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Dear Great Ocean Road Taskforce Project Manager

GOVERNANCE OF THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD REGION ISSUES PAPER

Parks Victoria has reviewed the *Governance of the Great Ocean Road Region Issues Paper*, which details the strategic objectives for the future management of the Great Ocean Road Region.

Proper and robust governance and management of the Great Ocean Road Region is of major strategic significance for Parks Victoria. The region has the potential to give impetus to greater economic activity, promote regional dispersal of visitors, create opportunities for further investment and capitalise on the booming visitor economy as it correlates with nature-based tourism opportunities.

The Great Ocean Road is one of the world's most distinctive coastal landscapes and one of Australia's most recognised tourism destinations. Therefore, it is essential to preserve and maintain the outstanding conservation values, and the unobstructed views of the hinterlands and coastline, through the application of appropriate and consistent land use policies and controls.

After measured consideration and recognizing Parks Victoria's role in the Region, Parks Victoria considers that several key areas require further exploration.

Future Administration

Parks Victoria does not support the formation of yet another new body; we do not believe that a case has been made to add further bureaucracy and costs. The key needs are for coordinated planning and investment prioritisation; this can best be achieved by the establishment of a strong coordinating committee with very senior representation from the key land managers and stakeholder bodies.

Such a committee could operate in a similar manner to that involved with the Yarra Action Plan:

'Yarra Action Plan that has coordinated direction-setting and a coordinating committee featuring Traditional Owners, without machinery of government changes, such as establishing a new body or dramatically increased scope of an existing agency' (Birrarrung Council)

If deemed necessary, the mandate for this committee could be enshrined in legislation. Parks Victoria should be a member of such a committee.

Managing Future Visitation

Visitation throughout the Great Ocean Road Region and particularly to key Parks Victoria sites continues to grow exponentially, providing the opportunity to connect people with the natural and cultural values of the region. The unique landscapes that attract many local, national and international visitors, support local communities through tourism and business investment - both of which enhance liveability in regional Victoria. At the same time, high visitation provides challenges in protecting fragile landscapes and cultural values. This visitation must be well managed.

To ensure that the Great Ocean Road and its diverse landscapes remain an iconic destination of intrinsic value, it is important to recognise and ensure the enduring connection of the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung people to their traditional lands. This should be done through effective joint management with Traditional Owners.

Consistent visitor demand exceeding site capacity at key sites managed by Parks Victoria and other agencies is a recurring issue that must be addressed. Planning and governance driving the management of the Great Ocean Road Region must consider the importance of community engagement, appropriate site-specific management of increasing visitor demand (including visitation caps when and where appropriate), and the enhancement of conservation and cultural heritage values.

All these considerations should be used to inform the strategic direction for the future management of the Great Ocean Road Region. Emphasis should be placed on setting parameters around enhancing the region's:

- Natural and cultural heritage values
- Visitor experience
- Maintenance standards
- Revenue models and yield.

This would be achieved through better prioritisation of works across the landscape and improving asset conditions. It would also involve balancing local community and visitor needs and aspirations with increasing environmental impacts and visitor numbers both in overnight stay locations and for touring day visitors.

A strong coordinating committee and an overall strategic plan that is consistently adhered to will support effective visitor management, good conservation, increased accessibility and the development of appropriate regional infrastructure.

Parks Victoria's Role

Parks Victoria is clearly positioned under legislation and through its strong community brand, expertise and operational resources, as the responsible land manager for all National Park and other land management responsibilities for the region. Parks Victoria has major programs in place to address the challenges outlined in this letter for its assets, within the framework of a broader strategic vision for the region.

To ensure that Parks Victoria is adequately funded to effectively maintain all land under its management within the region and to provide outstanding visitor experiences, it is critical that all current and future revenues generated by Parks Victoria within the region must be retained in full by Parks Victoria.

Parks Victoria looks forward to further engagement with the Taskforce.

Yours sincerely



Chair
30 April 2018

Future management of the Great Ocean Road Region

Excerpt from the 'Governance of the Great Ocean Road Issues Paper' released April 2018, page 12.

"The critical issues and opportunities outlined in this [above] document have been developed in consultation with the organisations that have responsibilities for decision-making and management of the Great Ocean Road and its region, along with regional tourism and environmental advocacy groups.

We would like to hear your views on the ideas in this issues paper and any other ideas you may have about improving the management and oversight of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes."

Link to the Plan:

https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/121256/GreatOceanRoad_IssuesPaper_v22.pdf

Parks Victoria Response:

1. What do you love most about the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes?

1.a Due to the vast volume of visitors the Great Ocean Road (GOR) attracts each year, it provides a great opportunity to connect people and parks and by doing so enhance visitors' health and wellbeing.

1.b That these landscapes, many of which are managed by Parks Victoria, provide benefits to local communities through supporting a significant tourism industry, economic prosperity, greater wellbeing and liveability.

1.c That unobstructed and uncluttered natural view scapes (sea and hinterland views) provide a sense of remoteness and wildness. They should be protected. Elements include:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| a. Sheer limestone sea cliffs | i. Kelp forests |
| b. Natural rock formations | j. Intertidal and shallow subtidal reefs |
| c. Isolated beaches | k. World-class surfing breaks |
| d. Coastal landscapes | l. Coastal heathlands |
| e. Great Ocean Walk | m. Ancient rainforests |
| f. Two National Parks | n. Native wildlife, including marine mammals |
| g. Two Marine National Parks | o. Waterfalls |
| h. Three Marine National Sanctuaries | |

1.d Cultural landscapes and values.

- a) The GOR provides linkages to other parts of the region and state (e.g. Great Southern Touring Route)

2. What aspect of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes would you most like to see protected?

2.a The world-renowned vistas and landscapes along the coast and through the hinterland are valued and protected, through sensitive development proposals, provision of quality infrastructure and services, education and information on how visitors can help protect this landscape.

2.b Independent character and unique visitor offers provided by the towns throughout the region should be maintained.

2.c The areas currently managed under the National Parks Act and other land-based Acts remain protected.

3. What aspect of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes would you most like to see changed?

3.a Appropriate sharing of Traditional Owner stories, acknowledgement and celebration of intrinsic connection of Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung people to their traditional lands – e.g. six seasons.

3.b Genuine and lasting partnerships through joint management with Traditional Owners.

3.c Unsafe and landscape damaging behaviours of some visitors in order to get what they deem is the perfect holiday photo, for example climbing over safety barriers and fences at visitor sites.

3.d Greater use, based on supporting infrastructure and developed attractions, of the hinterland touring route.

3.e Well-resourced land managers with appropriate investment to improve visitor experiences and traditional land management responsibilities along with a base investment in asset maintenance and renewal.

4. 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? If so, what are the key issues for the organisation/business?

4.a Over-capacity at key sites occurring on more and more occasions and at non-traditional times of the year (E.g. 12 Apostles, surf coast beaches, Erskines Falls). Issues relate to car park, walking trail and viewing platform capacity, with congestion causing unsafe behaviours and damage to the landscape.

4.b Increasing visitation suggesting more sites will come under the above pressures.

4.c Balancing competing demands from visitors, communities and other stakeholders

4.d Balancing visitation experience and protection of natural and cultural values

4.e Promotion of GOR as a world class experience and the expectation this creates

4.f Holistic community engagement

4.g Holistic visitor experience planning

4.h Coordinated strategy development and implementation

4.i Coordinated land-use planning and development

- 4.j Coordinated and adequately resourced infrastructure delivery and asset maintenance
- 4.k Coordinated and adequately resourced management of environmental and cultural values
- 4.l Fragility of the natural environment and values (eg impacts of climate change, coastal inundation and erosion)

5. Is there any critical issue or opportunity that we have missed (in chapter 3 of this Issues Paper)?

5.a The area is very fire-prone landscape, with the majority of visitors coming to the region during the highest fire-risk period.

5.b The challenge of undertaking an effective planned burning program that reduces risk for local communities as per *Safer Together*, whilst minimising the impacts to the visitor economy and tourists i.e. undertaking planned burns over the Easter period.

6. Do you have any suggested changes to the overarching policy, goals and principles (on pages 40 to 41)?

The Great Ocean Road and its landscapes is an iconic touring route with cultural landscapes of state, national and international significance and is to be treated as the one integrated and living entity for the purposes of protection and investment.

6.a Policy statement in green box [above] specifically identifies the cultural landscapes of state, national and international significance but not the natural landscapes.

Figure 5. Principles to guide the governance changes

Goal/Objective	Guiding Principles
Distinctive areas and landscapes protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protect and conserve the unique features and special characteristics of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes for future generations • touch the land, coastlines and waterways lightly and ensure there is a net gain for the environment⁷ out of any individual action, development or policy • recognise, protect and promote the heritage, cultural and identity values of the Great Ocean Road, its landscapes and towns
Traditional Owner inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledge Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung people as the traditional custodians of the land, coastlines, waterways and seas along the Great Ocean Road • recognise, protect and promote the values, rights and interests of the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung people • partner with the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung people in the development of policies, planning and management of the Great Ocean Road, its coastlines, landscapes and seas • support, and equip the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung groups to play an active role in shaping the future for their traditional lands, waters and seas
Coastal public estate vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance conservation of coastal environments along the Great Ocean Road, the unique habitats, ecosystems and biodiversity • prepare for, and manage, the impacts of climate change on coastal public land and assets • maintain the coastal public land footprint and access for the enjoyment and appreciation of future generations
Thriving local, state, national and international significant visitor economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise the importance of the Great Ocean Road, its coastlines and landscapes to the economic vitality and liveability of coastal communities, the south-west region, Victoria and Australia • enhance the experience of the touring route and its destinations for all visitors, including international tourists • recognise the importance of liveable communities along the Great Ocean Road and • ensure sustainable development of the Great Ocean Road visitor economy is a responsibility shared by all levels of government, industry, business, communities and the people of Victoria
Modern governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide visionary leadership and overarching direction to the management of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes – aligning the activities and decisions of responsible agencies and councils • integrate policy development, strategic planning, implementation and decision-making for the entirety of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes across all levels of government • develop a secure, long-term commitment to fund the delivery of strategic goals • prioritise the involvement of the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung people in the design of policies and planning for future of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes • prioritise community engagement in the design of policies and planning for the future of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes • maintain an ongoing dialogue with local communities along the Great Ocean Road

6.c Goal/Objective – Distinctive areas and landscapes protection

- Guiding Principles [above] dot point 2 – net gain for environment – does this mean within the GOR environment (and not state)?
- Suggest reference is included in this section regarding fire and all hazard emergency management

6.d Goal/Objective – Traditional Owner Inclusion

- Should mention Eastern Maar or Wadawurrung involvement in future land management.

6.e Goal/Objective – Coastal public estate vitality

- Guiding Principles dot point 1 – should include the word ‘protect’.

6.f Goal/Objective – Thriving local, state, national and international significant visitor economy

- Guiding Principles dot point 2 – should include ‘and supporting services’ after destinations

6.g Goal/Objective – Modern governance

- Guiding Principles dot point 3 - should include maintenance (eg fund the delivery and ‘maintenance’ of strategic goals).
- Suggest document needs a statement in here that talks about maintaining base services and approaches as an interim while strategic planning is occurring in the background.
- Recent examples of strategic community engagement processes i.e. Anglesea Futures have been underway for several years. The way in which these processes feed into the governance of the GOR needs clarity.

7. What elements would you like to see covered in a strategic framework plan for the Great Ocean Road Region?

7.a Natural values – currently included but not explicitly.

7.b Base maintenance standards across all asset types and responsibilities that are funded appropriately.

7.c Any substandard assets are brought up to a specified standard (based on location, use, type) across the landscape.

7.d The visitor experience including interpretations are managed across the entire journey.

7.e Options for revenue models

8. What are your thoughts about establishing a new organisation to oversee the development, and coordinate implementation, of a Strategic Framework Plan for the Great Ocean Road Region?

We would propose a model similar to the Yarra Action Plan that has coordinated direction-setting and a coordinating committee featuring Traditional Owners, without machinery of government changes, such as establishing a new body or dramatically increased scope of an existing agency.

- For the Yarra Action Plan, the relevant features were:
 - A coordinating Committee (Birrarung Council)
 - An existing agency be charged to develop the Strategic Plan (Melbourne Water)
 - An existing agency audit and report on the effectiveness (Commissioner of Environmental Sustainability)

8.b Parks Victoria’s feedback is that it supports the fundamentals of the Yarra Action Plan model in having coordinated direction-setting and a coordinating committee featuring Traditional Owners, without machinery of government changes, such as establishing a new body or dramatically increased or decreased scope of an existing agency.

8.c There were no changes to delivery agents (Melbourne Water, Catchment Management Authority, VicRoads, Parks Victoria, DELWP, or local councils)

9. What current constraints need to be addressed in the future governance arrangements?

9.a Prioritisation of works across the landscape and in particular in raising asset standards across the footprint.

9.b Balancing community needs, desires and aspirations with increasing environmental impacts and visitor numbers both in overnight stay locations and for the touring day or overnight visitor.

9.c Resourcing of any new initiatives and standards.

10. Are there any other management models/options we should consider?

10.a As per the response to Q.8, a model that features a strategic plan, community-based vision, compelling all responsible agencies to work to the objectives, investment, without machinery of government changes is preferred.

11. What criteria should the Taskforce use to evaluate the management model options?

11.a Potential criteria could include:

- Leads positive and transformational change
- Incorporates Traditional Owner voice and has an ease of integration with all future agreements with Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung
- Overtly protects natural, cultural and social values
- Involves the community
- Leads to thinking and action that delivers benefits beyond artificial boundaries
- Is value for money and increases economic value in the area
- The model optimises benefits across all values and objectives
- Is practical and simple

Other:

- The Marine and Coastal Bill and associated transition planning includes reform of this area through strengthened roles of the Catchment Management Authorities, a focus on coastal management plans, providing for Regional and Strategic Partnerships, and any transition of smaller Committees of Management. Any consideration of the reform of the Great Ocean Road needs due consideration of this reform. More broadly, with government applying a model in the Yarra area, and specific reform for the coastal areas, the default should be a model that applies integration of the components of these to the Great Ocean Road.
- There is no defined foot-print for the issues paper other than GOR and its landscapes. Does that mean to the top of the ridge? The value and role of hinterlands and those communities needs to be overtly articulated.