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To the Great Ocean Road Taskforce,  
 Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

## Future management of the Great Ocean Road Region

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 'Governance of Great Ocean Road Region Issues Paper'.

**The Geelong Field Naturalists Club Inc. (GFNC)** is the oldest environmental organisation in the Geelong region. Able to trace its history back to the late 1800s, the club was reformed in 1961 and has been engaged in conservation and natural history studies in the Geelong region ever since. The club has in excess of 200 members many of whom have a wealth of knowledge of the fauna and flora of the Geelong region. Club members have been active at the community level in the conservation of many important sites such as national parks in the Otways and Brisbane Ranges, You Yangs Regional Park, Ocean Grove Nature Reserve and Jerringot wetlands. The club promotes study and appreciation of natural history and regularly undertakes ecological surveys and field studies. **The club aims to preserve and protect Australian flora and fauna, with a focus on the conservation and protection of endangered species and their habitats.**

It is within the above context and the club's purpose that the GFNC make the following comments:

The GFNC considers the natural environment within Great Ocean Road study area to be extremely important to the State's biodiversity and is an area of natural significant, well loved by local communities.

- The area includes old growth temperate forest with numerous Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) containing many rare and threatened species. Some of these species are found nowhere else. While some species are also of national significance.
- The area includes marine sanctuaries with a richness of life and large stretches of unmodified coastline making it important for many Australian birds and other wildlife.
- The area contains well known area of geological and geomorphological significance.

Tourisms is based on seeing and experiences these natural areas and therefore any future development/planning must ensure that protection of the environment is the number one consideration.

The GFNC sees merit in there being a single body responsible for developing long term strategy for the area. The overarching policy and strategy document that guides future uses with the study zone,

however, must prioritise ecological and landscape protection. The responsible body ought to ensure that ecologically sustainable development (ESD) is a **principal outcome** and not just aspects that inform others in their decision making when implementation development proposal with the study area. It is the GFNC view that the body responsible for the strategy development be assigned the necessary powers to safeguard effective implementation. An effective strategic instrument must be one that not only safeguards environment and other public interest outcomes across the landscapes at issue but have a legal status sufficient to achieving real outcomes. Examples of the strategic tools that should be considered for governance of the Great Ocean Road region include the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan under Part 3A of the PE Act, Coastal Management Plans under section 36 of the Coastal Management Act, the Yarra Strategic Plan under the new Yarra Act, or Biosphere Reserves under the EPBC Act (and relevant UNESCO program).

The lead agency, whether an existing one or a new one will need to play a strong, independent and publicly accountable role in preparing a strategic plan or framework. Additionally, the wider legislative framework in it sits needs to include capacity for third party enforcement or review by the community (ie third parties) as well as by a relevant public authority.

Within any strategic plan for the Great Ocean Road area, it is the view of the GFNC that it will be necessary to limit and control the number of visitors to sensitive, high-use areas. A single body that is also assigned responsibility to build tourism and promote the area has the potential to have conflicting goals. With the above context, Infrastructure construction directly addressing tourist visitation must only be undertaken to permit an increase in tourism numbers that has a zero-negative impact on the highly sensitive environmental locations. There is an urgent need to get in front of the game and away from the building in response model that now exists to cope with existing tourism numbers.

While we support a single agency for Great Ocean Road area, the focus of the agency ought to be solely for and focussed on management of economic uses and development activity with a clear ESD framework. It is our view that the agency should not become an additional layer within the planning process on all aspects related to the communities that live with the study zone.

Yours faithfully



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