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# Background Report

Landscape Assessment North of the Princes Highway

Surf Coast Shire

MARCH 2007



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## 1. Introduction

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Planisphere was commissioned by Surf Coast Shire to undertake an assessment of the landscape character and significance of the area north of the Princes Highway within the Shire.

This project completes the work undertaken in the Great Ocean Road Region Landscape Assessment Study (GORRLAS) to assess landscape character and significance for the entire municipality.

This document contains a synopsis of landscape Character Types and Precincts within the Shire, an explanation of landscape elements, a summary of key character issues, and proposed recommendations, including the best method of implementing the study through the Surf Coast Planning Scheme. The two Precinct Packages should be used in conjunction with this report for a complete picture of landscape character in the Shire.

### Study Contents:

- Background Report (this document)
- Precinct Packages:
  - 1.1 Western Plains
  - 1.2 Barrabool Hills

## Methodology

This study uses the same methodology as the GORRLAS, a sound and consistent methodology for assessing the character of landscapes and the ways in which various types of development can be managed in different landscape types.

This study follows a methodology similar to the GORRLAS but simplified for the smaller study area. The methodology included:

- Inception
  - Base data gathering
  - Meeting with Council
- Character Survey
  - Analysis
  - Character Area Analysis Papers
- Significance Survey
  - Analysis
- Statutory Implementation
  - Gap analysis
  - Meeting with Council
- Final Report

For more information about the methodology, landscape character and significance theory and the broader context of the study please refer to the GORRLAS *About the Study Report*.

## 2. Landscape Character Types and Precincts

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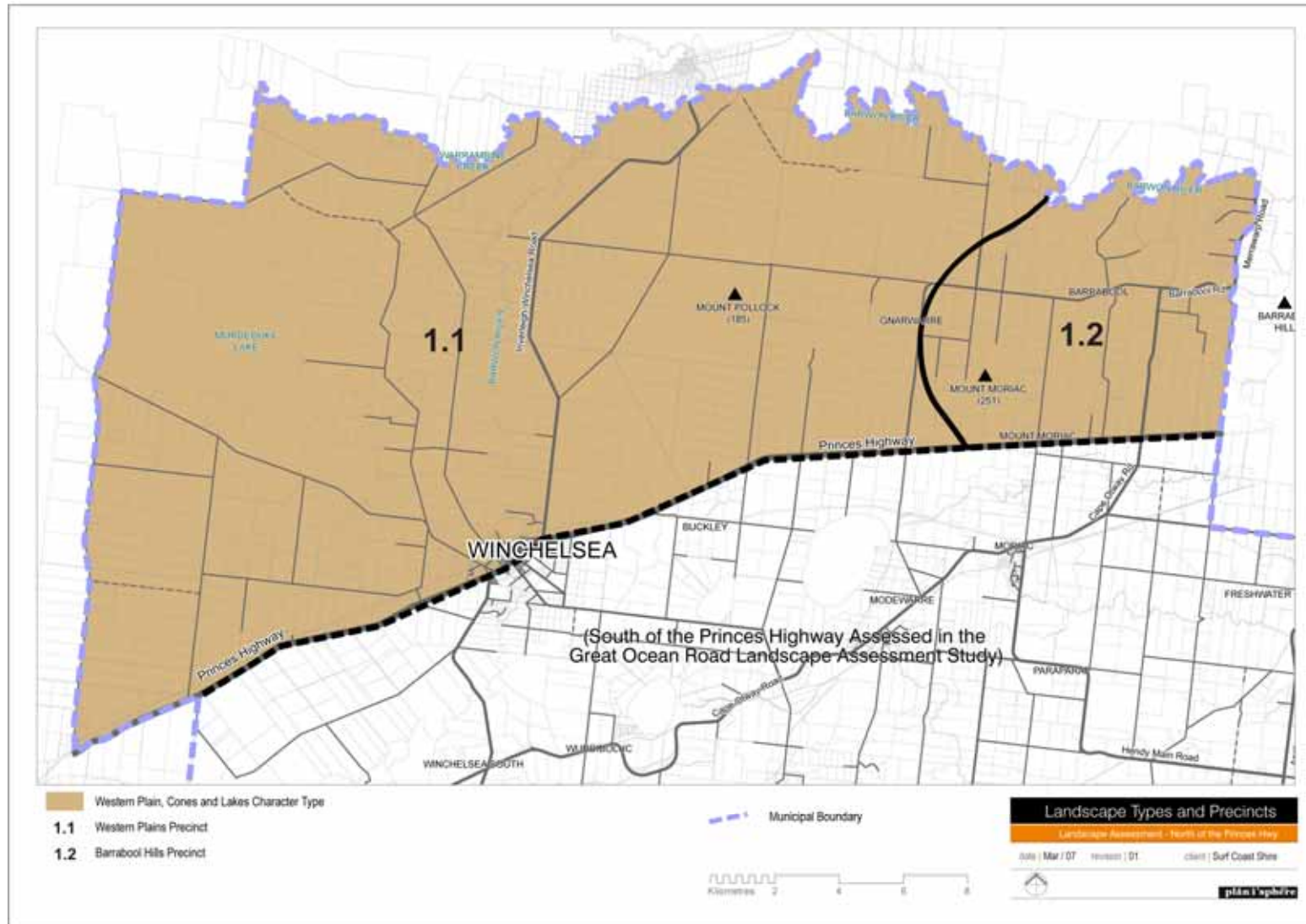
The Landscape of the Shire north of the Princes Highway is part of the Western Plains, Cones and Lakes Character Type, as identified in GORRLAS. Two Precincts have been identified, the Western Plains, and the Barrabool Hills. Detailed descriptions of these precincts are in the Precinct Packages. The maps on the following pages show the character types and precincts.

### **What is landscape character?**

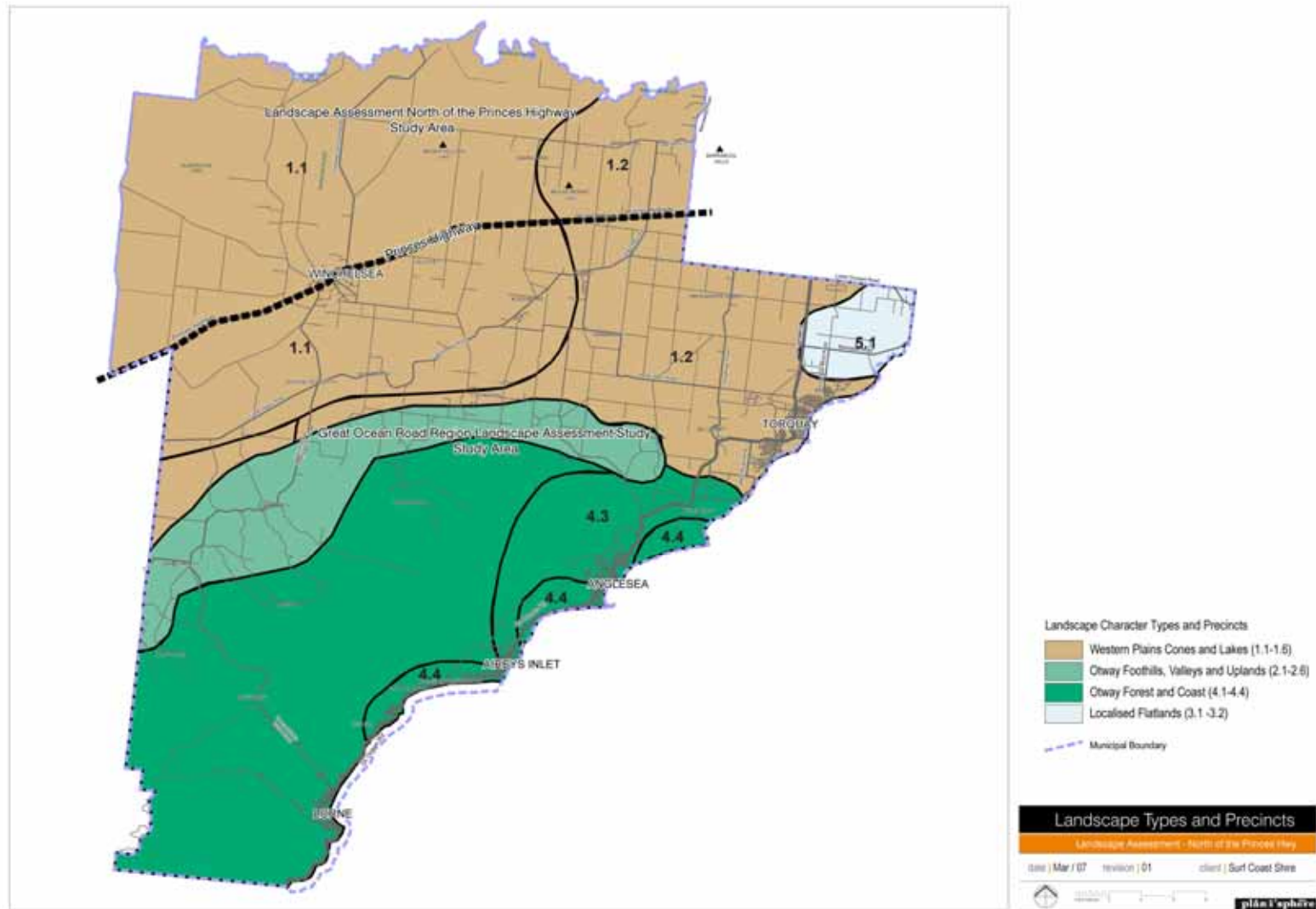
The following definition was developed for the purposes of GORRLAS and is equally relevant to this project:

*Landscape character is the interplay of geology, topography, vegetation, water bodies and other natural features, combined with the effects of land use and built development, which makes one landscape different from another.*

Landscape Types and Precincts



### Landscape Types and Precincts – Surf Coast Shire





### 3. Landscape Elements

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#### Townships

The landscape character of the following Surf Coast townships is described in the Precinct Landscape Elements section of the relevant Precinct Package.

- Winchelsea (Precinct 1.1)
- Gnarwarre (Precinct 1.2)
- Barrabool (Precinct 1.2)
- Mount Moriac (Precinct 1.2)

A issue in Surf Coast is ribbon development between settlements. It is important to contain the urban form of townships, and for the natural landscape to dominate beyond the township edge. Township edges may vary in the way they interface with the natural landscape. It may be appropriate that the built form edges of some townships are clearly demarcated, while others are 'softer' comprising a combination of buildings and vegetation. If not appropriately designed and integrated with the landscape, development on the periphery of settlements, often in low density residential areas, can 'blur' the urban boundary of townships with development spilling into the natural landscape. Signage clutter along the main road into a township can have the same negative visual effect.

#### Edges

'Edges' occur in the landscape when different landscape types or features intersect. They create complexity in the landscape and provide visual contrast and a point of interest. For any given landscape (eg the sea, a forest) it is often the edge (eg the coastline, a clearing in the forest) that attracts the most people and creates management issues.

Edges within the study area include:

- Township / natural landscape edges
- Edges where landscape character precincts meet
- Topographical edges

- Features in the landscape creating edges ie incised valleys, stands of vegetation, rivers and other waterways, shelter belts etc
- Road corridors creating edges

#### Corridors

The main road corridor and key tourist route that passes through the Study Area is the Princes Highway. Smaller north-south tourist routes are Devon, Barrabool and Merrawarp Roads, and the Inverleigh-Winchelsea Road. These main road corridors are zoned Road Zone Category 1 and buildings within 100 metres of them requires a planning permit in the Farming Zone. As a result most development adjacent to main roads can be assessed and managed. This is important because the impression and landscape character of an area is often confined to what is seen from the main road corridors, particularly the key tourist routes.

The assessment and management of development that can be seen from main road corridors is therefore an important issue in the Shire. Particular types of development for which Development Principles have been prepared in relation to this issue include, development on highly visible hill faces and ridges, ribbon development and low density development on township fringes.

#### Implications for Local Policy

It is recommended that brief policy statements about each of these Landscape Elements be included as Local Policy in the Surf Coast Planning Scheme. It is envisaged that the policy statements would be incorporated into the relevant Local Policy for that landscape Character Precinct.

## 4. Summary of Issues

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### Development Pressures

#### Rural Living

There is evidence that there is a trend toward increased Rural Living and hobby farming developments in Surf Coast Shire (Surf Coast Rural Strategy Review 2007). The Rural Strategy states that while the population is expected to grow in the next 20 years, there is sufficient zoned land to meet the housing needs to accommodate this growth. The Rural Strategy established that urban intrusion into productive agricultural land should be avoided. From a landscape character perspective, rural living developments can degrade the open rural character of areas such as those within the study area, especially if located on prominent locations such as on ridge tops. There are a small number of properties that appear to perform a rural living function in the Barrabool Hills and along the Barwon River valley toward the east. The remainder of the study area is largely free from rural living.

#### Signage

Road corridors, such as the Princes Highway, experience pressure for advertising and informative signage. Signage should be minimised, and where necessary should be of small scale, and not located in a way as to block important views.

#### Ribbon Development

Ribbon development along road corridors, including uses such as sales from rural properties, can degrade the rural character of the study area. Where developments along road corridors are permitted, they should be encouraged to locate further into the property, and be grouped with existing infrastructure or buildings.

#### Agricultural Infrastructure

The siting and design of buildings and structures related to the agricultural use of the land, such as sheds, impacts on the character of the landscape. The strategic direction of the study

area is for agricultural use and so the development of this infrastructure is important. However this development can be informed by guidelines to minimise the landscape impact. Such guidelines may include locating infrastructure away from road corridors, clustering buildings and structures in groups to mimic traditional and existing developments, and screening some developments with vegetation.

### Planning Permit Controls

#### Zones

The vast majority of the Study Area is zoned Farming (FZ). The remainder is either Public Conservation and Recreation Zone (PCRZ) covering waterbodies such as Lake Murdeduke. The township of Winchelsea contains the Low Density Residential Zone (LDRZ) and Residential 1 Zone (R1Z). Major roads are covered by the Road Zones Category 1 (RDZ1) and a permit is required for any development within 100m of this zone. The rail reserve is covered by the Public Use Zone Category 4 (PUZ4).

The existing zoning is appropriate from a landscape character and significance perspective, and no zoning changes are recommended. It should be emphasised however that any future rezoning of the land, particularly rezoning to Rural Activity (RAZ), Rural Living (RLZ) and Low Density Residential (LDRZ) may allow development that conflicts with the Objectives as described in the Precinct Packages, and is therefore discouraged.

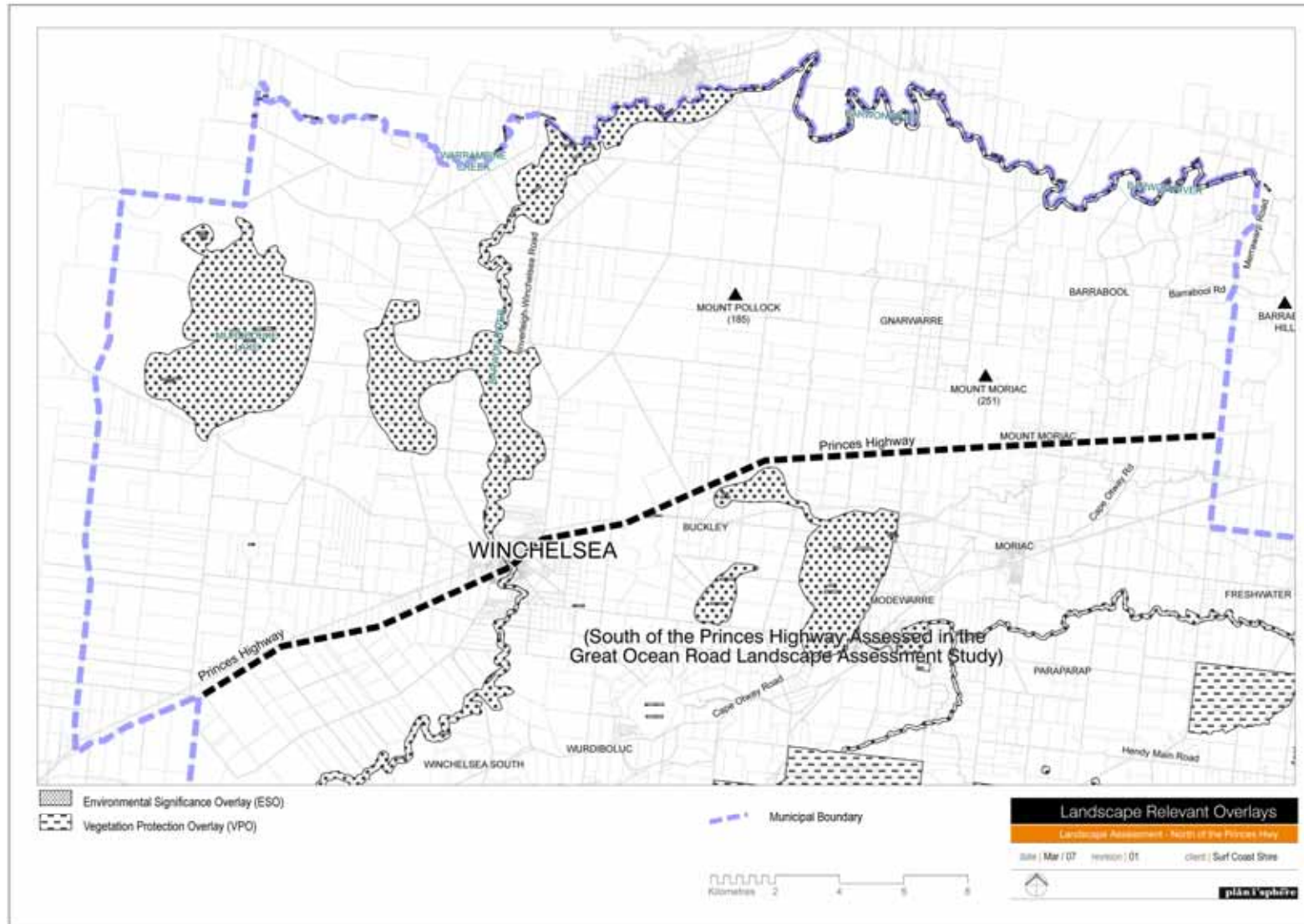
#### Overlays

Environmental Significance Overlay Schedule 1 (ESO1) covers the Barwon River Valley and Lake Murdeduke. The ESO requires a permit to construct a building or fence, to subdivide land and to remove vegetation.

The following pages show maps for zones and overlays from the Surf Coast Planning Scheme.



Planning Overlays



## Proposed overlay

There are no additional areas of significant landscape character that warrant protection and management through the application of the Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO). This was determined by applying the following formula to the Study Area.

*Significance + Pressure + Lack of Control = Priority Area  
(for additional control)*

The level of significance (Regional, State or National) was attributed to the landscapes through the application of a set of assessment criteria. While there are areas of significance these areas were assessed to be of a local significance, and did not warrant protection by the SLO. In addition much of these areas are already contained within the ESO.

## Local Planning Policy Framework

The Surf Coast Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) includes strategic directions to:

- Manage the diverse environmental values of the Shire.
- Preserve and enhance scenic landscapes and cultural heritage values.

The MSS also includes a summary of the Landscape and Culture Strategy, defining landscape units and objectives for those units.

In addition the MSS includes a Strategy for Winchelsea.

The Planning Scheme also contains the following Local Policies relevant to landscape character:

- 22.02 Rural and Environmental Development Policy
- 22.03 Fire Safety
- 22.05 Surf Coast Style and Colours
- 22.06 Streetscape and Landscaping

## 5. Implementation Recommendations

### Surf Coast Planning Scheme

The recommendations of this study and GORRLAS should be implemented into the Planning Scheme in concert.

#### Landscape and Culture Strategy

The Landscape and Culture Strategy (21.06) of the MSS should be reviewed and updated. The landscape units should be updated to align with the landscape Character Precincts as defined in GORRLAS and this study. In addition to the existing descriptions and objectives, the strategy should be updated to include the following sections from the Precinct Packages:

- Precinct Descriptions,
- Key Characteristics,
- Future Directions, and
- Landscape Objectives.

This will require editing of the existing descriptions and objectives to retain the aspects that are not covered in this study. For example, references to land uses and tenement issues may need to be retained, while references to landscape character can be replaced with new objectives.

#### General MSS Review

A review of the MSS content relating to landscape is required with strengthening of wording relating to the importance of landscape and ensuring that new development respects the existing character. The MSS should be reviewed with regard to:

landscape character, particularly clause:

21.04 Strategic Framework (particularly the sections regarding Environment and Landscape, and Housing and Settlement),

rural residential development particularly clause:

21.09 Rural Residential Strategy, and

townships within the landscape, with regard to clause:

21.14 Winchelsea Strategy.

#### Rural and Environmental Development Policy

The Rural and Environmental Development Policy (22.02) should be reviewed and updated to include the Precinct Development Principles from the Precinct Packages. This policy should also include a map of the Character Precincts.

#### Changes since GORRLAS

GORRLAS recommended that a new local policy be introduced specific to the landscape character of Surf Coast, including Precinct Descriptions, Distinctive Qualities and Development Principles (including Landscape Objectives) relating to Precincts in the Shire. This recommendation has been abandoned in preference of the above recommendation to reduce the number clauses to which a user must refer in the permit assessment process.

### Other Implementation Actions

#### Community Education

Consider the need for community education programs to disseminate information about landscape sensitive development and the findings of the study.

#### Council Staff Skilling

It will take time to become familiar with the findings of the Study and its implementation through the planning system, and the Shire's planners will need support and skilling to get the most out of the Study's recommendations. Correct approaches to site analysis, knowledge about acceptable design solutions for particular character types, and consistency are all important. Training sessions, workshops and a review of permit applications by appropriately qualified consultants may be useful techniques. Above all, the Council must send out the right message to the development community about the value of landscape character to the Shire's image and economy.

### **Council Statutory Support**

The main products for statutory support which will aid decision making are the proposed changes to the Surf Coast Planning Scheme, including the Development Principles and changes to the Rural and Environmental Development Policy. However, there are allied or associated measures that can be taken, including:

- Introduction of additional permit conditions
- Better enforcement of permit conditions
- Active monitoring of illegal works, and increased publicity regarding penalties
- Improved communication and coordination with public land managers to ensure that the desired landscape character outcomes are achieved