



HHRRG Membership update

February 2020

Proposed walking track: Yallock Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park (formerly Bass Coast Marine and Coastal Park).

Some background.

Members will recall that at last year's AGM, we discussed the Victorian government proposal for a walking track which would run from San Remo to Inverloch, extending the existing George Bass Coastal Walk.

In a 2018 pre-election statement, the government had said it would create a new Coastal Park linking the Bunurong Marine Park and Bunurong Coastal Reserve, the Punchbowl Reserve and the Kilcunda-Harmers Haven Coastal Reserve.

The proposal included a budget of \$19.6 million to purchase land and create infrastructure associated with an extended walk within the new park.

The government introduced legislation to create the new Coastal Park (now to be known as the Yallock Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park) in November 2019 and in December released a call for tenders for design services for the proposed walking track and related facilities, including a camping ground.

The tender documents are attached to this report.

Our preliminary position.

At our meeting in April last year, the HHRR Association endorsed some high level principles that we considered should apply to the development of the proposed walk and guide our Association's response to any design proposals i.e.

- Minimal impact on remnant vegetation
- Minimal impact on amenity of HH residents (e.g. in terms of proximity of any proposed track to houses)

The Executive also undertook to report on activities associated with the planning and construction of the walk.

Subsequent activities: community groups partnership.

Prior to our last AGM, our Association had already participated in a number of walking track discussions convened by the Bass Coast Shire Council in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and attended by community groups from the Bass Coast shire.

In May 2019 these groups agreed to form a partnership to discuss and respond to the walking path proposal. The groups involved are:

San Remo Foreshore Committee
Kilcunda Community Association
Friends of Wonthaggi Heathland
Harmers Haven Residents and Ratepayers Association/Friends of Harmers Haven,
Cape Paterson Residents and Ratepayers Association
Peregrine Walkers Group
South Gippsland Society.

The groups endorsed general principles, in line with those adopted by our AGM, that they considered should govern the project.

They also offered comments on specific parts of the walk, including a suggestion that the Kilcunda-Wonthaggi section of the walk utilise the existing inland rail trail from Kilcunda to Wonthaggi and a new inland section be created for the Wonthaggi- Inverloch section using existing land reserves.

The full statement by the groups is attached.

Release of the design services tender.

The tender for design services associated with the inaugural plan for the Marine and Coastal Park was released in December together with a preliminary assessment of walking opportunities developed by Parks Victoria. The tender closes on 11 February.

Several features of the design tender and of the Parks Victoria document are of particular note:

- Although the creation of a continuous walking trail between San Remo and Inverloch is obviously a central aim of the whole project, the broader objective is to create an “enhanced visitor experience” of the Park as a whole, including better access to beaches and improved visitor facilities, including a new “camping offer”.

There is an obvious tension between this broader aim of maximising community access to and use of the whole Park, including the beaches and foreshore, by a number of means (“universal access”) and protecting current environmental values, already under pressure from several directions.

The tender document offers little guidance as to how these tensions might be negotiated and resolved.

For instance there is no requirement for a net native vegetation/habitat gain or for the project to prioritise use of existing infrastructure (tracks, camps sites) over the creation of new assets.

The document is similarly agnostic as to the extent that the proposed trail may be engineered for allow for greater vehicular access to the Park, particularly for cyclists, although improving both “cyclist and pedestrian circulation” is a stated objective (p.4).

- In contrast, the Parks Victoria preliminary assessment document, while obviously not binding, makes some implicit judgements in relation to the competing aims of the tender.
 - It favours use of existing access paths and infrastructure
 - It prioritises options which will allow access by users of all ability levels and allow use by both walkers and cyclists.
 - It discourages options (such as the creation of a new inland trail between Cape Paterson and Inverloch) which would involve significant vegetation removal (p.14).

Implicit in the Parks document then is a recognition that if “universal access” is to be maximised through facilitating both pedestrian and cyclist access - and if environmental damage is to be minimised - the trail cannot be expected to hug the coast at all points.

- In line with this thinking, the Parks “preliminary” trail map by-passes Harmers Haven altogether. Rather than follow the coastline and cut through the Harmers reserve, the Parks’ proposed trail would follow the coast along existing paths only as far as Baxter’s beach and then turn towards the Wonthaggi West Area Historic and Cultural Features Reserve (p.12).

The next section would then take the trail users into the Wonthaggi township via former State Coalmine skip haulage routes and the Bass Coast Rail Trail.

It is not clear how users would then reach Cape Paterson, but it is apparent that Parks does not favour an actual coastal walk (whether or not it involves walking on the beach) for the Cape Paterson to Inverloch section of the journey.

The view of Parks Victoria is of particular significance because of the central role it will play both in the community consultation process and in the finalisation of the Park Access and Infrastructure Plan.

Sections 10 and 11 of the Design Services Brief outline the management and governance structures of the project. While DEWLP has ultimate responsibility for governance and delivery of the project, the development of the Access and Infrastructure Plan is to be managed by the Park Policy and Management team of Parks Victoria. Parks also has responsibility for coordinating and servicing community engagement activities (p.13).

Lastly, it has final sign-off on the completed plan (p.12).

Liaising closely with Parks will be important in trying to get a satisfactory outcome from this project, both for HHRR Association members and for similar community groups along the coast.

Community Groups meetings– 24 January 2000/9 February 2000

The community groups who have been involved during 2019 in early discussions of the trail were taken by surprise by the release of the design services tender in December, not least because they had expected to be able to have some input into its terms.

Representatives of the groups who formed the initial partnership last April met on 24 January this year to consider how to respond to this situation. Amaryl Perlesz, Rosemary Paterson and Ros Eason attended on behalf of the HHRR Association

Those at the meeting considered that there was little likelihood of getting changes to the design tender documents now that they had been issued but the group agreed to explore the possibility of getting some input into the contract documents.

Of particular concern was the issue of the new camping site which the tender treats as a fait accompli. The community groups' position is that no new camping "opportunity" is needed along the relevant sections of the coast.

At the meeting, the groups agreed to make an initial written representation to DELWP, expressing concern about the lack of prior consultation as to the contents of the tender and, in particular, about the assumption that a new "camping opportunity" would be created. Group members also undertook to use any contacts they had in DELWP and Parks Victoria to make informal representations on these issues.

The groups met again on February 9. It was reported that Parks Victoria wished to have a preliminary meeting with the coalition groups but no date for that meeting has yet been set.

It was agreed that at that meeting the coalition would put forward the following positions:

- Coalition to have representation on the Project Working Group (PWG) and/or any similar consultation bodies. The PWG currently consists of representatives of Parks, DELWP, Bass Coast Shire Council and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC).
- Project outcomes to include net gain of native vegetation.
- Restriction of track to walking path (no horses, bikes) in sections which go through existing bushland.

It was also agreed at the meeting that the coalition may have more weight if it formalised itself – at least to the extent of giving itself a name. It will be known as the Yallock-Bulluk Coastal Alliance,

Future consultation process.

A broad timetable for the project, including community consultations, is contained in the Design Services Brief (p.9).

Phase 1 – research and investigation (March-May 2020). During this initial phase of the project it is intended there be "targeted partner/stakeholder engagement" as part of an initial community consultation process.

Phase 2 – Draft Access and Infrastructure Plan (June-August 2020). By the end of August the objective is to have a draft plan ready for approval by Parks Victoria and subsequent public exhibition. This would form the basis of a (potentially) wider community consultation.

Phase 3 – Final Draft Access and Infrastructure Plan (September- November 2020) -finalisation of the Plan, "following community and partner feedback" in preparation for sign-off by Parks Victoria.

Phase 4 – Technical documentation (December 2020 – February 2021).

The opportunities in this timetable for formal community input are limited to Phase 1 and 2 ie to the 6 months between March and August. It will be important for the HHRR Association to work closely with the other groups in the "partnership" during this time as we will obviously have more weight in the consultation process if we can put forward a common view.

HHRR representatives will be working on the basis of the broad principles adopted at the 2019 AGM and the May 2019 document produced by the partner community groups.