



To: Coastcare Victoria

coastcare.victoria@delwp.vic.gov.au

24 January 2020

Submission Re: the DRAFT Coastcare Victoria Strategy 2020-2025

The Port Phillip EcoCentre welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the DRAFT Coastcare Victoria Strategy 2020-2025.

Who we are

The Port Phillip EcoCentre (EcoCentre) is a leading community-managed organisation with a dedicated team of scientists, educators and volunteers, who design and implement innovative environmental programs. Our expertise is Port Phillip Bay health, its catchments and the urban ecology of Greater Melbourne, within the traditional lands and waters of the Kulin Nation. We deliver specialist education, scientific research and community action projects with over 250 cross-sector partners. We are the home of the Port Phillip Baykeeper, an independent voice for Port Phillip Bay. The Baykeeper is part of the International Waterkeeper Alliance, a global network of 340 grassroots-supported Waterkeepers in 44 countries.

Please find below our comments and suggestions to the DRAFT Coastcare Vitoria Strategy 2020-2025 (the DRAFT).

1) Comments on Figure 1: Contributing Communities

Victoria's Marine and Coastal Environments (p.4) provides a good summary of the 'values' associated with the Victorian coast, concluding with "Stewardship and protection of Victoria's marine and coastal environment is vital, and the critical contribution of communities cannot be understated".

However, the DRAFT contains an outdated (2010) measure of, or reference to the total in-kind and financial contributions made by community volunteers and organisations that work to care for the Victorian coast and marine environment. We note that since 2010 the EcoCentre's citizen science and practical environmental protection activities conducted with schools, community and corporate groups has quadrupled in volunteer contribution to a total of 20,357 hours in FY18-19; and since 2010 Beach Patrol Australia has amassed more than 3,800 members who conduct beach cleans each month.

Although *community stewardship of coast and marine values* directly contributes to protecting all of the 'values' listed in Figure 1, *community stewardship* is not included in Figure 1.

Similarly, there is no reference to citizen science, research, education or hands-on conservation action in Figure 1. Community engagement in citizen science has seen increasing popularity in Australia. As an example, EcoCentre's workshop "Citizen Science- how to design quality projects" was the second most popular workshop at DELWP's 2019 Victorian Marine and Coastal Forum.

These are significant omissions which could easily be rectified. We suggest including an additional heading in Figure 1 as follows:

Contributing Communities

- Vegetation management and monitoring;
- litter and pest species control;
- citizen science and research;
- education and interpretation.

While we acknowledge that the DRAFT does list actions similar to the abovementioned under **Victorians Valuing the Coast** on page 19, we believe that omission of these actions from Figure 1 significantly understates the value of community stewardship and substantial financial and in-kind contributions made by volunteers and community organisations.

2) Comments on Figure 1: Rest, reflection and personal wellbeing

Figure 1 provides no reference to the value of coasts and marine environments to a mentally, physically and spiritually healthy community. Worldwide, there is much scientific evidence of the benefit of living near and engaging with blue spaces, to individuals and communities. Engagement with blue spaces makes people happier and healthier, stimulates physical exercise, mental health and deep feelings of connection and belonging¹.

On April 3rd 2017, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP and Minister for Health the Hon. Jill Hennessy MP published the Victorian Memorandum for Health and Nature, recognising that "There is a strong connection between the health of the natural environment and human wellbeing. There are diverse benefits for all being in the outdoors, including physical, psychological, cultural and social health and wellbeing."²

In the State Environmental Protection Policy (Waters), Cultural and Spiritual Values are listed under 'Beneficial Uses of Water'³. However, in a few months from now, the SEPP (Waters) will be subsumed in EPA Victoria's new Environmental Reference Standard (ERS); and cease to exist in its current form. The Cultural and Spiritual Values are the only Beneficial Uses of Water value that will *not* be adopted into the new ERS. The EPA states: "...it is considered that in achieving or maintaining the objectives for other environmental values (for example water dependent ecosystems and

¹ Nichols, W. J. (2015) *Blue Mind, the surprising science that shows how being near, in, on or under water can make you happier, healthier and better at what you do*. Back Bay Books

² <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/victorian-memorandum-for-health-and-nature>

³ Environment Protection Act 1970 - State Environmental Protection Policy (Waters)

species, water-based recreation, and traditional owner cultural values) would also be maintained”⁴, making this value implicit rather than a value worthy of being highlighted.

The beach is where we go to rest, rejuvenate and reflect. We therefore propose that Figure 1 in the Coastcare Strategy should also include ‘Rest, reflection and personal wellbeing’ under **Recreation**.

3) Comments on **Why is Coastcare important?** (p.9)

The text in this section is primarily on the benefits to volunteers from participating in Coastcare activities. While all of these benefits are beyond question, it must be noted that the importance of Coastcare in creating opportunities to engage the wider community warrants mention here. We suggest amending the existing wording with the following additions:

The important work of volunteers contributes to healthy, dynamic and biodiverse marine and coastal environments which are valued, utilised and relied upon by Victorians. They help to protect cultural heritage, ecosystems, and species for their intrinsic value, and for people to enjoy now and in the future. Environmental volunteers are often motivated to contribute by a special connection to their local environment, landscape or community; and, by a commitment to shared responsibility to maintain an inspiring and liveable environment for future generations.

We note that Appendix B (referred to in this section) is missing from the DRAFT.

4) Comments on **Program Delivery** section (p.17)

Suggested additional roles under **Volunteers** are:

- liaise with relevant management agencies to ensure best practice and works approval;
- convene the community around issues and solutions *and advocate for positive environmental change*;
- produce local media to generate wider community engagement, awareness and appreciation.

5) Program sponsors and funders (pg. 18)

‘Program sponsors and funders - Includes DELWP (as primary sponsor), government at all levels, corporate and local business supporters and philanthropic partners....’ In view of their massive and fundamentally important contributions, why are community organisations not included here?

6) Priorities for Action 4.5

On a similar note, in **Enabling Strategy Delivery** priority for action 4.5 would ideally include community organisations:

- Facilitators explore developing / in local working groups of counterparts in relevant agencies, community organisations and programs to identify and capitalise on opportunities for collaboration, information sharing and efficiencies for programs and volunteers.

⁴ DELWP & EPA Victoria (2019) Impact Assessment – Proposed Environmental Reference Standard

7) Engaging more CALD Communities in caring for our coasts (Goal 2.4, pg 15)

A topic that arose during the panel discussion of the 2019 Victorian Marine and Coastal Forum was the lack of cultural diversity among people actively caring for the coast. According to the 2016 Census, 28.4% of Victoria's population were born overseas and 26% speak a language other than English at home⁵.

Coastcare has a great opportunity to engage more multicultural groups, but we believe this is not explicit enough in the Priorities for Action. 'Diverse and inclusive' could be described to be more specific, like in 3.1 Priorities for Action. CALD communities should be more actively connected with, in addition to engagement via Summer by the Sea.

We propose to more explicitly integrate the participation of CALD communities in the Priorities for Action across the Strategic Plan 2020-2025, by seeking advice and guidance from the Victorian Multicultural Commission and utilising the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*.

8) Additional comments

The EcoCentre endorses the focus on, and acknowledgement of local volunteer groups that plan and conduct virtually all of their activities, including governance, funding submissions and acquittals without the support of paid staff. However, we believe that the capacity for regional not-for-profit organisations (such as the EcoCentre) to achieve substantial practical outcomes and build important cross-sector relationships with potential collaborators is not fully recognised. Similarly, Coastcare Facilitators are key (non-voluntary) enablers for regional not-for-profit networking. They enable cross-sector communication and partnerships, and multiply in-kind contribution, innovation, and resources to deliver more impactful projects for Victoria.

In conclusion, as long-term collaborators, the EcoCentre believes Coastcare is a valuable program that should continue in the future. Although this point is outside of the scope of this review, we support future government decisions to increase the funding for this program, in order to deliver the Coastcare Victoria Strategy 2020-2025 in the best way possible.

Regards,



April Seymore
Executive Officer

⁵ The State of Victoria Department of Premier and Cabinet (2017) Victoria's Diverse Population: 2016 Census.