



AIREYS INLET AND DISTRICT ASSOCIATION INC

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This submission to the Great Ocean Taskforce on the future management of the entire road is made on behalf of The Aireys Inlet and District Association (AIDA).

AIDA welcomes the establishment of this Taskforce.

We note that its objectives are to:

- "1. Review the effectiveness of current Great Ocean Road governance arrangements.
2. Undertake extensive consultation with the Traditional Owners of Country, responsible public entities, key stakeholders and the community.
3. Report to the Victorian Government within twelve months with recommended reforms to governance arrangements for the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes.
4. Make recommendations on governance reforms to:
 - a. boost tourism expenditure and investment along the Great Ocean Road
 - b. better support local communities to benefit from the visitation economy
 - c. maintain appropriate environmental and landscape protections."

An Introduction to AIDA

AIDA's chief area of interest is the preservation and improvement of the coastal environment, its hinterland, foreshore and coastal communities from Urquhart Bluff to Eastern View. AIDA was established more than 50 years ago and has about 450 members from the area. Our members are a mix of permanent residents and those with holiday homes. AIDA works closely with the Surf Coast Shire on all planning matters, including the development of policies such as the area's structure plan and neighbourhood character guidelines.

AIDA seeks the maintenance of the low-key, non-suburban characteristics of our area, protection of the night sky and the natural environment and its flora and fauna. The landscapes and largely unspoiled views of our area must be fully protected from unsympathetic developments, a recent example of which is the Fairhaven Underpass. This, and works such as the enlarged roundabout with lights in Anglesea, introduce unfortunate suburban elements into the environment.

AIDA does not see the need for any major infrastructure changes in our area except building additional public toilets near the community hall in Aireys Inlet. We would not support any project to widen the Great Ocean Road.

AIDA has a significant interest in this taskforce's objectives and trust that our submission will be considered carefully during the taskforce's deliberations.

AIDA's comments and recommendations

Our first recommendation is that the focus of the taskforce should be broadened to include the many benefits of promoting the use of the inland routes to access the various attractions of the Great Ocean Road. This 'regional' approach would have the benefits of:

1. Reducing the traffic demand along the Great Ocean Road itself, allowing it to retain its classic two-lane scenic qualities,
2. Creating completely new, alternative tourism-related developments and economic growth across the whole Princess Highway to Great Ocean Road region,
3. Removing many of the buses and large vehicles from directly using the Great Ocean Road,
4. Greatly increasing bush fire safety and providing alternative escape options, and
5. Reducing road accident related blockages of the Great Ocean Road in the peak season.

In your survey, you asked the following question: "Do you work for, own or operate a business, or are you a member of a community organisation that benefits from visitors to the Great Ocean Road Region? Please describe the key issues."

AIDA is a significant and important local community organisation but we do not benefit from the tourists who visit our area. It is unfortunate that community organisations, or members of the public, have not specifically been asked to comment on this question as we also have issues with tourists in the area. We recognise the economic importance of the tourist dollar but there is also a desperate need to recognise the negative impacts of mass tourism on the local community. These include road, and parking congestion and overcrowding of public spaces, poor driving practises, and unauthorised toilet stops. There is a need to recognise these negative impacts and any planning for the Great Ocean Road needs to include strategies to reduce these.

We believe there is a need to find a mechanism to control the increasing number of tourists travelling the Great Ocean Road, particularly those who make it a day trip from Melbourne. We would welcome a discussion about finding ways to limit the numbers of tourists accessing the road whether by car, minibus or large bus.

It is unrealistic to imagine that the road, the environment and our communities can continue to accommodate increasing numbers of tourists without diminishing the experience for all.

The Taskforce must ensure that it investigates plentiful examples from overseas where visitor numbers are controlled, rather than assuming – as stated in the Taskforce terms of reference - that the final objective is to increase tourism expenditure and investment and the take of the tourist dollar. There are many popular tourist destinations where numbers are limited either through tolls (Torndirrup National Park near Albany WA or Yosemite National Park in the US) or the need to book (Alhambra, Granada, Spain).

The environmental impacts of mass tourism has been shown in many places around the world to be not economically or socially sustainable. Increasing numbers of tourists does not build a sustainable tourism industry. The UN's 'Sustainable Tourism Strategy' is very clear about this. There is a desperate need for the taskforce to investigate overseas experiences of mass tourism and what is being done to make tourism sustainable in other places, especially environmentally sensitive landscapes.

The Great Ocean Road is certainly a fragile landscape not capable of sustaining mass tourism while maintaining its environmental and social sustainability.

Attracting tourists travelling by car (or public transport) to stay longer on the Great Ocean Road would provide much greater benefit to the local economy than encouraging greater numbers (and bus loads) of day visitors. Call it “nature-based tourism”, “ecotourism” or “slow tourism”, many townships on the Coast have all the attributes required to attract visitors for a multi day holiday - not in the summer season when the area is already crowded and accommodation fully booked, but throughout the rest of the year when the area remains exquisitely beautiful but accommodation is plentiful and facilities are underused.

One of AIDA’s major aims has long been “to promote Aireys Inlet as a destination for nature-based tourism that offers a variety of walking experiences including our beaches, cliff platforms, wetlands, estuary and river, and bush trails in the National and Forest Parks of the hinterland”. To this end, AIDA has been very active in promoting the development and maintenance of a network of walking paths and unsealed shared roadways that link all parts of the township to the coastal and hinterland walking trails.

However, it is obvious that large numbers of people will destroy the landscape (flora and fauna) they have come to see and it is important that the taskforce focus on slow tourism and not mass tourism.

Fire Safety

AIDA asks that the Taskforce make recommendations about not travelling along the Great Ocean Road during days of Extreme Fire Danger and Code Red. Most of those who live on the coast, or have holiday homes there, have a fire plan for these days and for many it is to leave, and leave early, as recommended by the CFA. It is crazy, and frightening, to see cars, buses and minivans full of tourists travelling down the Great Ocean Road heading to the Twelve Apostles on these days while the locals, following their fire plan and advice of the CFA, are leaving the area and heading towards Geelong.

These tourists would have no idea what to do in the event of a fire and a mechanism needs to be found to prevent their access to the coast on days of Extreme Fire Danger or Code Red.

Chapter Three- The Case for Change

This chapter recognises the importance of local communities but is largely about accommodating greater numbers of tourists. The Taskforce terms of reference are inherently contradictory, seeking to both " boost tourism expenditure and investment along the Great Ocean Road [and] better support local communities to benefit from the visitation economy" and to "maintain appropriate environmental and landscape protections". How will these conflicting aims be reconciled? (We note in passing that 'tourism' is not 'visitation': the latter means the appearance of a supernatural being or the visit of a bishop to his/her diocese.)

We believe more emphasis should be placed on the well-being of local communities. While we recognise the need for an integrated decision-making framework or body for the whole of the Great Ocean Road, we are concerned that this could reduce AIDA’s ability to be involved in the decision-making about development or change in our area. At the moment we have a significant input into decisions that affect our area and, through this, AIDA has been able to protect and maintain the low-key, non-urbanised nature of our coastal communities, which is so highly valued by residents and visitors alike.

AIDA requests that an environmental impact statement is prepared before there is any consideration of boosting tourism expenditure. This could investigate ways of supporting local communities to benefit from the visitor economy and maintaining landscape and environmental protections. A wide selection of professionals could contribute including geographers, geologists, engineers, scientists etc.

We note, too, that there have been repeated and often wasteful attempts to clarify and reform responsibilities for this coast, most recently in the 2017 revisions to the Marine and Coastal Act. Are these now to be set aside?

AIDA is pleased that this taskforce has been established and agrees that there is a need for a change to the way the Great Ocean Road is managed but we would hope that any solutions fully consider the needs of those who live along the road as well as tourists and that our recommendations and comments about the dangers of mass tourism are carefully considered.

If you require clarification of any of AIDA's points or further information please contact me on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

President
AIDA