



Priorities for Regional Collaboration: Coastal Planning and NRM (Coastal Priorities)

Executive Summary

Project Rationale

The Western Coastal Region extends from Thompson's Creek in the east to the South Australian border in the west, including the municipalities of Surf Coast, Colac Otway, Corangamite, Moyne, Warrnambool and Glenelg. It includes the bulk of the Barwon-South West administrative region and the Corangamite catchment region, plus the entire Glenelg Hopkins catchment region.

Through this project, coastal decision makers, Chief Executives, senior officers, professional staff and technical experts have agreed that there is a clear need for a dedicated process to facilitate improved collaboration, investment and alignment between organisations with common interests and complimentary responsibilities for delivering integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) through coastal planning and natural resource management. This project was designed to pilot a process to work towards meeting that regional need.

The Process

The project was designed to be as inclusive as possible and harness the skills and expertise within the region's public service organisations, and benefited from the interest and participation of many organisations and their representatives and staff. Several delays were experienced to improve the project and resulting process. The stages of the project included:

- 1) High Level and Investors workshops in 2007 to confirm the need for the project and its scope
- 2) An Institutions and Priorities Review to establish current roles, assets and priorities
- 3) Development of a collaborative priority-setting methodology
- 4) Professional and technical workshops to promote understanding of organisational priorities, build relationships and confirm the process and inputs
- 5) A Chief Executives / senior managers workshop to confirm themes, issues and opportunities
- 6) Convening a series of working groups to progress regional statements for priority themes
- 7) A Final Report outlining the project need, method and opportunities arising from priority themes

A fundamental challenge to the process was the new Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008 being released after the workshops that set the themes and prior to working group deliberations.

The Priority Themes and Projects

The Coastal Priorities project has delivered a priority list of themes with suggested initiatives to deliver on issues arising from those themes. The themes include:

- Identifying and assessing coastal natural and built assets
- Positioning the region to respond to climate change
- Addressing the pressures of population growth and development
- Clarifying roles and facilitating collaborative arrangements
- Improving the awareness and engagement of communities and stakeholders

The initiatives identified have been developed through the application of a logical analysis that considers the current situation, the gaps and the opportunities. All aim to collaboratively develop systems to support consistent decision making around coastal NRM and planning, particularly as the threats of

population/development pressure and climate change become more evident. All initiatives will require further work to be progressed, including explicit support from participating organisations for capacity and resourcing to effect them.

The need for collaborative and consistent approaches has been well supported in the priority setting process, with partners identifying the benefits of capitalising on the effort, knowledge and resources of their regional counterparts. The act of bringing regional stakeholders together to share knowledge and understanding of issues and each other's roles in integrated coastal zone management has also been recognised as a significant benefit for the region.

There is obvious overlap between several themes and the opportunities they provide. There are likely to be several opportunities to generate higher order projects with outcomes across themes.

The Priority Projects that were put forward can be consolidated as follows, and for these initiatives to be progressed, commitment of resources by regional partners is essential.

A consistent Asset and Threat Framework (including monitoring of asset condition)

A collaborative research program for

- assets, threats and systems
- climate change impacts
- demographic changes and development pressures

A regional approach to

- climate change response, including the potential for a Coastal Action Plan
- coastal planning, including engagement with the Regional Strategic Planning initiative and TBL assessment of development opportunities
- education and capacity building

Refining the Coastal Priorities process

The benefits of an annual cycle

The Coastal Priorities project was intended to form the basis of an annual cycle of priority-setting and collaborative action and investment across the region to complement organisational planning and budgeting processes. The annual cycle would focus on regional coastal priorities and ensure a high level of currency and ownership among regional stakeholders. The Western Coastal Board has committed to establish the feasibility of a further annual cycle for 2009-10.

The annual priority-setting and collaborative process is expected to:

- Improve the development, alignment and implementation of State, regional and local strategic planning initiatives such as the Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008, local planning schemes, Regional Catchment Strategies and sub-strategies, and Coastal Action Plans.
- Facilitate the development and alignment of organisational strategic plans e.g. sustainability strategies between and within organisations
- Contribute to greater organisational ownership of and engagement in collaborative processes
- Support the identification of collaborative opportunities for on-ground/operational activities
- Improve collaboration for external and internal funding opportunities and investment
- Add value to other internal organisational and collaborative priority-setting processes
- Strengthen organisational and institutional approaches to ICZM, and
- Build the capacity of the region to collaborate on, plan for and implement initiatives.

The Coastal Priorities project has been a pilot. While the foundations of an annual cycle have been developed through this project, the annual cycle itself needs to be refined and confirmed with regional stakeholders for the 2009-10 period and beyond through a clear process based on continuous improvement.