

This is a private submission informed by widespread involvement with environmental and heritage groups in the northwest of Melbourne and long involvements on the Otway coast with emphasis on skindiving and bushwalking. It is also informed by a working career built on systems analysis and a deep appreciation of complexity and emergence which can lead to impatience with those who demand oversimplification. I have previously provided responses to your survey and had always intended to write something more general, but need to keep this relatively short save for reproducing a very relevant epilogue from 2016.

While I welcome the idea of rationalising statutory responsibility on a regional basis, with too familiar disclaimers about boundaries, especially seeing including Warrnambool and increasingly Torquay under "Great Ocean Road" as a potentially unbalancing problematic, I want to underline the importance of not letting the extraordinary diversity of detail, a major driver of return visits, fall through the cracks. It is falling in love with those many special places that attracts seasonal visitors who use public and private spaces to get back together in temporary communities with rich histories and which over the years expose countless others through occasional visits, further spreading awareness. I only rarely meet Victorians who don't have some personal awareness of even Cumberland River if it comes up in conversation, unlike it seems some government officials.

The Great Ocean Road Coast Committee set a new standard for community involvement while producing their benchmark Coastal Management Plan, doing and keeping the work in house rather than outsourcing to the usual suspects. For me that has only been matched by the Catchment Collaborations which have been at the core of Melbourne Water's Healthy Waterways Strategy renewal process now reaching delivery point. Keeping submissions for digestion by specialists is never going to deliver the quality you can get by facilitating constructive interplay between interested public and recognised stakeholders.

Widespread public and official use of internet forums can be used to solve the granularity problem and ensure that every place, no matter how big or small its community of interest, can have its issues raised and addressed. It just needs recognition that one size fits all does not work. Need to do better than PTV after its 2015 Torquay workshop asked for V/Line GOR services to run Waurin Ponds to Bellbrae interchange with Torquay-Geelong routes.

Given the younger years I spent exploring coastal reefs, primarily between Lorne and Cape Otway, it is particularly disappointing that there is still only one business between Torquay and Warrnambool that can fill a SCUBA tank and zero mention in your issues paper of the potential of diving on these rich ecosystems to become a significant attraction for both an international audience and a clientele less locked into seasonal holiday timetables.

The further point of this submission is to include below an epilogue to my submission to Biodiversity 2036 which used the example provided by Cumberland River in the light of the Wye River fire to expose issues of detail that need to work better. The points therein, including preliminary mentions of View Point and Carisbrook Creek still stand as there have been no significant changes save that the floods later in 2016 again illustrated the failure of state emergency services to address the existence of Cumberland River; I did meet with one of the lessees of the Holiday Park a year ago for an amicable chat; and I have in the interim made day visits to Aire River and Blanket Bay, the camping grounds at

which might be relevant models for Carisbrook. I am still accumulating pictures of the vegetation succession at View Point which should turn into a paper/presentation in due course. Epilogue is not updated nor otherwise edited.

### **Epilogue: Cumberland River, East Otway Coast Case Study**

Before going into some detail about the situation at Cumberland River in light of the Wye River fire, I want to make a point about a couple of other locations a bit further down the road that were familiar territory in my diving days but which have had their public utility destroyed for imagined minor ecological gains that have not materialised. Carisbrook Creek once featured a grassed camping area with amenities that was reminiscent of but smaller than Cumberland River. (below left) It seems to have been imagined that by excluding humans the natural world would reassert itself in useful ways, at the same time ParksVic was increasing support for tiny basic bush camps on 4WD tracks that are vulnerable to fire. (e.g. Jamieson River bush camp, centre, with now ironic “No Fires” sign, evacuated December 19 after lightning strike and still closed) View Point is an actual place name 1Km past Wye River's Point Sturt. It too is of geomorphological and cultural history significance, then long served as an informal parking place for coast visitors. After being cut off by a roadside crash barrier, coastal scrub regenerated until it was badly burnt Christmas Day, with no sign of regeneration by Easter, unlike even the other side of the road. (right, 24 January, showing fishing track)



A camp site was established at Cumberland River during construction of the Great Ocean Road. (pic overleaf, left) It was then opened for public camping by the Roads Board with management later moved to Lorne Foreshore Committee which managed other camping grounds in Lorne. Some families have four generations of history at Cumberland, underpinning a base ethic of looking out for each other which survives a more than sufficient turnover across many sites. The Foreshore Committee was absorbed into the Great Ocean Road Coast Committee coincident with Lorne's move, along with the rest of the Shire of Winchlesea, into Surf Coast Shire. Resident managers have been in place for over 50 years under various arrangements, most recently on rotating contract with a master lessee. GORCC remains the committee of management for the crown land reserve. The PPRZ buffer that surrounds the leased reserve has recently been incorporated into Great Otway National Park, leaving GORCC no unleased territory on which to spend the fraction of its earnings that are devoted to the coastal environment elsewhere. (right) Today's Cumberland River Holiday Park has 100 camp sites and 14 self-contained cabins. It is of order a million dollar per annum business or \$10,000 per night peak season.



Castle Rock (below top left and middle, sign near lookout re old track, top right) dominates the Cumberland River skyline with Langdale Pike (bottom left) similarly conspicuous at the top of the valley. Both were once reached by well worn tracks from the camp. The start of the very popular Castle Rock track was compromised by a gravel pit excavated and never reinstated by VicRoads when they widened the road back to Lorne in the 1970s. It is still used but less and less with no maintenance and ParksVic only supporting inland access via Sheoak car park 2km towards Lorne, Sheoak Picnic Ground inland from Lorne or a connecting track from 2km up Cumberland River to the Sheoak tracks. (pics overleaf) The always more challenging Langdale Pike direct track has been lost and even the old forestry road still shown on maps as reaching it from the MVO Cumberland Track has disappeared. (c.1970 view down, bottom centre) Cumberland Track to Mt Defiance summit and inland was a major access for the Wye River fire, (viewed from Cumberland, Christmas day, just after breaking containment line, bottom right below) it and the 4WD network it connects to remaining closed to the public. Cumbo was evacuated on Christmas day and remained closed for ten nights.





I spent 20 years of summer holidays and more at Cumberland River until our camp and a dozen caravans were lost in a flood six weeks after the Ash Wednesday fire of 1983, the fire having not got closer than the other side of Lorne. During those years my focus was increasingly on diving, mostly off the rocks between Lorne and Cape Otway, increasingly with SCUBA and underwater photography. After 20 years with extensive business travel, in 2002 I returned to having summer holidays at Cumbo, since retirement from regular paid work getting a caravan and extending booking to six weeks plus nine night stays across Easter and in Spring. Increasingly focused on bush walking when Great Cormorants nesting on a ledge in the cliff above my camp site encouraged me to upgrade photographic equipment, leading to making movies of birds, other natural attractions and annual camp concerts. Increasingly involved with suburban councils et al re environment, heritage and transport planning in particular, I also wanted to try to do some good for the Cumbo community and became a member of a couple of GORCC community reference groups.

Having been close enough to the cutting edge of information technology from 18 to 64, including work on client communications, I was well aware the Holiday Park systems were falling badly behind, but avoided making an issue of it until their mishandling of the Wye fire response and recovery made it inescapable. This is not in any way a reflection on the performance of the contracted camp management, nor of the broader fire response effort, all of whom did all that could be asked within their operational parameters. However there was no system for routinely communicating with the body of booked in clients. So while comparable camping grounds at Wye and Kennett Rivers that were more directly disrupted have had nothing but praise for their handling of the situation, Cumberland has had public criticism which reached as far as ABC Melbourne radio 774 and still simmers online. When originally selected, the Colac-based lessees were building a stable of three similar businesses which they cross promoted, but this had diminished to just Cumberland River long before that lease was renewed, with the lessees actively seeking to restrict all communications to their hired management, the best of whom were very good but still only lasted four years in the job.

It is now my strong opinion that a business of this size cannot afford to have that one extra layer in the ownership structure treating it as their personal superannuation scheme without adding value through proactive involvement. This is raised and emphasised here to suggest a need for DELWP to become more nuanced with respect to the management of significant sites on public land than the current regime of committees of management with provision for leasing to private operators allows. GORCC cites Cumberland River as being at the far end of its range of responsibility for coastal areas from Point Impossible and its Torquay head office. Cumberland is also literally metres on the Surf Coast side of its

boundary with Colac-Otway Shire, but without permanent residents it has no local votes anyway. Stripping the PPRZ buffer and the beach away to ParksVic control also means GORCC has nowhere relevant to spend its lease income on coastal improvements. Certainly the proximity to Lorne is some value to Cumberland holiday makers, but so is the separation. There are no shortage of opportunities for improvement, be they reinstating old TransOtway bus stops that were lost in the V/Line takeover or a pedestrian underpass, both requiring VicRoads support, or restoration and maintenance of tracks on ParksVic land to redress the absurdity of the major walks requiring driving when there is a substantial seasonally resident population based right there to make use of them.

I have no idea how things might be significantly improved under current arrangements. While GORCC management try to be communicative, there is no evidence of any of the committee taking a particular interest in Cumberland River. There would also appear nothing to gain by transferring the committee of management role to resource-constrained ParksVic which already has its own cultural commitment to other access points to Great Otway National Park. Another downside is the impracticality of trying to establish an active Friends of Cumberland River group in the absence of permanent residents to form a core and with visitors not wanting such distractions on their annual holidays. In an ideal world, environmental volunteers might be provided with out of season accommodation, but that kind of thing isn't easy anywhere in this era of fine-grained financial accountability. There may also never be a better time than following the Wye fire to start planning some of the more challenging sections of a potential track network to link the Surf Coast and Great Ocean Walks, but we would need strong advocates to even get that idea on the table.