



## **Response of the Victorian Caravan Parks Association to the Western Regional Coastal Plan 2015-2020 Draft**

The Victorian Caravan Parks Association (VicParks) is the peak body for Victoria's caravan park owners and managers, providing one united industry voice for its 390 members.

The caravan park industry in Victoria contributes \$475 million to the state economy each year and employs more than 2,500 people in regional and metropolitan areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft plan. The Board is to be commended for its comprehensive cover of the issues to be managed in order to ensure that these vital coastal environments remain for the enjoyment of future generations.

VicParks does not have the expertise to comment on directly on many of the aspects of the plan which require specific resource management capability.

However we wish to make comment on Chapter 4 of the document entitled "*Managing Regional Visitation Pressures and Maximising Access*", and in particular, the section 3 (b) of that chapter, which recommends the identification of vulnerable parts of the landscape where demand might be reduced by encouraging visitors towards alternative sites. This chapter acknowledges the challenge of managing periods of high demand and avoiding damage caused by congestion and over-use.

My comments relate to the relative threat to the environment from uncontrolled camping access. The Western coastal area covers some of the most scenic and beautiful coastal locations in the state. This area of the coast is an iconic destination that is on the MUST DO list for many interstate and international travellers who journey to the Great Ocean Road specifically to see the magnificent coast-line and its many structures.

The issues described in this chapter outline a series of procedures and guidelines for regulating access to coastal land and achieving a balance between providing access for users whilst protecting natural values. In general, the document appears to assume that all access can be regulated by providing further services such as improved boardwalks, balloted access, and the provision of shuttle transport from nominated parking areas, to name a few.

However the Draft Plan has not addressed the issue of uncontrolled camping in coastal areas. Our members report a growing incidence of so-called "free campers" who choose to stay in coastal areas for a number of reasons that might include a genuine love of the outdoor environment in a coastal location of unique beauty, or possibly to avoid accommodation costs in a hotel, motel, or

commercial caravan park. Such unregulated access at popular sites can cause problems of litter and waste management, as well as environmental degradation of fragile sites. The unsupervised access can also be a source of great irritation to local ratepayers who resent campers using a special resource in this way. The 2012 document "Climate Adaptation in Coastal Caravan Parks – Report 2 – P. 10 reports that "residents see their involvement in protecting the coast as very important"; our direct experience is that locals become irate when they see visitors abuse the environment that is so special to residents.

Managing this problem will not be easy. Councils do not seem to have the manpower resources to patrol and manage this illegal camping. In the absence of a determined effort by Councils to manage this issue, an abundance of websites have been developed to advertise and promote the location of free camping sites to both domestic and international visitors, and the problem will continue to pose a threat to the ongoing management of popular sites.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer these comments. For further information or comment, please call me on [REDACTED]

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Victorian Caravan Parks Association

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