, d) environment, e) sport and leisure, f) economy and infrastructure should seek to become aware of the study's findings and critically examine existing programs and services and future measures which could be put in place.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Utilise surfing as a tool for youth engagement and development

Surfing was identified as a critical link to engaging disengaged youth, particularly indigenous youth. The Surf Coast is home to both the Sports Education and Development Australia (SEDA) surfing program and the Surfing Victoria Indigenous program; two key stakeholders that use surfing as a critical link to providing youth access to practical experience and work. Incorporating the economic value of surfing study into this context, where the surf industry makes up a quarter of the economy and provides 2,034 full time or equivalent jobs (AEC Group, 2014) there is an opportunity for the Surf Coast Shire to work in conjunction with these two educational and surf specific organizations. This is to further build on a skills and surf industry based pathway for students and youth who are disengaged from traditional schooling and to provide them with the prospect of practical experience and employment within the surf and sporting industries.

Following on from education and youth, surfing was also described by many participants as a mechanism to curb indoor physical inactivity, partying and substance abuse. Whilst there is no existing studies that can lay concrete claims to the above statement, participants in this research strongly stated that their involvement in surfing, especially when they were young led to their reduced involvement in partying and substance abuse whilst

increasing their desire to be outside in a healthy and natural environment. The Surf Coast Shire Council youth department and similar youth targeted organisations have the potential to further test this concept and include surfing and similar activities in programs that aim to get youth actively involved.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Consider providing funding and in-kind support for surfing and surf-based programs

This study has shown multiple examples of surfing being a highly valued component of the Surf Coast community. Comparing surfing to similar community-driven activities such as soccer, netball, local community gardens and the local men's shed, surfing does not need material facilities and infrastructure for people to participate. Due to the nature of the sport it is often overlooked in terms of funding because in a sense it does not need concrete foundations to exist. To unlock the full potential of surfing the Surf Coast Shire could revisit possible funding opportunities to invest in the social infrastructure of local surfing clubs and surf-based organisations. This could include training, resources and equipment for the local surfing clubs and funding for programs and events that target indigenous people, women and youth participation, and environmental and community issues.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Engage with the surfing community and seek to understand Council actions that could strengthen and undermine the strong feeling of surf community

Stated in the Surf Coast Shire Council's Council Plan for 2013-2017 under one of its five guiding pillars, the community pillar is "*We actively engage with our diverse and growing communities to establish quality services, healthy and safe environments and long term community partnerships*" (Surf Coast Shire, 2013). The Surf Coast Shire, as identified by local surfers should recognize the surf community as one of its key local stakeholders and work closely with the broad range of individual surfers and groups/organisations that have been established by surfers to strengthen and maintain its sense of surf community.

Council also needs to be aware that respondents acknowledged that the surf community, in particular Torquay/ Jan Juc is experiencing a significant change as the population of both residents and surfers steadily increases. This could create tension and conflict amongst the surf and non-surf community within the Surf Coast Shire and Council needs to be wary of the implications that may surface. This could arise due to a number of factors such as; the strains of sever localism shown towards tourists who surf or the apprehension between different surf craft riders and ocean users, e.g. those that ride longboards against those that paddle surf life saving boats competing for waves at the same break. To minimize future complications the council needs to monitor the situation, be willing to implement conflict-resolving measures and facilitate community conversations to assist opposing communities in managing these issues.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Recognise the health and wellbeing benefits of surfing by including it in Council health and wellbeing programs

The health and well-being benefits of surfing incorporated factors such as fitness, healthy eating, healthy lifestyle, happiness and mental and physical health and wellbeing. This information is important for both the Surf Coast Shire's health and wellbeing department and related areas and for those that work in the same sector but are non-council employees. Further possibilities could be developed and researched to use surfing as a mechanism for increased health and well-being and to be integrated into specific health related programs.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Engage surfers in Council's environmental discussions and decision-making processes

The Surf Coast Shire is well renowned for its pristine beaches and world-class waves. Local surfers have identified that through surfing they feel strongly connected to the environment and are dedicated to safeguarding the natural world, in particular the ocean. As the Surf Coast Shire implements plans and policies relating to the environment and create their Environmental Leadership vision the inclusion of surfers voices, both individual and collective need to be incorporated. There is also the opportunity for Council, community based environmental groups and eco-friendly companies to work in collaboration with surfers to include their ideas on local environmental issues, projects and events. In addition Council could look to work with the surf industry to implement environmentally friendly and sustainable practices and policies to mitigate harmful environmental impacts.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Work with stakeholders to ensure surfing is accessible and inclusive for all Surf Coast community members

Surfing is not as readily accessible to some Surf Coast Shire residents as it is to others. Council needs to understand factors, such as inaccessibility and exclusion certain residents may experience due to surfing being both a high cost sport and reliant on a particular location. Those with a low socio-economic status or those who reside in inland towns or properties do not have an equal opportunity to surf as their coastal residing counterparts do. The social and economic benefits of surfing that have been outlined in the social value of surfing study and in the economic value of surfing study therefore may not be relevant to these particular residents. Important factors that positively impact an individual and community, such as increased health and well-being, increased social networking and connections and the opportunity to be employed by the Surf Coast Shire's largest industry, the surf industry, may effect these individuals. These components need to be addressed and appropriate Council led measures put into place. the surf industry, may effect these individuals. These components need to be addressed and appropriate Council led measures put into place.

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Hurley



Photo: Surfing Victoria