



26 April 2018

The Hon Richard Wynne MP
Minister for Planning
Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Minister

RE: Corangamite Shire Submission to the Governance of the Great Ocean Road Issues paper.

Corangamite Shire Council considered the 'Governance of the Great Ocean Road Issues Paper' at its meeting on 24 April 2018, and resolved to make this submission. Council is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the issues paper and welcomes the work of the Great Ocean Road Taskforce in considering the effectiveness of current governance arrangements for the Great Ocean Road and proposed reform.

Council's response to the matters raised in the issues paper is attached. Whilst Council supports in principle the proposition of a single management authority for the Great Ocean Road, Council is concerned to ensure there is further consultation on the preferred governance arrangements which are finally recommended by the Taskforce before the recommendations are adopted by Government. In forming this view, Council is concerned that the Issues Paper contains insufficient detail relating to preferred future governance and funding arrangements. Specifically, Council is seeking that any future Board include representation of elected representatives from local government to ensure a strong connection to local communities is maintained. It is Council's view this will be critical to the success of any governance reforms.

The Great Ocean Road is a key visitor destination. There is a need to ensure that the visitor experience is improved and that continued investment in infrastructure occurs, particularly at sites with high levels of visitation such as the 12 Apostles. Council has strongly advocated for the implementation of the Shipwreck Coast Master Plan, and seeks a continued commitment by Government in this regard. Council has also sought to facilitate private sector investment in increasing tourism product and accommodation, to lengthen duration of stay and increase economic benefit to the Great South Coast region.

Corangamite Shire congratulates the State Government for establishing the "Great Ocean Road Taskforce" and welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Issues Paper released for comment.

Yours faithfully

[Redacted signature block]

Director Sustainable Development

Management Arrangements

There are currently approximately 17 agencies involved in the management of the GOR (refer page 37 of the Issues Paper) including State Government agencies, local governments and coastal committees.

Current management arrangements are complex and sometimes involve duplicated effort by different agencies (for example in relation to management of private and public land, or in relation to infrastructure planning). This is not efficient and the management fragmentation inhibits the achievement of policy objectives. Trying to align organisational processes, policies, priorities and budgets often results in inefficient use of limited resources.

There is scope to rationalise management arrangements, and to avoid duplicated processes. The fragmented nature of the management of the GOR is a major hindrance to the realisation of its economic potential both to the region and Victoria. Improved environmental management is also critical to long term economic return.

Council supports the management of the GOR as a wholly integrated system and one entity.

Governance by a Single Authority

The Taskforce has given some consideration to future governance arrangements. Council officers support in principle the recommendation outlined in the issues paper; that a lead agency should be identified to manage the GOR as an entire ecosystem.

Whilst establishment of a single management entity is supported by Council, it is important that this does not simply add a further layer of complexity, and that there is a rationalisation process to simplify existing management arrangements, transferring responsibility to the new agency and dismantling existing entities. It will be necessary that existing agencies give up some level of control to ensure that appropriate powers are vested in a single authority. This will achieve benefits from a single entity authority managing the whole of the GOR. The authority must be responsive to the changing environment and be underpinned by strong research/data foundations.

Establishing an authority will require an appropriate and enduring governance structure. For example, a Board which includes both skill based members and elected representatives from councils along the GOR. Council is seeking that further consultation occur concerning the recommended structure of a single authority and the composition of its Board.

A Strategic Framework Plan for the GOR

The authority should have the powers to develop an overarching Strategic Framework Plan for the GOR. The authority would be responsible for:

- Setting an overall vision and strategy for the GOR.
- Planning for the entire visitor journey.
- Planning for asset management including the road and visitor facilities.
- Management of Crown land reserves that are currently managed by Committees of Management.
- Management of key visitor sites such as the 12 Apostles, Loch Ard, Point Grey, and Lorne and Apollo Bay foreshores. This would include collection of income from a number of possible sources.

The Great Ocean Road Strategic Framework Plan should build on existing local government planning and include:

- Definition of the GOR region.
- Overarching vision for the GOR region.
- Identification of and protection plan for the region's natural assets.
- Identification/confirmation of coastal township boundaries.
- Traffic management plans for the GOR and hinterland roads.
- Emergency management plan for the region.
- Management of the increasing visitor experience including identification of necessary public and private sector infrastructure.
- Organisational chart of responsible agencies for service delivery.
- An implementation plan for the Framework identifying responsible agencies.

The process undertaken by the authority to develop the Great Ocean Road Strategic Framework Plan must be inclusive of all relevant communities including the traditional owners.

It is essential that once the Strategic Framework Plan is completed, the authority has the power to:

- Coordinate responsible agencies for service delivery.
- Advocate for public and private sector investment including the need for a dedicated and recurrent funding source.
- Develop budget bids.
- Engage with local communities including the traditional owners.
- Advise on the potential to streamline existing management agencies.
- Advise on streamlining planning processes to facilitate private sector investment.
- Advise on potential for revenue raising opportunities to increase visitor yield.

This authority should be required to develop and report on the implementation of the Strategic Framework Plan. It is essential that regular and independent auditing of the implementation of the Strategic Framework Plan be held and the outcomes be made publicly available.

Strong partnerships with, for example, traditional owners, the private sector, other government agencies and local communities will be essential. New funding models are also required to leverage the capacity of these key stakeholders.

Funding of an Authority

The Taskforce recognises that given the current importance and future potential of the GOR to the State economy, a dedicated and ongoing secure funding source is required, that is not dependent on the annual budget cycle and allocation (refer page 45 of the Taskforce report).

Council strongly supports this proposition. Income generated from the GOR should be returned to the GOR. The authority needs to have an income source independent of Council or the State Government (e.g. parking fees, entry fees, management of key tourism sites and income from caravan parks). The income would need to support the operations of the authority, but the authority could still seek capital funding from the State Government as does Phillip Island Nature Park or Sovereign Hill.

In addition, there must be a sufficient allocation of funds to the authority to:

- achieve the outcomes required by the long term strategic plan and ensure its continued implementation over time
- enable transformation of the visitor experience and achieve change in the way the visitor consumes the GOR
- manage key visitor sites.

Income generated by the authority would be spent along the GOR. It is expected that the income would cover all operating costs of the authority and maintenance/renewal at key visitor sites.

Funding from the State Government would still be available for major capital upgrades, as occurs at Sovereign Hill and Phillip Island Nature Park. This should include funding to support infrastructure provision and the delivery of key projects (for example the Glenample Visitor Experience Centre), even where there is a strong reliance on the private sector to deliver key infrastructure.

Parks Victoria would remain responsible for natural resource management outside the high use visitor sites managed by the authority.

Protecting the key landscape and environmental features

The GOR has a national heritage listing, and is located within some of Victoria's most spectacular coastal landscape. It is also abuts marine parks and the Southern Ocean. The attributes of the natural and marine environments underpin the experience of the GOR.

Appropriate environmental management, including planning for and responding to climate change impacts, will be critical to the long term economic success of the GOR. The environment underpins the visitor economy. Ongoing environmental sustainability requires economic solutions.

An authority should have a strong role in ensuring the conservation and protection of significant environmental and landscape features, and in ensuring sites of cultural significance are protected for the long term. This could be achieved through appropriate research and overarching policy as well as further improvements to governance arrangements in relation to crown land. A further challenge is the need for increased provision and upgrading of infrastructure on public land.

There is scope to rationalise crown land management arrangements and to reduce the number of bodies responsible for crown land management. Parks Victoria should retain a role in the management of crown land, other than for sites of high visitation.

Management of key visitation sites and delivery of the Shipwreck Coast Master Plan

The authority should have a strong role in the management of key visitation sites and in the delivery of the Shipwreck Coast Master Plan, including the delivery and management of the Glenample Visitor Experience Centre proposed in the Shipwreck Coast Master Plan.

The Shipwreck Coast Master Plan (SCMP) was released in December 2015. It is a significant piece of planning work for the 28 km section of the coast between Princetown and Peterborough. Importantly it seeks to better manage visitation to the GOR in the vicinity of iconic sites such as the 12 Apostles and Loch Ard Gorge. The SCMP aims to change the way the precinct is consumed, improve the quality of the visitor experience at the 12 Apostles, and leverage private sector investment in quality tourism accommodation and product.

The authority has a key role to play in transforming the management of sites with high levels of visitation. For example, the 12 Apostles, Gibson's Steps and Loch Ard Gorge. This will require a strong focus on both long term planning and the delivery of improved visitor infrastructure.

Priority must be given to further detailed planning work for the Glenample Precinct, and to other initiatives within the SCMP which seek to transform the way the precinct is consumed, provide an improved visitor experience, and to ensure that the precinct is well placed to manage the substantial projected increase in future visitation.

There is a need to ensure ongoing and adequate government funding to implement the SCMP to achieve transformation and a step change in the way visitors experience the Shipwreck Coast. Ongoing and substantial government investment in public infrastructure is critical to the achievement of the plan and to support investment by the private sector.

As the SCMP is now three years old, it is critical that the Taskforce provide advice to Government on the need for continued support for the achievement of the SCMP. Implementation of the SCMP must be accelerated to address the growing challenges of congestion, visitor safety and projected increases in visitor demand.

Corangamite Shire strongly supports the SCMP and will continue to advocate for appropriate levels of Federal and State Government funding to implement the Master Plan; to provide much needed upgrading of public infrastructure and to and support ongoing private sector investment

Council seeks that the Taskforce recommend accelerated implementation of the SCMP to address the growing challenges of congestion, visitor safety and projected increases in visitor demand.

The 12 Apostles Trail

Currently it is not possible to safely walk or cycle from the 12 Apostles Visitor Centre to Loch Ard Gorge – a distance of 3.7 km. Every visitor must make a motorised transfer.

The 12 Apostles Trail is embedded into the SCMP. It is a key project to change visitor behaviour on the Shipwreck Coast and allow for non-car based movement between key coastal destinations and into the hinterland. In the context of increased visitor projections, it is important to advance the construction of the trail, so as to achieve some increased dispersion of visitation into the hinterland and away from congested coastal sites.

Shifting visitation from being a point to point passive experience at one or two locations, to being an integrated experience of moving between multiple sites and key commercial hubs and the hinterland, will be an important outcome of further investment in this initiative.

The Visitor Experience and Visitor Economy

Critical to the long term sustainability of the GOR and the visitor economy is changing consumer behaviour. With international day trip visitation to the GOR expected to increase from 785,000 in 2017 to 1.7 million in 2026, infrastructure, products and services commensurate with this level of visitation are critical.

The current visitor experience is underwhelming. The landscape is spectacular, but support infrastructure, product and experience is almost non-existent. There is little or no interpretation of the landscape, the history or the wildlife. There is limited orientation of the breadth of lookouts, sites and experiences. Visitors experience little weather protection and

encounter limited seating, limited food and beverage offering, inadequate retail offering, and limited integration or connection with other visitor experiences or commercial hubs.

Holistic planning of the visitor experience from end to end of the GOR is required; the interconnectedness and quality of the experience needs to be consistent and present from start to finish. The linear nature of the GOR also means that changes anywhere within the line have implications on other sections of the road. The capacity of the GOR to accommodate increasing numbers increases the importance of creating multiple touring options that meet visitor expectations.

There is need to ensure that the visitor experience is significantly enhanced, and that a greater diversity of tourism product is developed, including for all seasons. Unless there is substantial future investment in product development, there is a reputational risk.

The visitor economy is particularly important to regional and rural Victoria, with 56 per cent of Victoria's total tourism employment located in the regions. It is also important as a primary driver of employment on the coast, and in the diversification of the local economy in a region where the economic base is heavily reliant on agriculture.

The authority will have a key role in:

- Driving the visitor economy of the GOR region.
- Increasing regional economic yield and lengthening duration of stay.
- Achieving increased investment in accommodation and product along the whole of the GOR.
- Ensuring strong linkages between the GOR and the hinterland/wider region.

GORRT would remain responsible for marketing and visitor servicing.

Statutory Planning Arrangements

A new management authority for the GOR should have a key role in relation to statutory land use planning and ensure that future planning outcomes are consistent with, and support the delivery of the overarching Strategic Framework Plan.

Corangamite Shire considers that local government should continue to have a key role in relation to statutory planning, and be able to maintain genuine input in relation to statutory land use planning. Council strongly supports the retention of its responsible authority status to decide all planning permit applications.

There is a need to develop a more pro-active approach to:

- The identification of suitable private sector opportunities (as per Amendment C30 and the business case process undertaken previously by Corangamite Shire).
- The development of streamlined approval processes for key projects.

Such actions are consistent with the *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy* (July 2016) which identifies the need to:

- Assign clear responsibility and leadership within government for progressing new investment projects of state and regional significance.
- Fast track approvals for visitor economy projects of state significance through the use of the *Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994* where appropriate.

These arrangements would appropriately recognise the heavy reliance on ongoing private sector investment to deliver both accommodation and tourism product. Both are essential to transforming the visitor experience, and achieving important economic benefits for the region and the state.

It is imperative to increase accommodation in the GOR region and to provide and connect a breadth of tourism offers, beyond the 12 Apostles, that visitors can access. This is currently inhibited by a complex regulatory regime including local applications of diverse land use zonings and overlays. An authority could take a lead role in streamlining current regulation, and in achieving greater consistency in planning control mechanisms for the duration of the GOR.

Infrastructure planning and provision

Infrastructure planning is often prioritised by agency priorities and budgets and often not addressed until the infrastructure is failing. It is critical that a new authority build a long term infrastructure plan to ensure timely renewal of infrastructure and maintenance. The authority should have the task of developing a transparent plan for future investment and renewal in the road network.

Given the GOR's iconic status and economic importance, it is essential that it is appropriately maintained and developed to meet current and forecast usage. The State and Federal Governments have allocated \$50m each towards the maintenance of the GOR in recent years. A further \$53m has also been allocated by the State for infrastructure along the GOR including a barrier to prevent landslips from affecting the road at Wye River.

Council strongly supports the ongoing provision of both State and Federal recurrent funding to maintain and upgrade the GOR.

The majority of visitors to the GOR utilise hinterland routes such as the Port Campbell-Cobden Road to connect to the Princes Highway and return to Geelong. There has been a lack of recognition of the hinterland routes as part of the visitor journey, and insufficient investment by VicRoads in upgrading and maintaining these roads to a suitable standard.

Council strongly supports the ongoing provision of State recurrent funding to maintain and upgrade key hinterland routes connecting the GOR to the Princes Highway.

VicRoads should remain responsible for undertaking works on the GOR and key hinterland routes, but should have dedicated funding, as occurs with the Westgate Bridge. The authority would provide guidance and input through its infrastructure planning function.