

Skenes Creek to Marengo Coastal Action Plan

Interim Review

November 2005

Prepared for the Western Coastal Board by Pragmatic Environmental Solutions



Introduction

The Victorian Coastal Strategy¹ (VCS) was developed in accordance with the *Coastal Management Act* 1995, and establishes the overall framework for planning and management of the Victorian coast. Coastal Action Plans (CAPs) are developed by the relevant Coastal Boards pursuant to the Act to assist implementation of the VCS on a regional, local or issues-based level. The CAPs take a long-term strategic view, clarifying directions for future use and identifying key actions required to achieve preferred outcomes. CAPs also provide managers with a priority rating for each action to help prioritise works.

The Skenes Creek to Marengo Coastal Action Plan was prepared by the Western Coastal Board (WCB) and endorsed in May 2001 by the Minister for Conservation and Land Management.

The CAPs relevant to the Skenes Creek to Marengo coastal zone are as follows:

- Central West Victoria Regional CAP;²
- Central West Estuaries CAP;³ and
- Skenes Creek to Marengo CAP.⁴

The *Coastal Management Act* provides that a CAP should be the subject of a major qualitative and quantitative review five years after its commencement, and that an interim review should take place approximately mid-way through this five-year term. This document constitutes the interim review of the Skenes Creek to Marengo Coastal Action Plan, and will provide the WCB with an indication of its usefulness to coastal managers in providing strategic direction and setting priorities for coastal works. The major review scheduled to take place in 2007/2008 will assist the WCB to determine whether a subsequent CAP is required.

Two types of assessment have been used in this interim review: a qualitative assessment that focuses on its usefulness to coastal managers; and a quantitative assessment of the degree to which the actions in the Plan have been implemented to date.

It should be noted that while Regional CAPs are intended to provide direction for the preparation of local CAPs, preparation of the Plan preceded that of the Central West (CW) Regional CAP. Therefore, there are some actions within the CW Regional CAP that are relevant to the Skenes Creek to Marengo coastal zone but do not exist within the Plan. The focus of this review is the Plan and its actions.

Background

The coastal zone includes the foreshore in the townships of Apollo Bay, Marengo and Skenes Creek and lies along the Great Ocean Road (GOR). The Plan covers the area from the foothills behind the coast to three nautical miles offshore. The coastline involved stretches from southwest of Marengo to northeast of Skenes Creek. Apollo Bay retains the character of a quiet

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

² *Central West Victoria Regional Coastal Action Plan 2003* State Government and Western Coastal Board

³ *Central West Estuaries Coastal Action Plan 2005* State Government and Western Coastal Board

⁴ *Skenes Creek to Marengo Coastal Action Plan 2001* Western Coastal Board

coastal village, and the area's scenic setting has led to its high tourism and recreation value. The challenge is to preserve the coastal township character, environmental values and scenic landscapes that are threatened by continuing pressure for development and the intensity of activity during peak holiday periods.

Apollo Bay is recognised as one of the major activity nodes on the West Coast in the VCS. The VCS identifies the area as a 'Coastal Recreation Zone', capable of sustaining recreational opportunities for large numbers of people. It is recommended that this type of zone should be managed to minimise impacts on remnant values and the coastal environment. It is also identified as an area with strategic priorities for improved facilities and a need for detailed planning to direct use and future development to suitable locations.

The Great Ocean Road Region Strategy (GORRS) identifies Apollo Bay as a strategically located coastal settlement and its capacity issues will need to be considered as visitor and residential numbers increase, potentially impacting on significant cultural and natural values. With the declaration of the new Otways National Park, the area will experience a further increase in visitor numbers. The significance of the precinct and current and anticipated use of its coastal zone means its future needs to be carefully planned.

The major role of the Plan was to build on existing plans and strategies and to develop, through a proper consultative process, a framework for the future direction of the development and management of the area. Preparation of the Plan included the identification of key issues and objectives relevant to the area and involved an extensive consultative process.

There are two agencies with lead responsibility for the implementation for the majority of the Plan's actions. These are the Apollo Bay Kennett River Public Reserves Committee of Management (COM) and the Colac Otway Shire (COS). Other agencies involved in implementation include the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CCMA), the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), Barwon Water (BW), VicRoads (VR), the WCB and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Assessment

This interim review incorporates a qualitative and a quantitative assessment of the success of the Plan. All agencies with responsibility for implementation provided input for the review. As the COM and COS are responsible for most of the actions, a representative of each provided the majority of input that forms the basis of this review.

Perception of the Plan and Process

The Draft Guidelines for the Preparation, Review and Revision of Coastal Action Plans⁵ (hereafter referred to as "the Draft Guidelines") state that the function of a CAP is to provide strategic direction and identify priorities for coastal use and development. The following assessments are based on the degree to which the Plan and process have performed that function.

⁵ *Draft Guidelines for the Preparation, Implementation, Review and Revision of Coastal Action Plans, October 2004* Victorian Coastal Council (currently under review).

The Process

Most lead agencies demonstrated awareness of the Plan but are not using it as per its intended function. Of the two primary lead agencies, the COM finds the Plan useful while the COS generally does not.

The COM regularly consults the Plan as well as the VCS and CW Regional CAPs for strategic direction. While the COM acknowledged that the Plan priorities do not match COM priorities, it reported that Plan priorities are factored into the priority-setting process. While the COM reported that it would like to see the local CAP process continue for the Skenes Creek to Marengo area, it noted that a document with a more regional focus would also work well if it adequately addressed key issues pertaining to this coastal zone.

The COS reported that it does not use the Plan for guiding strategic direction, nor for setting priorities. Strategic direction is instead identified using the VCS and staff knowledge of local issues. Priorities are set according to funding availability and other factors, rather than according to Plan priorities. The COS does not find the Plan useful and does not see the sense in continuing with the local CAP process for this area. Occasionally the COS uses the document to check if the document permits works that it plans to undertake.

The document

The representatives of the COM and COS reported the following issues regarding the structure and content of the document:

1. Level of prescription

The majority (80%) of the Plan's actions are prescriptive. CAPs are strategic by definition and should have a primarily strategic focus. The COS representative reported that the Plan would be more useful if it included a map identifying activity nodes and providing examples of activities and projects to illustrate the types that would be appropriate for each node. This would be preferable to the high degree of prescription provided in the Plan. Prescriptive actions could be picked up through the Apollo Bay Structure Plan and later the Planning Scheme, as well as other local planning documents.

2. Number of actions and repetition

Both the COM and the COS believed that the coastal zone's issues don't warrant so many recommendations. Actions that are ongoing in nature (21 in total) are perceived by both the COS and the COM to be a normal course of business and don't need to be included in the Plan. It was suggested by the COS that the document should be issues-based rather than geography-based to avoid repetition in the actions and in the general text.

3. Invalid actions

The COS reported that the following 17 actions are obsolete (either outdated or impossible to address) and should not be included in the Plan: 6, 7, 21, 23, 25, 28, 36, 37, 39, 48, 50, 51, 53, 54, 58, 67 and 71. It should be noted that 8 of these have been addressed sufficiently to date, while 9 have not.

4. Confusing priority ratings/timelines

Page 21 of the document outlines four priority ratings with associated timelines for implementation. These ratings are “high”, “medium”, “low”, and “ongoing”. However, the “low” rating is not assigned to any actions in the Plan. Additionally, there is a time gap between medium and low priority timelines (the gap between 4 and 5 years is not addressed), which is confusing. Assigning “ongoing” as a priority rating adds to the confusion. It doesn’t signify importance or urgency, but rather the nature of the action (ie continuous rather than discrete). A clearer presentation of priority ratings would assist coastal managers to better identify priorities for works.

Progress in implementing the actions of the Plan

This review assesses progress in implementation as follows:

- the degree to which the actions have been undertaken to date, and
- the proportion of actions addressed adequately, according to priority rating.

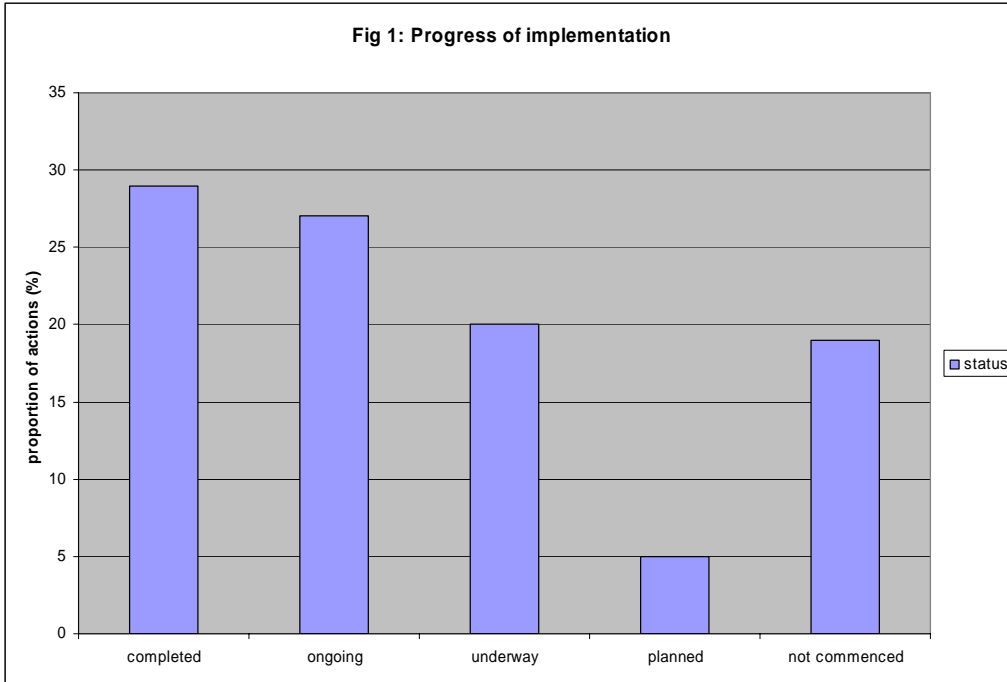
The Appendix comprises a table listing the Plan’s actions with indicators of progress (status), reasons for actions not being implemented (limiting factors), and priority ratings assigned to each action. It also describes progress to date and the future intentions for implementation as reported by lead agencies.

The Plan includes 79 actions. Of these, the majority (81%) have been implemented to at least some degree. Four indicators have been used to signify action status in this report. They are outlined in Table 1 below, along with the number and proportion of actions that belong to each status category.

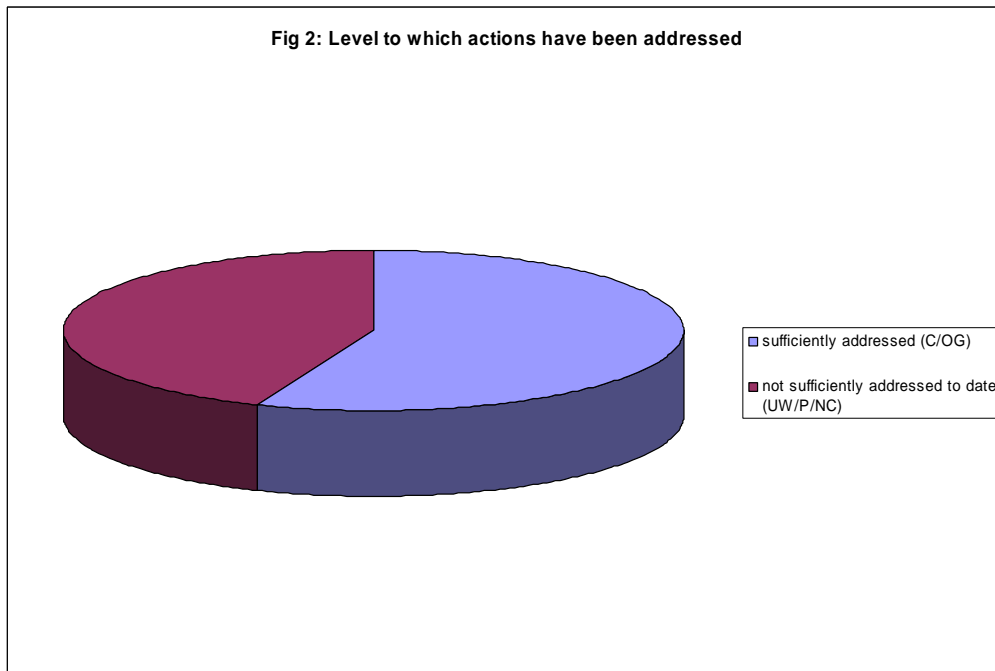
Table 1: Indicators of progress in implementing actions

status	description	# actions	proportion of 79 actions
C (completed)	The action has been completed.	23	29%
OG (ongoing)	The action is ongoing in nature and is implemented indefinitely into the future. (Eg: #74: Retain and enhance indigenous vegetation along coast near Skenes Creek.)	21	27%
UW (underway)	Actual works have commenced.	16	20%
P (planned)	The action is in the planning stage. This can include discussions with stakeholders; investigations or research; preparation of planning documents; etc.	4	5%
NC (not commenced)	The implementation of the action as it is written in the Plan has not commenced.	15	19%

Figure 1 below illustrates progress of implementation:



Actions that are considered sufficiently addressed are those that are either completed or are being addressed on an ongoing basis, and these comprise 44 (56%) of the 79 actions. Actions which are not sufficiently addressed are those that require further attention and these include actions that are underway, planned or not commenced. These comprise 35 (44%) of the 79 actions. Figure 2 below shows that nearly half the total number of actions are yet to be sufficiently addressed:



Implementation and priority rating

Of the 79 actions in the Plan,

- 50 are assigned “high” (H) priority, to be implemented within 1-2 years;
- 23 are “medium” (M) priority, to be implemented within 2-4 years;
- 0 are “low” (L) priority, to be implemented within 5+ years;
- 5 are assigned an “ongoing” priority; and
- 1 is assigned an “ongoing/high” priority.

Figure 3 below illustrates the proportion of actions that have and have not been addressed sufficiently, according to priority rating. Note that the action assigned an “ongoing/high” priority rating has been treated as a high priority action.

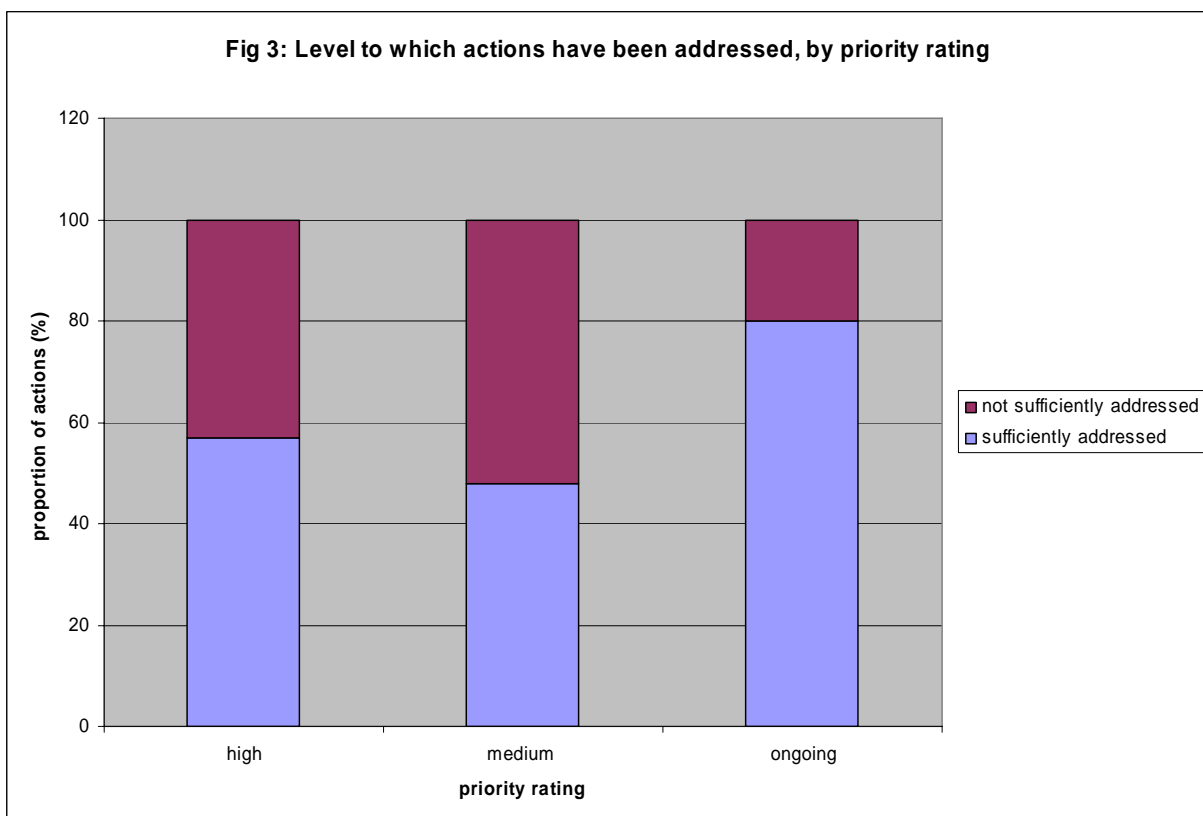


Fig 3 shows that there is no significant difference in implementation rate for high and medium actions (57% and 50% respectively). That is, the graph reflects the fact that lead agencies have not adopted the Plan’s priority ratings.

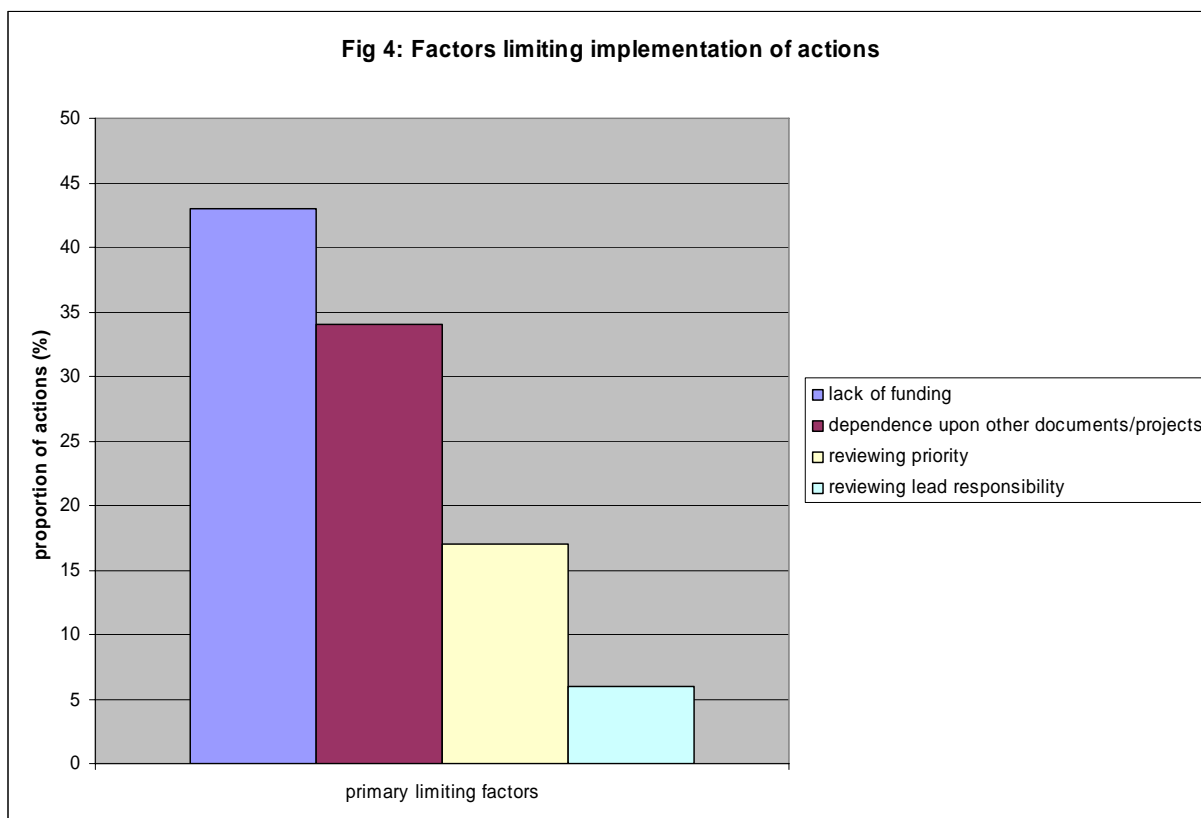
Primary factors limiting implementation of actions

There are 35 actions in the Plan which have not been addressed sufficiently to date. Four factors limiting implementation have been identified. They are outlined in Table 2 below, with descriptions, and with the proportion of the 35 actions that fall into this category.

Table 2: Factors limiting implementation of actions

limiting factor	description	proportion of 35 actions
LF (lack of funding)	Amount of funding required to sufficiently address action not available.	43%
DD (dependent upon other documents / projects)	Implementation of action dependent upon timeline or findings of other reports or implementation of other projects.	34%
RP (reviewing priority)	Lead agency reviewing importance of action.	17%
RL (reviewing lead responsibility)	The agency listed as lead in the Plan believes that another agency would be more appropriate to lead implementation.	6%

Figure 4 below provides a clear illustration of primary factors limiting implementation:



‘Lack of funding’ was the most commonly cited reason for lack of progress, offered for 15 actions that have not been sufficiently addressed to date. ‘Dependence upon other documents/projects’ was the limiting factor for 12 actions. Six actions were considered a lowered priority by lead agencies. Two actions were considered the responsibility of agencies other than the listed leads.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The COS reported that it does not find the Plan useful. The COM reported that it finds the local CAP process to be helpful, and would like to see it continue. However, it was acknowledged that as the majority of actions in the Plan are prescriptive, they should be picked up in the Apollo Bay Structure Plan from 2006, as well as other prescriptive documents. Key strategic issues could be addressed through a revised CW Regional Plan (due for review and revision in 2007/2008). The COM representative also mentioned that the use of a revised Regional document in place of the Plan would provide coastal managers with some context of management issues in other CW areas, and how they were being dealt with.

With nearly half of the total number of actions requiring address in the fourth year since the Plan's endorsement (21 of these are rated "high" priorities; 12 are rated "medium" priorities), the success of the Plan could be greatly improved. This would require improved uptake by lead agencies. Substantial communication efforts and significant updating of the document would be needed to achieve improved uptake. With only a year until the Plan's major review, this approach may not be an efficient use of funds.

The preparation of a Skenes Creek to Marengo Implementation Plan, with relevant outstanding strategic actions to be implemented in the year leading up to the document's major review, may be a more useful approach. It would involve a quick desk-top exercise to identify which outstanding actions are still valid (see the list that need to be reviewed). This document would be used in conjunction with a Central West Regional CAP Implementation Plan currently being prepared by the WCB, which will highlight outstanding regional priorities.

Communication of the role and relevance of the Skenes Creek to Marengo Implementation Plan to relevant lead agencies would be critical to its success in driving implementation of outstanding actions. This could be achieved by requiring that lead agencies sign a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines their responsibilities for implementation of actions in the implementation plan. Additionally, prescriptive actions could be transferred to the Apollo Bay Structure Plan (currently being prepared), the Apollo Bay Planning Scheme and other local planning documents.

It is recommended that the findings of this report are considered as part of the major review of the Plan in 2007/2008 to determine whether a subsequent Plan is required, or whether instruments other than the Plan are adequate to guide VCS implementation at the local level.

Should the major review outcomes support the development of a subsequent Skenes Creek to Marengo CAP, the following recommendations may promote a more successful process and document:

1. Improve communication of the document to lead agencies, including to councillors who make funding decisions.
2. Improve the document by:
 - a. Reducing the number of actions (eliminate unnecessary actions, including those that are prescriptive in nature).
 - b. Eliminate repetition by using an issues-based approach rather than one that is geographically-based.
 - c. Providing clearer priority ratings and related timelines for implementation.