

Submission to Great Ocean Road Taskforce



I am a psychiatrist and psychotherapist with an interest in the psychological significance of the natural environment (and climate change) and in indigenous issues. I own a property in Wye River which was destroyed by the Christmas Day bushfire of 2015 and where a serious landslide occurred subsequently.

On this basis I would like to make several points:

1. I note that there is to be collaboration with relevant Aboriginal organizations, which I think is excellent. A new governance structure could look at highlighting indigenous aspects of the road. On the one hand it could show important cultural sites. On the other it could also look more at Aboriginal history. In Wye River the signage says that the Gadubanud people lived in the area until the 19th century. It does not say what happened to them nor does it speak of their rich cultural history but also destruction of that culture. There is now virtually no one who claims Gadubanud heritage. A number of the Gadubanud were massacred. In charge of this massacre was a man called Smythe who also has a creek named after him along the road. A name change for that Creek might be appropriate as may be the broader issue of signage and whether there should be indigenous place names and other indigenous signage and information included along the road.
2. Though climate change is mentioned in the issues paper it is not given the prominence it warrants. Indeed the road is likely to be markedly affected by it. I have experienced this myself as both the bushfire and subsequent landslides were, I believe, in part caused by climate change. There is also likely to be increased need for mental health interventions as the consequences of climate change unfold.
3. There needs to be an appropriate balance between development of tourism (and infrastructure) and the experience of the natural environment. For many of us , myself included, the natural environment provides emotional and spiritual nourishment. There is a danger that such nourishment is severely damaged by poorly controlled tourism eg at the 12 Apostles and Kennet river. On the other hand the experience could be enriched by increased information about particular areas of natural interest and developing some tourist experiences eg walks which allow more immersion in the environment.