



25th April, 2018

## Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast Submission to Governance of the Great Ocean Road Taskforce Region Issues Paper

Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast is a volunteer environmental groups based in Torquay. The organisation is part of a national network of coastal groups dedicated to protecting our oceans and beaches for future generations to enjoy.

We hold regular beach clean ups and revegetation days along the Great Ocean Road attracting hundreds of community participants each year.



The Great Ocean Road boasts some of Australia's top beaches and waves. It is important that any future organisation tasked with overseeing planning and management along the Great Ocean has as its primary objective the protection and enhancement of the coastal and marine environment.

In our submission we would like to respond to the following questions outlined in the issues paper:

*1 – What do you love most about the Great Ocean Road (GOR) and its landscapes?*

The strength of the GOR is its natural beauty. The beaches, waves, hills and townships all add to the character of the road. The Great Otway National Park provides the green backdrop to compliment the yellow sand and blue sea. Small coastal townships dot the GOR home to many creative and cultural communities with a strong affinity for the ocean and the beach.

Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast believe it is important to protect and preserve all coastal vistas, landscapes and coastal communities along the GOR from overdevelopment and inappropriate development.

Torquay stands at the start of this iconic road and yet overdevelopment and inappropriate is threatening the character and culture of this unique and important surfing community.

As a community environmental group Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast would support Torquay/Jan Juc being removed as a Growth Node in the State Planning Scheme.

**All regional growth should be directed to the Armstrong Creek Development Precinct that is a short drive north of Torquay.**

This is the most suitable site for medium and high density residential living, not the coast.

*2 – What aspects of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes would you most like to see protected?*

Surfrider Foundation highly values the following GOR landscapes – Spring Creek Torquay (rural views and natural environment), Jan Juc hinterland (coastal views and natural environment), Bells Beach (surf culture and natural environment), coastal towns and beaches from Torquay to Apollo Bay.

It is also important to protect the cultural of the townships along the GOR and the vibrancy and character of their communities.

People travel to Torquay for a holiday because it is NOT like a suburb of Melbourne. They come for the beach, the waves, the surf shops, the cafes... to be part of the unique surf scene that Torquay offers.

**Overdevelop Torquay and you will destroy that which makes it unique along with a vibrant surf tourism industry.**

Case Study – the Surf Coast Shire and State Government pushed hard to turn Bells Beach into a tourism stopping point with plans to add a third carpark, toilet blocks, interpretation centres and massive parking for commercial bus operators.

The surfing community lobbied hard against these changes and saved Bells Beach from over development and commercial exploitation.

Today Bells Beach maintains its natural beauty, peace and coastal vistas. It is hugely popular with tourists because it was protected and not overdeveloped.

*3 – What aspects of the GOR would you most like to see changed?*

Surfrider Foundation would like to see minimal change to the GOR. We would like to see an increase in revegetation across all coastal areas with a strong emphasis on returning vegetation returned to pre-settlement variety and densities. For example we would like to see 25% of the Torquay and Lorne Foreshore areas revegetated which would increase landscape values and provide important habitat for native wildlife.



We would also like to see greater community input and decision making along the GOR. G21 is pushing for greater development in Torquay and yet they have NEVER asked the community of Torquay if they want more development.

More natural environment, less built form... that is what we would like to see along the GOR.

*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 GOR Region? If so, what are the key issues for the organisation, business?*

Beach Litter. We are seeing too much litter, particularly from tourists on our beaches and it is increasing along the GOR. The litter sources include local residents, tourists and international tourists who may not be aware of the high value we place on protecting our coastal environment. Much of the litter in the image below was collected at bus stop destinations along the GOR.



Thought also needs to be given to the number of visitors long the GOR and we would encourage a study into the impacts of Tourism (environmental, economic and community) on the GOR and its coastal communities.

*5 – Is there any critical issue or opportunity that we have missed?*

Prior to embarking on any improvement to facilities it would be prudent to undertake a study into the impact of tourism and impact of the projected increase in tourism numbers on the GOR.

To just assume an increase is positive for the region is to neglect the negative impact tourism is having on the environment, economy and community. A study needs to identify the carrying capacity of each town along the GOR and the GOR itself. Only through independent impacts studies can any new organisation make informed decisions about what is best for the region and each township moving forward.

It would make sense to encourage self-drive tourists to the region as they are more likely to stay longer and spend more on accommodation, food and goods than tourists on commercial buses who have a minimal spend along our coast.

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

The language is very 'stagnant'. 'Protect and conserve' should be replaced by 'increase and improve' ie/ the new body should be charged with improving the areas under protect and increasing the amount of native vegetation and habitat along the GOR.

**More protection and a significant increase in the native vegetation cover along our coast... don't just maintain what currently exists.**

#### Modern Governance

Any new management model must have at least 50% of its members representing the local community. Current boards like the Barwon Region Partnership and G21 are **top heavy with bureaucrats** and representatives who don't live on the coast and lack an understanding of community values and expectations.

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

Firstly studies into the impact of population growth, climate change and tourism on the environment, economy and communities along the GOR need to be conducted so that informed decisions can be made about what the key strategic issues are and how they should be prioritised.

Without impact studies any strategic framework is useless.

*8 – What are your thoughts about establishing a new organisation to oversee the development, and coordinate implementation, of a Strategic Framework Plan for the GOR region?*

The issues paper does not make a strong case for the establishment of any new organisation. It is unclear what this new organisation would do and more importantly if it is required. There is no analysis of the current management situation, what is working and what is not working.

Therefore we reserve comment on the establishment of any new organisation until more information is provided.

We firmly believe that if more time is required to formulate organisation models and provide support materials then the December 2018 deadline for delivery of the recommendations of this taskforce be extended.

If is the opinion of Surfriider Foundation Surf Coast that any new organisation must have minimum 50% local community representation to reflect the values and expectations of communities living along the GOR. Community representation would also bring local skills and knowledge to any new organisation.

All appointments to any new organisation must be through a vigorous, independent and transparent process. The organisation needs to be independent of government, commercial and business influences.

The new organisation could be funded through a levy on commercial bus operators and commercial business who profit from the GOR.

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

The Barwon Region Partnership and G21 are two good examples of how NOT TO set up an organisation. Neither organisation has community representation on their boards of management. Both organisations have failed to meaningfully consult with local communities on key planning and management issues in recent years (ie/ proposed Torquay Train Line which has not been discussed within the local community) and both organisations continue to advocate for growth against the wishes of local communities in Torquay, Jan Juc, Anglesea and Barwon Heads.

**Lack of consultation and community representation give the Barwon Region Partnership and G21 a big fail for governance and transparency in decision making.**

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

Any new organisation model should include community forums every six months to update and include community in decision making.

Key decision making meetings of the new organisation should be open to the public and/or broadcast on social media in real time.

Stringent conflict of interest rules to apply to all organisation members including staff and contractors.

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

Any new management model must comprise 50% community representation with KPI's that meet community standards of governance and expectation.

It is important that an annual survey of community views and concerns is conducted so that strategic decision making meets community values and expectations.

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