

SUBMISSION BY YALLOCK-BULLUK COASTAL ALLIANCE – July 2020

Background

After the Victorian election at which the promise to form a coastal park (including walk) from San Remo to Inverloch was made, community groups based in towns along the coast agreed to form an alliance to discuss the proposal and, where appropriate, present a shared response.

The alliance includes the following groups:

Kilcunda Community Association
Friends of Wonthaggi Heathland & Coastal Reserve
Harmers Haven Residents and Ratepayers Group/Friends of Harmers Haven
Cape Paterson Residents and Ratepayers Association
Peregrines Club Incorporated (Walking Group)
South Gippsland Conservation Society

Our groups have been involved in enhancing and protecting this coastal area for decades and are able to bring considerable on-ground experience and expertise to the table as well as representing the views of residents and ratepayers (approximately 1,000 between us). A number of the groups have commissioned or undertaken studies of the local areas and will make these available to the project group. A list of documents which we are able to provide is attached. Please contact us if you would like us to provide any of these documents.

We applaud the Victorian State Government for aiming to consolidate and expand the protected parts of this coastline at the same time as providing opportunities for the public to be enjoying our natural environment. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the project.

Some of the groups in this alliance will be submitting more detailed information related to that group's concerns and views.

General principles

That the community be engaged and consulted with as much as possible. This would mean that:

- The community, both through community groups and through general consultative processes, be invited to **participate** in the project from the initial planning stages through to final implementation;
- A community representative be included in the project team;
- That community groups consider how they can best contribute to the project outcomes (for example, offering to assist with vegetating / revegetating);
- Members of this alliance offer to accompany project team members during on-ground visits to share local expertise and information.

There should be minimal impact on the coastal environment. This would mean that:

- There would be a net gain in vegetation and habitat as a result of the creation of the Park;
- There would be an increase in the area included in protected public parkland much of which should be revegetated;
- Existing coastal wildlife corridors should be preserved and where possible, extended;
- The track should not cut through narrow bands of rare remnant coastal vegetation;

- Where the track does go through existing vegetation, the track should be narrow, ie a walking track, not established as a fire break or vehicular track;
- Cycling, motorcycling and horse riding should not be permitted on walking tracks that go through coastal vegetation;
- No fires be allowed in any part of the Park;
- No new camping grounds be established. There is already adequate camping accessible to walkers at San Remo, Kilcunda, Powlett River, Cape Paterson and Inverloch and a concern that creating new bush campgrounds will be a threat to the coast vegetation.

There should be due consideration given to the amenity, privacy and security of local residents and their homes. This would mean that:

- There should be a minimum distance between the track and houses;
- Consideration be given to where walkers might park if they intend to walk only a section of the walk;
- Consideration be given to the availability of toilets along the route to avoid walkers/visitors using the bush for a pit stop.

No new camping sites be established other than at the State Coal Mine in Wonthaggi.

- There is already adequate camping accessible to walkers at San Remo, Kilcunda, Powlett River, Cape Paterson and Inverloch and a concern that creating new bush campgrounds will be a threat to fragile coast vegetation.

Walking along the beaches between Kilcunda and Inverloch should not be encouraged or promoted as part of this walk.

- These beaches provide nesting sites for endangered birds and managing human (and their dogs) access to the beaches during nesting season is already proving a difficult task. Our groups appreciate that, no matter what, the establishment of this Park and walk will increase visitation to these beaches but argue that avoiding routing the track along the beach will reduce numbers on the beaches and lessen the impact on endangered shore nesting birds.

Comments on specific parts of the potential track

San Remo to Kilcunda

- The George Bass Coastal Walk is already established as a spectacular walk and extending it by connecting it to San Remo preferably along the coast (subject to land acquisition) will only add value.
- The terrain and geology of the existing path from Punchbowl Rd to Kilcunda does not lend itself to an all access pathway. It would be good to see increased vegetation on this track.
- The parking pressure on Punchbowl Rd is already severe and presenting increased risks. There are no public toilets which is leading people to use the bush. It may be possible to acquire land for parking and toilets in this area (though Punchbowl Rd itself is fairly 'basic' and may need to be upgraded to cope with additional traffic). Alternately, the Project team may need to consider directing walkers to the San Remo end of the walk and away from Punchbowl Rd (allow no parking on Punchbowl Rd?) and ensuring there is adequate parking and public toilet facilities at San Remo. A shuttle bus from San Remo to Punchbowl Rd could be a possibility in busy times.
- Parking pressure at the Shelley Beach carpark at Kilcunda is inadequate to meet the needs of current visitors and will also need to be expanded.

Avoid routing the track through Harmers Haven or Cape Paterson

In our view, it is inappropriate (and impractical) to route the main track through Harmers Haven and Cape Paterson to Inverloch for the following reasons:

- The Coastal Reserve from Kilcunda to Harmers Haven and then to Cape Paterson is vulnerable with fragile, complex dune systems, narrow remnant Coast Banksia Woodland (a threatened, listed EVC) and coastal indigenous vegetation. Clearing remnant vegetation and constructing a path through these two areas would seriously impact on the coastal foreshore, increasing fragmentation, loss of resilience and exposure to greater weed infestation.
- The indigenous bushland along the coast between Cape Paterson and Inverloch is very narrow in parts (less than 6 metres in places).
- The road and shoulder between Cape Paterson and Inverloch is also narrow and has become more dangerous over time with increased traffic including cyclists and walkers. The road is under serious threat from incursion by the sea as it arrives in Inverloch and it is hard to justify spending public funds constructing a pathway in such a fragile area of the coast.
- Planning the walking route along this coast increases the risk that people will attempt to walk along the beaches and inter-tidal rock shelf. This is a serious risk with the potential for fatal outcomes (a number of people have been swept from rocks along this coast or lost in dangerous surf). The risk level is increased for visitors unfamiliar with local conditions.
- Harmers Haven currently has no public toilets, no town water supply, has narrow unsealed roads and basic parking infrastructure. It would require considerable upgrade (and expense) to support increased walkers/visitors.
- A path cut between Harmers Haven and Inverloch along the coast would be unlikely to include coastal sea views due to the geography, existing vegetation and land availability.

Kilcunda to Wonthaggi (mud map attached)

We note that the Bass Coast Rail Trail from Kilcunda to Wonthaggi is already a popular established walk and cycle trail which, we assume, would be included in the options for a multi-use path as part of this project.

We propose a path which goes from Kilcunda along the Bass Coast Rail Trail to the Mouth of Powlett Road. An off road path along the Mouth of the Powlett Road would be required. The bridge over the Powlett River is narrow and dangerous for cars and walkers/bike riders to share – an additional bridge or extension would be necessary.

Formalising a shared pathway through the vegetation on the south side (seaward side) of the Powlett River Caravan Park is inappropriate. This area of remnant vegetation would be threatened by widening and increased foot/cycle traffic.

Therefore, from the bridge, the main path could then continue along the Mouth of the Powlett Road to the VDP Ecological Reserve (Desalination Reserve) using the existing shared pathway within the Ecological Reserve through to Williamsons Beach car park within the Kilcunda-Harmers Haven Coastal Reserve. From there the path could follow the existing slashed track, along the northern boundary of the Kilcunda-Harmers Haven Reserve, below the wind turbines to the Baxter's Beach track junction at the end of Campbell Street.

From there we have mapped two possibilities:

- Across the Baxter's Wetland Reserve and over West Area Rd to join the Rail Trail in South Dudley as it comes into Wonthaggi, through the town to join the proposed 'overland route' to Inverloch beginning at the southern end of Carney's Rd.

- Along Campbell St to Rifle Range Rd, Reed Crescent and across to the State Coal Mine to join the beginning of the 'overland route' at the southern end of Carney's Rd. This would require additional track creation and would provide access to side 'loops' through the Wonthaggi Heathland.

There would need to be improving carparking facilities to the east of the Powlett River campground as it should be expected that this would be a starting point for some walkers.

Wonthaggi to Inverloch (map attached)

We support using the route based on that outlined in the Bass Coast Shire Aspirational Network Pathways plan 2016. Since the creation of that plan, the bush block at the northern end of Carney's Rd has been licensed by the South Gippsland Conservation Society. The Society has received funding to create a wetland, boardwalk and additional tracks which would link Carneys Rd to the existing rail trail through bushland.

The track could then go either along Carney's Rd (which would require track work) to join the overland path or could continue along the rail trail toward the Wonthaggi-Cape Paterson Road but cut across the block adjacent to the road for which the Bass Coast Shire has recently applied to become the Committee of Management. It would be unpleasant and dangerous to walk along the roadside of the Wonthaggi-Cape Paterson Rd.

At the Inverloch end of the proposed pathway, we recommend a deviation from the Council document to avoid taking the path into Inverloch at the western end of the town and along the coastal strip into the township. This area has recently suffered serious erosion and solutions to ensure the sea does not encroach on the narrow strip of vegetation (and indeed, onto the residences) are still being considered and tested. We recommend taking the path through Inverloch from the Toorak Rd end of Drowleys Rd through to the existing shared path where Surf Pde meets Veronica Street.

Our groups are experienced at revegetation projects and would be happy to assist in the task of revegetating the area around the overland track.

Consideration would need to be given to parking for visitors wanting to begin the 'overland route' at either Inverloch or Wonthaggi.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS:

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1. Map Kilcunda to Wonthaggi
 2. Map Wonthaggi to Inverloch
 3. List of documents