

The Penguin

Newsletter of Phillip Island Conservation Society - Fourth Quarter, December 2001

VicRoads threat to roadside trees

It would be difficult to imagine a proposal with a bigger impact on landscape and environment values on Phillip Island than that put forward by VicRoads and due to be considered by the Bass Coast Shire Council early in the new year.

VicRoads wants to increase the width of the main Tourist Road through Five Ways and down to the start of Thompson Avenue to at least **12 metres**.

This would make it a "Standard A" four lane road. In the process they intend to remove between 150-300 mature indigenous trees and large areas of Swamp Melaleuca from the existing roadside reserve.

The road widening would begin at the Back Beach Road turn off and continue for the whole length of roadway past the Koala Conservation Centre, through Five Ways, over



the hill past Gap Road and Wimbledon Heights, and down past the wildlife park to the entrance to Cowes at the Ventnor Road/ Cowes-Rhyll Road intersection.

So far, VicRoads have offered no convincing justification for this proposal. In examining the environmental impact, VicRoad's flora and fauna assessment consultant BIOSIS concludes that this project will reduce the extent of vegetation/habitat and wildlife corridor and



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possible cause a decrease in population sizes of some significant flora and fauna species; lead to the loss of food trees for koalas; and have a highly significant local impact on the remnant vegetation "as the study area substantially contributes to the biodiversity of the Island".

BIOSIS adds that "...there are few or no measures that would significantly reduce (mitigate) impacts associated with...the proposed road widening." The impact this proposal will have on landscape values and amenity for local residents, tourists and visitors has been ignored by VicRoads, as have the likely effects of an increase in traffic speed in this area.

We all know that VicRoads is a powerful organisation used to getting its own way with road projects. It is therefore important that as many individuals as possible submit written objections to this proposal and send them to:

Manager of Planning
Bass Coast Shire Council
P.O. Box 118 WONTHAGGI, Vic. 3992

Objections should be written **ASAP** and should include the words "I wish to be heard" and quote application Nos. 00585 and 00586.

Be on the alert for public meetings in Cowes on this issue.

Meanwhile, back at VCAT...

Our Society appeared again at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal recently, (November 26 and 27) in an effort to protect approximately 1.6 hectares of remnant indigenous vegetation adjoining the foreshore in Settlement Road, between Saltwater Creek and Red Rocks. We had decided to conduct the case ourselves without legal representation because of the high cost of recent appeals (the Isle of Wight hotel and South Coast hotel cases).

Our appeal was against a Council decision to approve a five-lot subdivision of the 4-hectare area which has been zoned Residential 1 for at least 25 years, but never developed. Two of the proposed lots were either side of a Melaleuca wetland area and in the middle of a Coastal Banksia woodland. For many years locals have seen swamp wallabies, echidnas and koalas in the area and bird observers have reported seeing at least 36 native bird species here.

Seven months before the proposal went before Council for approval, the Shire's Environment Manager warned that:

- the site had various types of important vegetation communities and that a detailed flora survey was needed
- that there should be no discharge of pollution into Saltwater Creek
- that the significant wet area with swamp paperbark acted as a cleaning agent for waters into the Saltwater Creek
- that the wetlands and drainage lines should be retained

- that the foreshore boundary should be fenced to prevent additional access tracks through the beach area
- and importantly, that development should be restricted to areas of low conservation value.

While Council did try to address some of these issues in their conditions of permit including an insistence that the Melaleuca wetland area be transferred into Council control, unfortunately the sub-division layout was approved prior to any flora or fauna survey having been carried out which inevitably resulted in development being allowed in the high conservation value areas. This was the fundamental problem.

At VCAT we also emphasized the habitat value of the area and drew attention to the scarcity and fragmented nature of the remaining remnant vegetation on Phillip Island and hence the importance of maintaining the integrity of this area.

As a result of our VCAT appeal (and before a decision is handed down) we have achieved the following:

- a professionally conducted (but still only preliminary) fauna survey of the area, released by the proponents only after a request from the VCAT Chairperson mid-way through proceedings
- a more detailed vegetation survey, also only tabled during the appeal
- the involvement of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment at both a mediation session and the appeal hearing. Their evidence included the likelihood that *two of the vegetation communities/associations on the site have state significance!*
- a chance to present some alternative sub-division designs which would protect the environmental values of the area
- an awareness on the part of everyone involved in the hearing, that our local Planning Scheme has a long way to go before it will give adequate protection to valuable areas of remnant vegetation/habitat on the Island. **This should now be a high priority for PICS.**

Practically every document produced over the past 25 years examining the environment of Phillip Island has called for the urgent protection of the small fragmented remnants of indigenous vegetation which still remain, and yet it appears they are still being put at risk and need to be defended against poor planning decisions.

Thanks to: John Eddy and Geoff Glare for detailed vegetation surveys; Leon Costermans for comments about the impact of development (and Peter Fensham for good advice); Elizabeth Shaw for bird observing and two days at VCAT (a feisty performance under cross-examination!), Graeme Burgan for his evidence, Patsy Hunt and Moragh Mackay for their expert reports, Diane Baird for moral support, and of course Margaret Hancock and our good selves (Johnsons) for two more days at VCAT and weeks of living and breathing the issue! And if you want the uncensored highlights of the

hearing, speak to our good selves.

And the verdict is...

At time of writing, we have yet to hear the result of our appeal. But you can find out by going to VCAT's web page and get it hot off the screen when it is published at <http://www.vcat.vic.gov.au/vcatplanninglist.htm>, then find "decisions/judgements". By the way, our Isle of Wight decision is still on VCAT's web page from this time last year – it makes good reading.

More good reading, if you want to understand VCAT's aims and procedures, is Senior Member Jane Monk's address on their Open Day, at which Our Good Selves were in attendance. Ms Monk was Chairperson in our Settlement Road appeal.

Stop Press

SUCCESS AT VCAT!!

Tribunal members Jane Monk and Anthony Liston handed down directions on December 12. We have been successful in protecting the high conservation value areas from development. The Council was criticised for failing to heed the advice of its Environmental Manager and the DNRE, and our alternative plans were commended as 'having a number of positive attributes'. Back to VCAT for final determination on January 10.

Watching Hooded Plovers

Volunteers are now registering and indicating their availability for roster duty over summer for another Hooded Plover Watch



attempt. The results over the last couple of seasons have been heartening, and it has become a standard summer activity for many members of our Society.

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It can be a very pleasant xperience in eco-education at the "coal face", so to speak. Most beach visitors are delighted to be informed about the effort to save the Hooded Plover from local extinction. For more information, contact Jon Fallaw at the Phillip Island Nature

Park on 5952 1307 or koala@waterfront.net.au .

Letter from the President

Dear Members,

Suddenly it's almost Christmas, almost the end of the year, and all the usual alarm bells are ringing for 'The Penguin' deadlines! And who hasn't done what she out to have done? So, here goes...

It's 6.30am on Saturday, December 14th and I'm waiting for the telephone to ring – it will be ABC Regional Radio, and an interview about the recent oil spill. The good news is that fifty of the penguins went back to sea yesterday; the bad news is that one hundred and eighty-two remain in the Rehabilitation Centre. A tremendous effort is being made to make these penguins 'seaworthy' as there are many chicks waiting in their burrows for meals. We are very fortunate to have highly skilled Nature Park staff to lead the 'clean up' operation, and a group of trained volunteers – washing and feeding penguins is a very labour-intensive job! If you would like to join the volunteers, watch out for news of the next training program.

Last Saturday, sixty-five people had an inspiring day at the 'Pride of Place' Convention. From 10 January 2002 until 3 February 2002, you will have an opportunity to look at display boards in Cowes and San Remo, which show some of the ideas for the design framework for the whole of Phillip Island, San Remo, and back to the Anderson roundabout. Yes, I know we've done it all before – more than once – but this time the work is much more comprehensive AND it is backed by the State Government. So, please take time to study the display boards, and then lodge a written submission.

Penny Manning, Rose Thomas and I had the good fortune to be at the very first gathering in the new Visitor Centre at Churchill Island. The building is a joy, just right, both inside and out, so put it on your visiting list during the 'time off' period that is coming.

We will have a busy evening on Saturday 12 January 2002. TWO meetings (minutes available from the Secretary) AND the launch of the PICS website by Peter Atkins. We first knew Peter during the Saltwater Creek days. Peter was a founding member of the Environment Defender's Office. At present, Peter is the DNRE Manager, Statutory Planning Policy and co-ordination.

I wish you a peaceful and joyful Christmas, some 'R and R' and lots of energy for whatever PICS will be doing in 2002.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Hancock.

Birds at risk in Rhyll Inlet?

On November 9 at the Phillip Island Nature Park, Ray Lievers hosted a wide-ranging discussion with representatives of "stakeholder groups" on the future recreational uses of the Rhyll Inlet consistent with maintaining the wildlife values of this sensitive area.

A strong and consistent message expressed during the afternoon was the importance of not allowing any disturbance of the birdlife (including the international migratory waders protected by the RAMSAR/JAMBA/CAMBA agreements) which use the inlet.

Considering that permission has apparently already been given for a commercial tourist operator to bring his large vessel into the inlet for close viewing opportunities, there are clearly some conflicting issues to be urgently resolved here. Observers have witnessed this vessel disturbing birds already.

Newspaper extracts from PICS archives showing the Society's intense interest in the area are available in the hard copy of the newsletter at the Phillip Island Library or from the PICS Secretary.

Subscriptions

It's 2002 subscription payment time! Please use the [membership form](#), with space for your late 2001 membership payment and/or donation as appropriate. Thank you.

Diary Dates

Saturday, January 12

PICS Annual General Meeting. 8 pm, Heritage Centre, Cowes

Sunday, January 13

Working Bee at Red Rocks. 10 am, end of Red Rocks Road, Ventnor. BYO gloves, hat and lunch and enjoy a shared picnic afterwards.

Saturday, February 16

PICS Seasonal Walk. 2 pm, Contact M. Johnson (9439 9853 or 5956 8327) for meeting place.

February/March

Matthew Flinders Roadshow, Churchill Island. Display of log books, sextants and other memorabilia from Matthew Flinders' voyages.

Contact numbers for PICS

President: Margaret Hancock Phone 5952 2557

Secretary and Newsletter Editor: Margaret Johnson Phone 9439 9853 or 5956 8327

And also

Thank you to our newsletter sponsor **Kevron Plastics** (Tel 03 9387 9811), Australia's Leading Manufacturer of Plastic Identification Products.

The hard copy of our newsletter contains some articles that are not included as part of the online version. The PICS newsletter is available at the Phillip Island Library or by contacting the Newsletter Editor Margaret Johnson on 9439 9853 or 5956 8327.

The articles from this issue included in the hard copy are:

A Beachcomber Threatened by Bob Baird
Western Port – Pressures on a Ramsar site, reprinted from *The Harrier*

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