

**FINAL MINUTES FOR THE BELLS BEACH COMMITTEE
MEETING 18
29 June 2020, Video meeting via Zoom
5.30 PM – 7 PM**



PRESENT:

Committee members: Jane Currie (Chair), Andrew Cherubin, Cahill Bell-Warren, Graeme Stockton, James Deans, Corrina Eccles, Dave Matthews, Adam Robertson, Hugh Gorman; Cr David Bell, Cr Martin Duke.

Invited Guest: Paul Jane, DELWP Project Manager, Great Ocean Road Management Reform

Supporting Officers: Rowan Mackenzie (Manager, Environment & Community Safety, SCS), Kate Smallwood (Coordinator Environment, SCS)

APOLOGIES: Gabrielle O'Shea (Environment Officer, SCS) and Leigh Irvine (Project Manager, SCS)

NOTE: Due to COVID-19 health recommendations, this meeting was held via video conferencing

DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST:

NA

1. Acknowledgement of Country

Acknowledgment of Country and welcome by Jane Currie.

2. Great Ocean Road Coasts and Parks Authority (GORCAPA) Presentation

Paul Jane, DELWP Project Manager, Great Ocean Road Management Reform gave a presentation on the process and likely timeline to establish the new Authority. Paul noted:

- The current situation with significant numbers of tourists and vehicles is not sustainable.
- Key objective of the Taskforce Final Report is to have 'one integrated and living entity' along the entire stretch of the Great Ocean Road. This allows one organisation to respond to overarching issues like coastal erosion and climate change.
- 1st bill creating the Authority was passed in June.
- 2nd bill being drafted at moment – it will provide a set of powers to the Authority.
- The Authority will not be a planning authority – that role will remain with local government. The Authority will however have a strategic framework to guide use and development.
- The Authority will also look at carrying capacity and sustainable tourism, including trying to spread tourism throughout the year.
- For context – DELWP is the agency establishing the Authority but isn't the Authority, so Paul may not be able to answer all the questions Committee members may have.

The following questions were submitted by Committee members and shared with Paul Jane prior to the meeting:

Community representation (Andrew Cherubin)

- Given that there is to be no intention to have representation from local community on GORCAPA and given that GORCAPA is not an elected body. How are we to be assured that the wishes of the community are to be implemented for the Bells Reserve?
 - Paul noted that the Community Framework outlines how the Authority will engage with the community. DELWP has also looked at establishing special places committees – reference groups who can talk particularly to high profile places that are heavily impacted eg Port Campbell/Twelve apostles. There will be key connections between the Authority and state and local government elected representatives, with heavy cross over with local government.
- Is there an intention to continue the Bells Beach advisory committee for the long term?

- Presuming previous question is yes, in the long term how is GORCAPA going to choose the members of the committee?
 - Paul responded that the intent is to have one management arrangement across the entire region, with nothing held out as 'different'. He doesn't see management of Bells Beach coming into the Authority for another one to two years. They have to do due diligence first and work through the various management arrangements before transition to the new authority.

Weeds; Growth/Development (Graeme Stockton)

- Environmental weeds and environmental weed invasion, particularly along GOR roadsides represent one of the biggest threats to ecosystem integrity for the new GORCAPA. Budget funding to meet this growing threat has to date been laughable. The now large infestation of Flax-leaf Broom on the corner of Addiscot and the GOR on VicRoads land is one easy example where indifference has probably been the dominant attitude. What will GORCAPA's approach be?
 - Paul confirmed they want to ensure that the Authority has sustainable funding so it has the capacity to plan for and address environmental issues over the long term, including sea level rise and asset management.
- Many places along the coast are either at or moving past a sensible carrying capacity. The Bells Beach Recreational Surfing Reserve is one example. Will GORCAPA have a policy on limits to growth?
 - Paul responded that 'sensible carrying capacity' is something that the strategic framework will consider. Further work is required regarding infrastructure and carrying capacity eg Kennett River – has no toilet facilities but is attracting lots of visitors. We need to consider whether we want visitors attracted here in future and whether that is compatible with maintaining the natural environment. Data is needed to inform decisions regarding carrying capacity and response.

Committee members then raised the following questions:

- Graeme – how big is the Authority board? Paul – 12 members. Two nominees from Traditional Owners (Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar) and remaining 10 members from the community.
- Graeme – management of tourism/increasing visitation and ecological assets are ultimately conflicting aims. The whole idea of sustainability depends on the metrics used. Paul – yes, this will be a balance. They are currently working on environment reporting, including environmental accounts (see for example those prepared for Port Phillip Bay). They want to ensure that the Authority has the best data to make good strategic decisions. Maintaining and enhancing the natural environment is critical to attracting tourists.
- David Bell – what will the funding model will be? The Authority will have a large area of land to maintain. Paul – the hope is that eventually the Authority will be self-funded, although that probably won't happen for the first 5 years. The entity is fully supported but asset maintenance and upgrade isn't – there's a \$20 million gap which has to be filled with other revenue eg fees & charges, seasonal passes.
- David Bell – from a local government viewpoint, assets like toilets are used by everyone other than ratepayers. Paul – we have to work through this with local government – what assets will the Authority take over and manage. There's a broad range of assets to review with local government eg bowls clubs, art facilities.
- Andrew Cherubin – you mentioned you were starting to look for board members. Paul – this should commence in the next few weeks. There will be a public expression of interest (EOI) process promoted through newspapers and social media. They will be trying to get word out as broadly as they can. Once the EOI is ready, Paul is keen to circulate it to the Bells Beach Committee for broader distribution.

- Kate confirmed with Paul that she can share his presentation by email with the committee.

Action – The Committee wanted to re-emphasise to Council the importance and value of having a community advisory committee for Bells.

Action – Kate to follow up with Paul Jane, thank him for his presentation and reiterate the Committee's feedback regarding the importance and value of retaining a community advisory committee for Bells.

3. Minutes of meeting of previous meeting

Minutes of the meeting of 16 March 2020 were approved. Kate noted that there was only one action arising from the minutes which was to invite DELWP to provide an update on GORCAPA, which had been completed with the presentation from Paul Jane.

4. Rip Curl Pro 2020 update

Adam Robertson noted that there was not much to update from Surfing Vic viewpoint. They are still monitoring COVID 19 & taking advice from VicSport and finalising their COVID safe plan. Surfing Victoria will not be running any surfing events until August. The 50 year storm event may fall before then, but the event date is still unknown.

5. Works Update

Winki pathway replacement

Kate provided the following works update on Leigh Irvine's behalf:

- Clint Walters will be commencing concreting of the upper landing on Monday 6th July. He will be on site for a week and there may be two of those days during the week that access from the top car park will be unavailable. We will look to try and exploit poor surf conditions for the closure. Surfers however will be able to still use both sets of stairs to get in and out of the water, but access to and from will need to be via Bells.
- Fencing will be complete by the end of the week and there hasn't been any disruption during fencing work so far and will not be any further disruption to access until completion. The bike racks have also been installed today.
- Following the completion of both the fencing and pathway, there will be further works to tidy up and plant around the base of the fence and edge of the path.

Weed management works

Kate had circulated a weed map of the reserve Committee members before the meeting. She provided the following weed management update on Gab O'Shea's behalf:

- A new weed contractor has been working at Bells over May and June. They have spent many days going back over the entire reserve checking for regrowth of weed infestations based on the original Integrated Vegetation Management Plan mapping completed by Luke Hynes.
- They have covered the entire reserve and are doing hand removal and spot spray of the usual environmental weeds.
- With African Weed-orchid, they are finding this in many scattered locations and have mapped its location to return and treat in July/August when more plants are likely to have emerged.
- They have also reported serrated tussock coming in from the adjoining paddocks such as Bob Johnson's farm. Have spot sprayed plants any plants within the reserve.

Graeme noted that Chilean Needle Grass is actually of bigger concern at the reserve than Serrated Tussock and wanted to ensure that the contractors were aware that it had previously been found at the reserve. David said that there is a native grass that is very similar and easy to confuse with

Chilean Needle Grass. He queried whether the contractor is correctly identifying both the native and the weed grasses. Graeme concurred, confirming that there is native spear grass at the reserve

Action – Gab O’Shea to follow up with the contractors to ensure they are aware of the existence of Chilean Needle Grass at the reserve and how to treat it and its similarity to the native spear grass.

Cultural heritage investigation – Bells midden

Kate provided an update on the cultural heritage investigation of the Bells midden:

- This work was suggested by the Wadawurrung and is included as an action in the Coastal and Marine Management Plan 2019-2025. The work is being funded by Council
- The Wadawurrung have subcontracted Unearthed Heritage to conduct the investigation.
- The contractors completed their field work in March and took a number of samples for carbon dating. The samples were sent to a laboratory in New Zealand for processing, but the lab was closed for several months with COVID-19. The lab has apparently reopened but there is a backlog of work. The final report should be completed sometime in the next few months.
- Corrina Eccles noted that the Wadawurrung had been discussing this project recently and look forward to receiving the carbon dating results and final report.

Status update – Coastal & Marine Management Plan

Jane Currie requested a status update on state government approval of the Coastal and Marine Management Plan 2019-2025 (CMMP).

Kate confirmed that the CMMP was submitted to DELWP in December 2019 but was still awaiting ministerial approval. The recently formed GORCAPA Standing Advisory Committee, which provides advice on the development and review of CMMPs, had requested some additional information, which had been provided. Kate noted that DELWP had been very complimentary about the CMMP, especially in relation to engagement and involvement with Traditional Owners.

Action – Kate to follow up with DELWP regarding status of ministerial approval of the CMMP.

Elevated walkway

Graeme asked what was happening with the elevated walkway. Rowan confirmed the temporary walkway was to be constructed as part of the Rip Curl Pro, so Council won’t move forward with the walkway until the next Pro. The intention is to build the temporary walkway for the Pro similar in height and scale to the walkway proposed in the CMMP and then consult with the community. Officers would then report back to Council on the consultation results and seek Council decision on whether a permanent elevated walkway should be built.

Graeme recommended investigating constructing a much lower elevated walkway which could be lifted up/elevated during the Pro. Rowan noted that officers have a Council resolution to implement regarding the elevated walkway and that it was unlikely Council would change its resolution unless construction of the walkway was otherwise funded. The temporary walkway during the Pro is funded as part of the event, not by Council.

6. Other business

a) Andy Meddick, speech to Parliament during debate on Great Ocean Road and Environs Bill

Link to video on GT Alliance Facebook page was shared with the Committee by email prior to the meeting

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community-Organization/GT-Alliance-229083881168576/>

Jane wanted to ensure Committee members were aware of Andy Meddick's speech, that it was acknowledged by the Committee and captured in the minutes.

As not all Committee members had seen the speech, Jane summarised it, noting Mr Meddick's support for Bells and advocacy for a community led group to help inform reserve management. His proposed amendment to the Great Ocean Road and Environs Bill wasn't passed. The final legislation does include a general requirement for GORCAPA to engage with local communities in the development of public land management plans and policies.

b) Use of Zoom meetings in future

Rowan noted that when the current pandemic is over the Committee may find online meetings useful, especially for meetings required on short notice. Committee members agreed. Andrew requested that regular meetings still be held face to face given the limitations with online meetings.

Action: once the pandemic has concluded, continue to offer online/zoom Committee meetings for meetings called on short notice

c) Advocacy to GORCAPA on retaining community advisory committee for Bells

The Committee discussed the importance of retaining a community advisory committee for the reserve. Andrew noted that community members had worked hard with Andy Meddick and Stuart Grimley on proposed amendments to the GORCAPA Bill and the final result was disappointing.

Committee members discussed Andrew's suggestion that the Committee write to GORCAPA requesting that a community advisory committee – either current one or similar – be maintained to advise on reserve management. Corrina noted that it would likely be two years or more before the new authority was ready to consider management of Bells and that in the meantime Committee members should continue to advocate for an advisory committee. It was certainly important that the Wadawurrung retained a 'strong voice' on reserve management.

Rowan noted that the Committee is an advisory committee to Council and that a letter to GORCAPA directly from the Committee is probably outside the Committee Terms of Reference. It was open to Committee members as individuals, or through groups they are involved with to write to GORCAPA. There are local government elections in October and it could be timely to remind Councillors, both current and incoming, of the importance of retaining an advisory committee for Bells.

Committee members noted the importance of retaining a community advisory committee for management of the reserve – either the current committee or similar advisory committee – and the need to communicate this to Council. Martin Duke and David Bell will talk with other councillors about scheduling a briefing before caretaker period commences on 22 September 2020.

d) Next meeting

No date has been set yet.

Rowan noted that once Council is in caretaker mode (22 September – 25 October 2020), the Committee would just be giving advice to Council officers.

Meeting close: 7 pm.