

14 May 2015

Mr Richard Wynne MP  
Minister for Planning  
Level 20, 1 Spring Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Minister

### **Reformed Rural Conservation Zone**

I am writing to you to articulate Surf Coast Shire Council's interest in expanding the range of uses that can be considered in the Rural Conservation Zone to help promote tourism development in municipalities like Surf Coast.

The former State Government undertook changes to the rural based zones via Amendment VC103. The changes to the Farming Zone as part of that amendment have enabled some tourist based developments to be considered in Surf Coast Shire and recent examples include a Chocolaterie proposal sited on the Great Ocean Road between Bellbrae and Anglesea.

Whilst this has been positive there are extensive areas along the Great Ocean Road and the rural hinterland areas zoned Rural Conservation Zone (see Attachment 1) and this zone remains limited in the uses that can occur. Whilst this is understood, given the environmental focus of the zone, it is considered that some environmentally based tourism activities could reasonably occur in such a zone that aligns with broader environmental goals and supports economic development.

Surf Coast Shire Council has been approached by at least two potential applicants wishing to undertake tourist developments incorporating tree top walks, rope courses and education elements similar to the Otway Fly at Beech Forest. Ropes courses and other similar outdoor facilities are defined as 'Leisure and Recreation' in the planning scheme and as such are prohibited on private land in areas zoned Rural Conservation. It is considered that a number of the forested natural environment areas in the Rural Conservation Zone provide a unique opportunity for interpretative walks or treetop adventure parks that are not considered incompatible with the conservation objectives of the zone.

Given that accommodation, retail and commercial uses are Section 2 uses in the Rural Conservation zone, it is considered appropriate that leisure and recreation uses similar to those described above should be given a similar status as a discretionary use so that applications can be considered and assessed on their merits. It is acknowledged that other options exist such as site specific amendments however given the interest in this matter it is considered a broader change to the zone would be of benefit.

It is understood that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning have undertaken some recent work on clarifying the definitions and potentially introducing a new definition for adventure based activities to be a discretionary use in the zone. It would be appreciated if a review of this work could be undertaken as soon as practicable as at least one land owner in Surf Coast is considering a site specific amendment to facilitate their activity.

If you have any enquiries concerning this matter please contact Kate Sullivan, General Manager Environment & Development, on 5261 0821.

Yours faithfully

**Cr Margot Smith**

Mayor

CC John Ginnivan, Executive Director Planning & Building Systems  
Rob Milner, 10 Consulting Group

**Attachment 1 – Map of Surf Coast Shire Rural Conservation Zone Areas.**

