

Ref: CO424/A.4.6

30 May 2008



The Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts
House of Representatives
Parliament House
PO Box 6021
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities

The Western Coastal Board (the Board) commends the Australian Government for initiating the Inquiry and appreciates the opportunity to provide a brief submission. We note the range of investigations that have occurred since the 1980s, the difficulties of implementing the generally sound recommendations that have arisen and the ongoing currency of many of the issues arising through previous inquiries. The Board looks forward to robust national debate on the priority issues for the Australian coast and the development of targeted and resourced programs to address issues.

We understand that the Victorian Government and the Victorian Coastal Council (VCC) are providing submissions to the Inquiry. While we do not seek to replicate the material provided in those submissions, we draw your attention to the significant material provided by people and organisations in our region in response to the draft Victorian Coastal Strategy (VCS) 2007 and available on the VCC's website at www.vcc.vic.gov.au. In this submission we seek to provide a regional perspective for the Inquiry's consideration.

As you are aware, the Western Coastal Board (the Board) was established under the Coastal Management Act 1995. Victoria's Regional Coastal Boards are the only dedicated regional coastal management and planning advisory bodies remaining in Australia, and provide a critical vehicle for implementation of and advocacy for the achievement of state coastal policy. The primary functions of this Board are set out in Section 12 of the Act and include:

- to develop Coastal Action Plans (CAPs) for land within the region;
- to provide advice to the Minister and Victorian Coastal Council on coastal development in the region and any other matters referred to it by the Minister or the VCC
- with the approval of the VCC, to prepare and publish guidelines for coastal planning and management in the region;
- to facilitate the implementation in the region of the VCS, CAPs and approved coastal guidelines;
- to facilitate public awareness of and consultation and involvement in the development and implementation of the VCS, CAPs and approved coastal guidelines for the region;
- to liaise with and encourage the co-operation of Government departments, municipal councils, public authorities, industry, community groups and persons and bodies involved in the planning and management of the region in developing and implementing strategic solutions to matters affecting the conservation and use of the region's coast.

The Board supports the recognition the Inquiry affords the challenge of population growth on the coast. While Victoria has a range of policy responses that recognise population growth, pressures resulting from the rate of growth and its cumulative impacts challenge the implementation of policies seeking to promote sustainable development. At present, all levels of government lack the ability to properly assess the social, economic and environmental consequences of coastal population growth

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and associated development and is compromising our ability to deliver sustainable development on the coast.

In response to the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, we provide the following brief points:

existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum

- Through the Coastal Management Act 1995, the Board has worked with all regional stakeholders to develop 10 Coastal Action Plans (CAPs) across the region to interpret and apply the Victorian Coastal Strategy at a regional and local scale. A Boating CAP for the whole region (Breamlea to the South Australian border) is currently being prepared. The statutory 5-year reviews of all CAPs will be completed during 2008. This may result in a “second generation” of CAPs that respond to the current operating environment, which includes a revised VCS (currently draft) and the emerging strategic policy context for natural resource management, coastal development pressures and climate change.
- The Board enjoys a constructive partnership with both the Glenelg Hopkins and Corangmite Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs). Joint meetings have been held between the Boards or organisations, and in November 2007 a meeting of all three Boards was held for the first time, resulting in the development of a joint submission to the draft Victorian Coastal Strategy 2007. The Board has two common members with the CCMA and had common membership with the GHCMA prior to July 2006.
- A Working Party has been established with the Board and the CCMA to provide opportunities for strategic alignment. The GHCMA established a Coastal and Marine Technical Working Group in partnership with the Board in 2003 that was designed to provide technical input to project proposals and improve knowledge sharing across organisations in the region.
- While a range of policies and programs provide direction for coastal and estuarine areas, there is still great room for improvement in addressing marine issues.
- Many existing policies and programs rely on effective partnerships for their implementation. However, there is a lack of resources to facilitate the effective operation of the partnerships, particularly at the organisational level. In conjunction with partners the Board is progressing a Priorities project, partly through federal funding, that seeks to provide an effective regional model for priority-setting and collaboration. It recognises that much of the implementation of coastal initiatives is delivered through partnerships that are forged through personal relationships between the officers and members of organisations, and seeks to improve organisational linkages and relationships to support greater partnership opportunities.

the environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources

- As noted earlier, the sustainable use of coastal resources is not being achieved through current mechanisms. A major contributor to this is the apparent failure of assessment mechanisms to adequately consider and compare the social, economic and environmental impacts of population growth. Resolution of sustainability issues in the context of population growth will not be achieved by constraining the development of approaches to environmental impacts alone. An holistic response is needed that recognises limits to growth, and the sustainable use of coastal resources must adequately consider economic and social values.
- Regardless of variations in national, state, regional and local carrying capacity, the fundamental question that requires investigation remains “What is a sustainable level of population for the coast?”

the impact of climate change on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise

- Coastal areas appear set to incur a range of impacts arising through climate change. In our region, these impacts range from the relatively obvious impacts of inundation to the challenges of relatively secure water supplies attracting not only migration but also significant regional tensions around water security for the region and adjacent areas. Land use change on the coast arising through climate change is also emerging as an important issue as both people and productive land uses move to areas with additional water security.
- Regional stakeholders are extremely interested in climate change and looking for leadership on the issue from all levels of government.

- Planning tools are required urgently to enable local government to avoid inappropriate development occurring in vulnerable areas. Such tools need to respond to issues of retreat and relocation of communities, and the need for ecosystems to migrate. Their development will benefit from substantial investment now to avoid costly responses to a suite of emerging climate change issues.

mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities

- Progressing this issue requires a greater awareness of the composition and functioning of coastal communities and a debate dedicated to exploring what sustainability might look like.
- The draft Victorian Coastal Strategy 2007 attempts to describe elements of sustainable coastal communities. While this is an exciting first step, there is a clear need to resource further investigation and promote research into the social, economic and environmental values of coastal communities and their value to the community at large
- Clarity is required around the role and function of local communities and regional communities.
- Education and engagement of communities will be critical and must be resourced.

governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone

- The need to improve integration, coordination and resourcing of coastal management has emerged time and again in our region through a variety of projects, programs and consultation, and the Board sees a need for strong leadership in these areas.
- As noted earlier, Regional Coastal Boards are unique in Australia. Our Board delivers exceptional value for investment in advocating and promoting the implementation of state coastal policy, acting as an independent broker for the resolution and progression of complex issues and providing sound strategic and operational advice for partner organisations on the coast. Importantly, the Board has the capacity to participate in issues with implications for both natural assets and communities, and uses its skills and experience to provide specifically coastal advice across a broad range of settings. Our scope includes issues that affect both public and private land.
- Our Board operates with a recurrent annual budget in the order of \$250,000 which employs 1.8 EFT staff, including a full-time Executive Officer and 4-day per week project and administrative support position. Projects are conducted with a range of partners, and recent project funding has provided for the employment of an additional 0.8EFT Project Manager.
- While the Board operates with a coastal focus, we rely on partnerships with a range of local, regional and state organisations and individuals to progress issues. The ability of our stakeholders to deliver sustainable outcomes on the coast, and thereby improve environmental, economic and social values, is clearly constrained by a lack of capacity across all organisations. There is an urgent need for greater resourcing to deliver the changes required to the management of our coastline to secure the future productivity and prosperity of our region.
- All stakeholders will require capacity building initiatives and professional development in order to develop, implement and evaluate appropriate responses to the myriad issues facing coastal areas.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry. If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised above please contact Steve Blackley, Executive Officer, on (03) 5226 4925.

Yours sincerely



Lynn Murrell OAM
Chairman