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Surf Coast Shire Council Submission - Governance of the Great Ocean Road Region Issues Paper

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit to the Governance of the Great Ocean Road Region Issues Paper.

Surf Coast Shire Council views the future governance arrangements of the Great Ocean Road as vitally important to long term sustainability of the region. Accordingly, please find below our submission in response to the Governance of the Great Ocean Road Region Issues Paper.

The process to date:

- Council acknowledges the State Government commitment in establishing the Taskforce and the collaborative process to develop and prepare the Issues Paper which provides a thorough and clear logic towards a case for urgent changes to the governance of the Road and its landscapes.
- Council appreciates being represented on the Taskforce and for its views, and the community's views, being sought on the future governance arrangements for the Great Ocean Road region.

Pressures and the case for change:

- Council acknowledges and agrees with the key issues identified in the Issues Paper.
- Further, in support of these issues the following information is also provided:
 - As the eastern start of the Great Ocean Road, Surf Coast Shire's close proximity to major population centres will see it face significant external growth pressures. Greater Geelong (247,000) and western Melbourne (834,600) currently place it within 1 hours' journey for over 1 million people. By 2026 the population will have expanded to approximately 1,279,500 (greater Geelong ~282,000 and west Melbourne ~ 997,500) placing substantial pressure on infrastructure over the next 10 years from day trip visitors.
 - Population growth within Surf Coast Shire is forecast to grow from 30,400 to 45,700 by 2036. Based on these figures it is estimated over 1,650 additional jobs will need to be created to cater for this increase. Tourism, as a key industry sector, will need to provide a significant amount of these new jobs.

- At year end December 2017 Surf Coast Shire received over 2,160,000 visitors, accounting for approximately 42% of visitation to the Great Ocean Road Region. This number will rise to 3,400,000 by 2026 should visitation levels increase proportionately to overall visitor numbers to the Great Ocean Road Region. This represents an increase of approximately 1,240,000 visitors. (Sources: Forecast ID, Tourism Research Australia and ABS)
- Other factors that should be considered include:
 - The emerging role of transport connections to the region– for example Avalon becoming international and the proposed Surf Coast Rail to Torquay will potentially boost regional visitation beyond the above visitation estimate.
 - Visitors travelling further along the Great Ocean Road place a burden on infrastructure (toilets, rubbish, car parking and traffic congestion) with economic benefits being received further west. A whole of region approach is needed to ensure appropriate infrastructure in appropriate locations. Individual Council's should not bear the burden of paying for this type of regional infrastructure.
 - To improve public roads safety, greater investment in education and support for international drivers at the whole of system level is required as early as possible in the visitor experience (e.g. improved education and instructions at airports and car hire facilities).
 - Enabling infrastructure authorities (such as water and telecommunications) need to extend their planning focus beyond each individual development to provide enabling infrastructure capable of catering for future development requirements.
- Council acknowledges that the visitor economy is important to our region, but it should not be promoted at the expense of the amenity of those that live in the many towns along the Great Ocean Road. Many townships have existing master plans that have been developed and agreed with by the communities and it important that any new governance model acknowledge and respect these plans. It is important that townships that do not have formalised strategies guiding their development and growth, be given the opportunity to put these in place.
- Council agrees that a new model for building and maintaining priority infrastructure is required. Our coastal towns are struggling to come to terms with the current and growing challenge of visitor pressure as they both seek to support visitation whilst also affirming their coastal town amenity and character.
- Council's view is that one way to mitigate the impact of greater visitation on local communities is to ensure there is adequate infrastructure in appropriate locations that is sensitive to the environment and amenity (e.g. toilets, parking, roads, paths) - this is not being adequately funded or provided under the current arrangements.
- Council agrees that a coherent, coordinated, and cooperative approach to climate change planning, research and investment in maintaining coastal assets and infrastructure needs to be adopted by all responsible public entities. This view is reinforced by the VAGO Victorian Auditor General's Office report to Parliament *Protecting Victoria's Coastal Assets (March 2018)* which has found:
 - Victoria's coastal assets are not being adequately protected from current and future coastal hazards.
 - Victoria is at real risk of losing valued coastal assets and infrastructure as a result of increasing coastal inundation and erosion hazards, if things do not change. Some locations will be significantly affected by sea level rise as early as 2030.
 - Overall asset management practices are poor and not aligned with risk. There are critical gaps in asset information and coastal hazard knowledge, and asset management systems do not meet accepted standards.

- Scarce funding is available and is not being effectively targeted to high-value high-risk assets, but rather those that are failing irrespective of their need and service.
- DELWP's proposed actions will address a range of longstanding issues impeding the effective protection of coastal assets, but they must be resourced and implemented to ensure change in practice across the coast and all its managers.
- Given the weight of issues identified, Council agrees a strong case for change to the governance of the Great Ocean Road and its landscapes exists.

New management model:

- Council supports a more holistic Great Ocean Road decision-making framework with overarching, coordinating mechanisms for planning and action.
- Council supports The Guiding Principles, Figure 5 (page 41 of Issues Paper) as a solid basis for further development or confirmation through further community engagement.
- Council recommends stronger emphasis on the demonstration of environmental leadership as an outcome from the new management model. The region is an environmental asset that can profoundly change people for the better through their experiences with it. Demonstrating our environmental leadership along the road is an opportunity to influence visitor actions when they return home. Examples could include keeping the region free of litter, reducing wildlife road kill, electric vehicle charging stations, solar and other environmentally sensitive designed infrastructure, education of the natural environment as a core feature at visitor information centres and stormwater and waste management and recycling.

Strategic framework plan:

- Council supports development of an overarching Strategic Framework Plan that provides direction to portfolio and local government agencies for coordinated and coherent decisions along the touring route.
- Council supports the establishment and assignment of a lead agency function to develop the Strategic Framework Plan.
- Council notes that the Strategic Framework Plan approach is consistent with proposed reforms outlined in Chapter 5 - *Integrating planning systems of the Marine and Coastal Act Consultation Paper (2016)* which states: "Planning for marine and coastal areas needs to integrate state-wide, regional, local and site-specific mechanisms that cross boundaries and apply to public and private land when needed. Ideally, spatial planning for coastal and marine areas would be integrated, co-ordinated and transparent."

A lead agency:

- Council recommends Option 4 – A new body – be established. Council does not support Options 1, 2 or 3. In coming to this recommendation Council agrees that the Great Ocean Road faces complex management and development issues and that currently, it is managed by a confusing array of public entities, creating duplication and inefficiencies with overlapping responsibilities and some gaps.
- Council recommends that the new body must have the political relationships, depth of skills and capabilities to deliver the transformational change necessary.
- Council agrees that it is essential that local indigenous groups have a foundation role in governance, planning and management of the region.
- Council recommends that further investigation and consultation is undertaken on the extent of what land use planning authority is delegated to the new authority. The following factors should be considered:

- Council's naturally seek to understand and represent local community perspectives and this can be difficult to balance in the context of developments that seek regional, state or national benefits.
 - Council believes some development can be supported but it should be of appropriate scale consistent with the nature of the landscape and desired character of our coastal communities
 - Developers should reasonably expect a planning process that provides them with a known process and fair timeframe, and one in which they and the community are treated with respect.
 - New development proposals should consider the interface with coastal communities and not create "islands" that do not contribute (but actually may detract) from local economic activity.
 - Whatever changes occur to planning processes – it is essential that communities retain the ability to have their say.
 - A critical issue for councils is whether they would be prepared to consider ceding Planning Authority and Responsible Authority roles for proposals over a certain size (for example developments over \$30m) or on the basis of geographical criteria such as "outside town boundaries" but retaining "inside town boundaries".
- Council agrees that:
 - Existing agencies could continue to be responsible for service delivery within their functional portfolio or jurisdiction.
 - Any gaps or overlaps in service delivery functions that are identified by the Taskforce will also be addressed in the reform recommendations.
 - Future activities of the responsible public entities would need to support the objectives of the overarching Strategic Framework Plan and decisions made within the new integrated decision-making framework it provides.
 - The lead agency would work with existing agencies to coordinate implementation of the strategic framework plan.
 - Council recommends that management overlaps between Councils and coastal management committees should be resolved, noting that the strategic rationale for having a coastal committee rather than council delivering these functions should be made clear (as not all locations have coastal committees). One approach would be to affirm the core purpose of each organisation and to streamline functions to align with those purposes.
 - Council notes that simplifying management arrangements for the Great Ocean Road is consistent with the actions identified in the Proposed Transition Plan (2017) under the *Strengthening Victoria's Marine and Coastal Management* reform.
 - Council advises that the new body will need to be able to leverage private investment and accordingly will need to engage proactively in defined economic development activities.

Funding:

- Council supports secure funding sources and/or commitment to fund the delivery of the Great Ocean Road Strategic Framework Plan over a 20 to 25 year period.
- Council affirms the need and willingness to consider its participation in proposals for revenue generation, so long as that revenue is directly retained by the new body (eg GOR Authority) and not diverted to state government consolidated revenue.
- Council advises that it is essential that councils don't have to fund infrastructure that essentially services a visitor base (such as coaches) for which local communities receive little or no benefit. This is one of the current constraints preventing the establishment of much needed visitor infrastructure.

Other short term reform opportunities:

- Council recommends that the State Government consider the opportunity to make a number of short term reforms:
 - Reclassify Cape Otway Road to be fully under VicRoads responsibility (parts are currently with Surf Coast Shire).
 - Establish funding for the Great Ocean Road within the State Government budget as its own line item rather than the need to fund within VicRoads overall allocation.
 - Establish a Great Ocean Road planning process, based on a Standing Great Ocean Road Advisory Committee.
 - Fund a cadastral survey for the Great Ocean Road (as this currently does not exist).
 - Seek proposals from councils and agencies for land tenure and management responsibility anomaly resolutions.
 - Undertake a strategic road connection assessment for key Great Ocean Road 'feeder roads' to include roads such as Deans Marsh - Lorne Road, Bambra Road, Forrest – Apollo Bay Road, and Anglesea in the context of the Alcoa planning exercise.

I look forward to receiving further updates as this important matter progresses. If you have any enquiries concerning this submission please contact me on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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General Manager Environment and Development