

Central West Regional
Central West Estuaries
South West Regional
South West Estuaries
Coastal Action Plans

Interim Review

October 2006

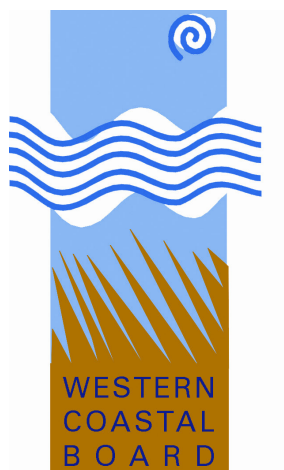


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A note to readers:

This Report was originally completed in September 2005 and only covered the Central West Regional, South West Regional and South West Estuaries CAPs. However, since this time, the Central West Estuaries CAP has been released (November 2005) and undergone a similar review process. Given the similarities between the findings of this review and those that covered the other three CAPs, it was decided to include the Central West Estuaries CAP in this Report as well, rather than having it be the subject of its own separate report. It is also expected that having one Report cover all four CAPs will improve awareness, understanding and adoption of its content.

Introduction

The Victorian Coastal Strategy (VCS)¹, developed in accordance with the *Coastal Management Act 1995* (the Act), establishes the overall framework for planning and management of the Victorian coast. Coastal Action Plans (CAPs) are developed by relevant Regional Coastal Boards to assist implementation of the VCS on a regional, local or issues based level.

CAPs provide for strategic coastal planning for the region or local area under the larger framework of the VCS and therefore take a long term strategic view, clarifying directions for future use and identifying key actions required to achieve preferred outcomes. CAPs also generally provide managers with a priority ranking for each action to assist with the prioritisation of works.

The intended lifespan of a CAP is usually approximately five years. CAPs will be subject to a major review at the end of their lifespan and an interim review, or progress report, mid way through it. The outcomes of the reviews will assist Coastal Boards to determine future strategic planning arrangements for their region (eg whether a CAP is required for a particular area; whether it needs to be amended or rewritten for the next five years).

The Western Coastal Board (WCB) endorsed the Central West Estuaries CAP (CWE) in 2005 and the Central West Regional (CWR), South West Regional (SWR) and South West Estuaries (SWE) CAPs (hereafter referred to as “the Plans”) in 2002. This is the mid point of the intended lifespan of the Plans, and this report provides an interim review before their major review in 2007/08 (N.B. To synchronize the timing of the major reviews of the Plans, the CWE CAP is intended to have only a two year life span). The purpose of this review is to assess the effectiveness of the Plans at achieving their objectives to date.

The effectiveness of the Plans has been assessed using feedback supplied by committees of relevant stakeholders established to direct and oversee implementation of

¹ *Victorian Coastal Strategy 2002* State Government and Victorian Coastal Council

the Plans. Measures of progress in implementing the Plan's recommended actions and qualitative information regarding how useful they find the Plans were gathered.

Background

The WCB region includes the Victorian coastline from Breamlea to the South Australian border. This coastal zone has many significant cultural, historic and environmental values, and inappropriate use in the past has led to damage to these values in some parts of the zone.

The Plans present a framework for the development and management of the west Victorian coast that is consistent with the VCS. They provide descriptions of coastal, estuarine and marine issues, objectives and recommendations for the strategic management of this zone. Responsibilities are also assigned to achieve each recommendation. The preparation of the Plans involved extensive consultation with members of the community, interest groups and government departments.

The Plans intend to provide support and direction for the protection of the coastal zone's significant cultural, environmental and historical values, and to assist in providing guidelines and recommendations for tourism, recreation and development opportunities.

The general objectives of the Plans provide the framework necessary for the protection and appropriate use of the coastal zone, and include:

- Applying the Victorian Coastal Strategy and its principles at a regional level.
- Providing directions and priorities for coastal, estuarine and marine management and research.
- Coordinating and integrating planning for the coastal, estuarine and marine environment.
- Encouraging and fostering partnerships and communication between stakeholders.
- Increasing public awareness, understanding and appreciation of coastal, estuarine and marine values and threats.

The main stated roles of each of the Plans are briefly outlined below.

Central West Regional CAP

- Provide a framework to support and integrate existing local CAPs, and a regional context and guide to the development of regional and local policies and strategies, and on-ground works programs relevant to the coastal and marine environment.
- Set out the strategic direction for the region and bring together commonwealth, state, regional and local policy into a coastal and marine regional context.

Central West Estuaries CAP

- Bring together a regional planning and management framework and structure, with recommendations for actions for improved integrated planning and management of estuaries within the Central West Coastal Region.
- Review the application of estuary planning policy, zones and overlays for the Greater Geelong, Surf Coast and Colac Otway Planning Schemes, and recommend improvements for better quality planning of estuaries.
- Provide a toolkit to assist with individual estuary management plans, assessment of development proposals and day to day management.

South West Regional CAP

- Improve the management of south west Victoria's coastal and marine region by:
 - coordinating and integrating strategic planning
 - introducing a regional policy that integrates state and local planning
 - making consultation and decision making processes more transparent and widely understood.

South West Estuaries CAP

- Provide an overall strategic planning framework to improve the quality, consistency and efficiency of planning and management decisions for estuaries.
- Guide the preparation of individual estuary management plans affecting the health, ecology and hydrology of estuaries along the south west coast.

Assessment

There are several organisations responsible for implementing the Plans. While the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is the key organisation responsible for implementing much of the SWE CAP, most of the actions from the other CAPs are shared between a few key groups, including the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Local Government and the WCB for the CWR and SWR CAPs, and Local Government and Committees of Management for the CWE CAP. The Corangamite CMA has also been increasingly realising the important and major role it should play in implementing the CWE CAP in recent times

The WCB established committees with representatives from all relevant organisations during 2005 to direct and oversee the implementation of each CAP. This report was developed from feedback obtained from the committees and provides both a qualitative assessment and a quantitative assessment of the implementation of the Plans.

Qualitative Report

In order to determine how useful the Plans have been to date, each Committee member was asked to complete a questionnaire relating to both the usefulness and effectiveness of the Plans and the CAP process in general. The qualitative report is based on the responses to the questionnaire and is provided below.

The Plans

There is generally a low level of understanding and awareness of the Plans by the organisations responsible for implementing them, particularly among CEOs, Chairs and Councillors. The wide range and number of plans, strategies, etc to consider and the lack of a strong advocate to promote and facilitate implementation of the Plans were suggested as key contributors to the low level of understanding and awareness.

Most organisations are not using the Plans for their intended purpose (eg to integrate coastal, estuarine and marine planning and management). This is seen to reflect the low level of awareness and understanding of the Plans, but also their confusing mix of

prescriptive actions at local scales and more general actions at the regional level. Difficulties are also apparent with interpreting and applying the latter type of actions to achieve desired outcomes on the ground.

It is generally found that the Plans are not achieving their purpose, with their low level of use again seen as a major contributing factor. However, the lack of time and targets to adequately measure the effects of the Plans was acknowledged. Interestingly, some responses indicated that the purpose of the Plans may still be being achieved through means other than the Plans application (eg use of other documents).

Specifically, the SWR CAP is not considered a helpful tool for implementing the VCS at a regional level. Many organisations refer to the VCS itself, and in particular its hierarchy of principles, for guidance on coastal and marine planning and management. They find the VCS more readable than the Plans and its broad principles and objectives easy to apply at a regional or local level. The VCS does, however, lack specific detail relevant to the region and its particular issues that is supplied in the Plans.

Many members of the SWR CAP Implementation Committee felt that, while the interim review process was worthwhile, it has highlighted that that CAP hasn't been used or successful in achieving its intended objectives.

Strong support for the Implementation Committee process established for the Plans was expressed by most organisations. In addition to facilitating the establishment of priorities, targets and timing for the completion of actions, the process is particularly valued for the opportunities it provides for coordinating and integrating coastal, estuarine and marine management across all relevant groups, including the community, and fostering commitment to the Plans and their implementation.

The CAP Process

A general level of support for the CAP process was evident amongst those organisations who participated in the survey. Many feel that increased awareness of coastal, estuarine and marine issues and their consideration in decision making are the main outcomes from the use and implementation of CAPs. Some also think CAPs help to promote

knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of other groups and increase integration between them.

Having a strong advocate to promote awareness and acceptance of CAPs is seen as one of the main factors that can determine their success or failure. Facilitating funding for CAP implementation is another role this advocate could play. Involving all stakeholders in the CAP process is also important for their success. This is thought to help develop commitment to CAPs and increase knowledge and awareness of stakeholders.

To help improve their effectiveness, many organisations believe an implementation process similar to that established for the Plans should be included as a key part of each CAP. Ensuring all actions are clear, achievable and measurable and that Lead Agents have the capacity to implement them are other important factors to help CAPs be effective.

Quantitative Report

The quantitative assessment of this review focuses on the progress of the implementation of the Plans' actions since endorsement.

Each organisation was asked to provide reports on the progress of implementation of the actions they are identified as Lead Agent for. Comments were also gathered on the future intentions for implementation of each action. Appendix A comprises table listings of the results of this exercise and a summary is given below.

Progress in implementing the actions of the Plans

Of the total number of actions in the Plans:

- Approximately 13% are fully completed;
- 44% partially completed;
- 33% of actions are being undertaken as ongoing initiatives; and
- 9% have not been started (these may include actions that are being planned through the preparation of other documentation).

A high number of the actions from each Plan have been either fully or partially completed. Of the three CAPs, the CWR has the most number of actions (21 out of 45 actions) and the SWE the highest percentage (75%) of actions in these categories, however the latter only contains a total of 8 actions.

All three Plans also have a similar number of actions that have not yet started implementation. Again, given its small number of total actions, this represents a larger percentage (25%) of actions in the SWE CAP compared to the CWR (7%), SWR (8%) and CWE (11%) CAPs.

Conclusion and recommendations

This review shows that there has been significant advancements made towards implementing the Plans, with a large number of actions being completed or progressed to some degree. However, due to their general low level of awareness and use for their intended purpose, it is likely that this progress is a result of factors other than the application of the Plans themselves.

A number of issues have been identified that are likely to be affecting the use and effectiveness of the Plans, such as the wide range and number of other existing strategies, plans, etc; the lack of a strong advocate to facilitate support and implementation of the Plans; and, confusion about the role and purpose of the Plans.

The following recommendations have been developed to help improve the effectiveness of the Plans and the CAP process in general.

The Plans

Continue the implementation process established for the Plans.

The Committees formed to oversee and direct implementation of the Plans should develop Implementation Plans for the actions remaining to be completed from each CAP. The Committees should then continue to meet to monitor progress against the Implementation Plans, make any necessary adjustments and drive their realisation. It

may also be appropriate for the Committees to broaden their focus in the future from just the Plans to other regional coastal, estuarine and marine management issues, such as coordinating research projects and funding, and eventually the major review and revision of the Plans. The findings from this interim review should be considered during the implementation process to improve the usefulness and effectiveness of the Plans in the future.

Conduct full reviews of the Plans at the end of their intended lifespans.

It is recommended that a more extensive review of each CAP be conducted in 2007 - 2008. These should take into account the findings of this interim review, in particular those relating to the perceived usefulness and effectiveness of some of the Plans, and include further reporting on the qualitative and quantitative implementation of the each.

The CAP Process

Increase knowledge and awareness of CAPs and commitment to their implementation.

This is particularly relevant to higher levels within organisations and could be achieved through workshops, forums or meetings with relevant groups. These tools could also provide opportunities for increasing the capacity of organisations for implementing CAPs and improving the management of marine and coastal areas. Key groups to target should include local government and, in particular, Councillors. It is important that the messages conveyed through this process are also disseminated to all levels within organisations. Involving people from the early stages of the CAP process and in particular during its development would allow the greatest opportunity for improving commitment.

Reinforce legislative responsibilities for implementing CAPs.

CAPs are approved statutory documents under the Act. Ensuring managers of public land affected by CAPs are aware that they are required by the Act to take all reasonable steps to give effect to them is expected to increase commitment to their implementation.

Facilitate inclusion of CAPs as reference documents in Planning Schemes.

Including CAPs as reference documents in Planning Schemes is seen as one of the most useful and effective ways of facilitating their implementation as it requires CAPs to

be considered as part of all relevant decision making processes and also helps to improve general awareness of them, especially by local government. To assist in achieving this, the CAP process needs to provide a simple course for Councils to include relevant CAPs as reference documents in individual Planning Schemes.

Establish an implementation process early and continue it on an ongoing basis.

A suitable approach would be to develop Implementation Committees similar to those established for the Plans. The main role of the Committees is to coordinate the development of an Implementation Plan for each CAP, which details responsibilities and the priority and timing for completing actions. The Implementation Committee should be formed early in the CAP process, preferably to allow sufficient time for the Implementation Plan to be developed as part of the CAP. The Implementation Committee should have an ongoing role through the life of the CAP to monitor progress against the Implementation Plan and make any necessary adjustments. While its main task is to increase integration and coordination of efforts and develop the Implementation Plan, the Committee could also undertake other tasks, such as coordinating funding for implementing the CAP. A Memorandum of Understanding should be developed for signing by the head of each organisation to formalise commitment to the CAP and the Implementation Plan. A standard implementation process could be developed and followed for all CAPs.

Confirm and communicate role and purpose of CAPs.

The intended role and purpose of each CAP, and the CAP process in general, needs to be established and clearly articulated. While some variation between individual CAPs may be appropriate, it is felt that in general they are best used to set regional priorities and objectives to guide decision making, and that prescriptive, localised actions are more suited to other instruments, such as management plans.

Improve coordination and integration of relevant strategies, plans, etc.

Stronger links need to be made between the various documents relating to coastal, estuarine and marine planning and management to allow greater coordination and integration. A reduction in the number of documents may also be appropriate.

Improve linkages between CAPs and VCS.

While it is important CAPs remain separate documents and provide detail relevant to the region and its specific issues, they also need to better reflect the VCS to assist achievement of one of their key objectives of applying the VCS at a regional level. This could be achieved through improving similarities in content, design, structure and format. Stakeholder knowledge of this CAP objective could also be improved so that CAPs are used for this purpose instead of the VCS itself.

Provide a strong advocate to lead and facilitate support and implementation of CAPs.

One organisation needs to assume the role of 'CAP advocate' to help ensure CAPs are being implemented. Key tasks of the advocate would include increasing awareness and knowledge of the CAP, facilitating its implementation and conducting reviews of progress. This is a key task of the WCB in its roles as leader of the CAP process and coordinator and supporter of coastal management in their region. While limited resourcing and other factors have severely restricted the WCB's ability to fulfill this task in the past, priority should be given to improving CAP implementation in the future. Catchment Management Authorities are also seen to have a major part of this role in relation to the CWE and SWE CAPs. Their responsibilities under the *Water Act* 1989 and role in developing and implementing River Health Strategies require them to take the lead for estuary management in their regions.

Appendix A

Central West Regional, South West Regional, Central West Estuaries and South West Estuaries Coastal Action Plans Progress Reporting Tables