

An Island Worth Conserving

A History of the Phillip Island
Conservation Society
1968-2008

Christine Grayden

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHS:

Front cover – clockwise from top: Pricking out for Bicentennial planting; “Camping Out”, Children’s Environment Morning; PICS and other objectors at VCAT; John Jansson - Rhyll Inlet; Mike Cleeland and Graeme Burgan with trees for community planting; Eric Bird – North Shore.

Back cover – Keith Grayden at Cape Woolamai. Photo: John Eddy

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The various members who have contributed photographs

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Christine Grayden, 12 April, 2008

INTRODUCTION

Land mass, 10,000 hectares; coastline, 101 kilometres long – *PHILLIP ISLAND!* Yes, a small island, which probably has been the subject of more governmental reports, more research, and more theses, than any other similarly-sized part of Australia!

Perhaps this has happened because of its clearly articulated physical boundary; perhaps because of its many facets long advertised as the ‘Natural Attraction’; perhaps because of the social mix of ‘locals’, holiday makers, holiday home owners, new permanent residents, and the ceaseless flow of visitors from within Australia and from overseas. Whatever the reason, Phillip Island is a special place for many people. It’s a place which needs special care as the demands for urbanization grow, and the need is realised for places of true ‘re-creation’ for nearby metropolitan dwellers.

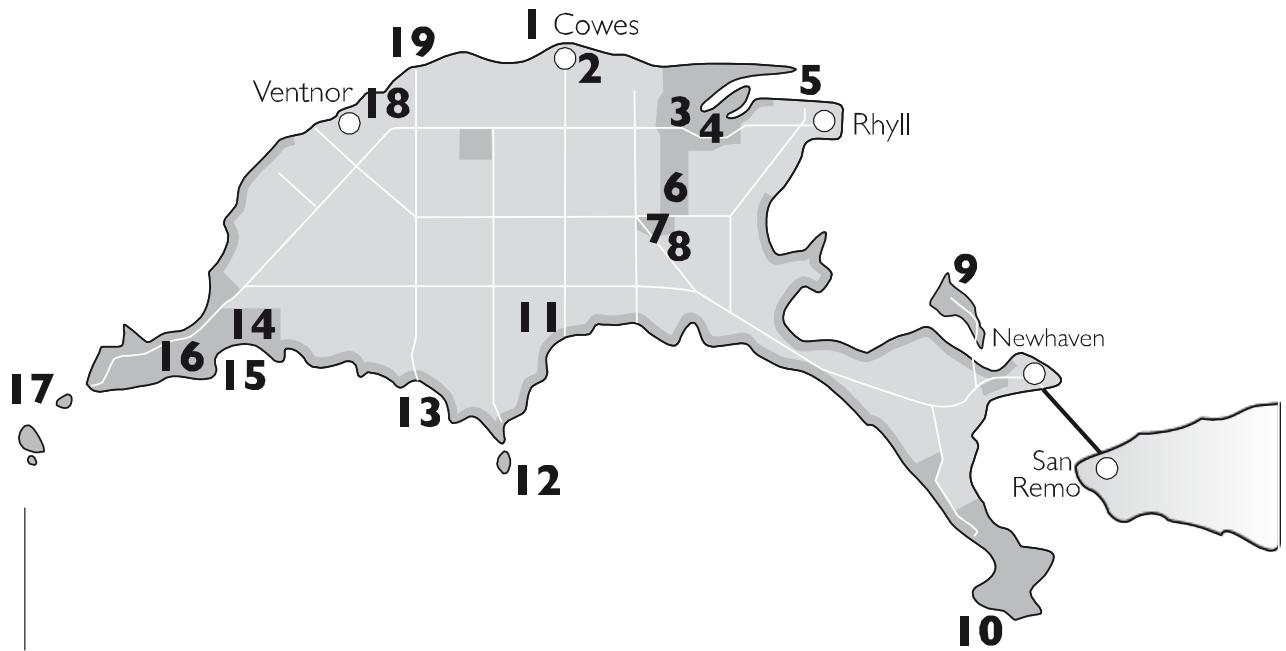
An Island Worth Conserving records the efforts, since 1968, of a wide range of people, with a wide range of interests, who have shared, and continue to share, a love of Phillip Island. Forty years ago our first Secretary, Ken Pound, chose the motto ‘Save Wildlife Today for Tomorrow’. Since then we’ve learned the lesson that ‘Save Wildlife’ really means ‘Save Habitat’, and that ‘Save Habitat’ means that, first, we must get planning use and management right for the land, the waterways, and the sea which surrounds us.

So, here we are, forty years on! Special thanks go to our author, Christine Grayden, who has worked her way through seemingly endless minutes, correspondence, newspaper reports, and recalcitrant sources who have kept saying: “I haven’t time now, I’ll do it next week!”

We also thank the Bass Coast Shire Council for their financial support which has made possible the publication of this record of forty years of action for the environment.

We can rejoice in the many good things which have been achieved. We can look forward with enthusiasm and determination to the challenges which lie ahead, and we hope, that wherever you live, and whatever is your particular conservation cause, you will find encouragement in what has been achieved here. As conservationists, we may not always succeed, but we can make a huge difference if we dare to ‘have a go’!

Margaret Hancock,
President,
Phillip Island Conservation Society Inc.
12 April, 2008.



Phillip Island

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 North Shore | 11 Grand Prix Circuit |
| 2 Jetty Triangle / Isle of Wight Hotel | 12 Pyramid Rock |
| 3 Tip/Transfer station | 13 Berry's Beach |
| 4 Conservation Hill | 14 Swan Lake |
| 5 Rhyll Inlet | 15 Penguin Parade |
| 6 Oswin Roberts Reserve | 16 Summerlands |
| 7 Koala Conservation Centre | 17 The Nobbies |
| 8 Barb Martin Bushbank | 18 Saltwater Creek |
| 9 Churchill Island | 19 Red Rocks |
| 10 Cape Woolamai |
Phillip Island Nature Park |

Chapter 1 BAPTISM OF FIRE

Phillip Island, 1968: scattered, remnant trees on gentle hills and along dirt roads; patches of tea tree amidst the gorse and boxthorn; fibro shacks, caravans on chocks and outside ‘dunnies’ on bare blocks in windswept subdivisions. Minimum public toilets, recreation reserves, made roads, car parking. A myriad of haphazard tracks from houses to the beach. Burning of farmland and rookeries. Coastal erosion. Grazing of sheep and cattle right down to the beach. Uncontrolled shooting. Barely controlled housing subdivision development. No practical protection of flora and fauna outside the immediate Penguin Parade area and the koala reserves. A developing, exploitative tourist industry. A conservative council dominated by second and third generation Phillip Islanders.

Hardly a promising social or political landscape for the formation of one of the first grass-roots conservation societies in the nation. However, as with so many effective community groups whose roots are strong and who end up staying the distance, the Phillip Island Conservation Society, or PICS, was started by one extraordinary individual. That individual was Ken Pound. In freakishly favourable circumstances, Ken provided the catalyst for many like-minded individuals then on Phillip Island as both permanent residents and holiday-home owners, to achieve remarkable and far-reaching results.

Ken’s early life led him to seek solace in nature, and his early working life on Phillip Island involved him in showing the orphaned boys of St Paul’s Boys’ Home at Newhaven how a love and knowledge of nature could help them too. Ken took advantage of Phillip Island’s prolific bird life, beaches and core of reserves to take the boys on excursions where they recorded their sightings. In this way he became known as ‘the bird man’, and something of a crank, a fanatic. This view was reinforced by his performance of the first act of radical environmental activism on Phillip Island when he joined the end of the New Year’s Eve parade in 1966 wearing a necklace of shot seagulls he had found that morning at the Tip. Beside him walked an impromptu accomplice wearing a sign: “No New Year for these birds!”

It was therefore no surprise to anyone that Ken should mount a petition against firearms on Phillip Island, which yielded over 3,000 signatures over the 1966-67 holiday season – indicative of a groundswell of conservation concern amongst the general public. When the local Jaycees, faced with a ‘conservation’ theme for 1968, required a delegate to attend their conference in Marysville entitled ‘Conservation Design for Living in our Environment’, they invited Ken to join and attend the conference.¹

On 21 March 1968, an article appeared in the *Wonthaggi Sentinel* headed: “Big Money Ready for Rhyll Area”, with a plan providing “for a safe boat harbour and marina, dredging and developing of apparent wasteland around the tidal Inlet for boating facilities”. Ken, who knew the Rhyll Inlet area better than virtually anyone on Phillip Island, responded the following week with a letter, which was headed: “Development not wanted”.² At this time Ken (who later became a PICS Life Member) had long dreamed of a conservation group for Phillip Island, and realizing that he needed an existing prestigious group behind him to aid its formation, asked the Jaycees to convene a meeting for the purpose. An article hinting at this possibility appeared in the *Wonthaggi Express* on 2 May 1968 headed: “Conservation League for Phillip Island?”

The meeting was held on a cold night in the St Philip's Parish Hall on Saturday, 11 May 1968, and 33 people attended. A constitution was adopted and the committee appointed. Brook Morgan-Payler, a farmer, became President; Vern Johnson, proprietor of Kingston Gardens Zoo became Vice President; Jack Oswin, farmer, became Junior Vice President (later a recipient of a BEM); Ken Pound, then employed by the council, became Secretary; Committee members were Keith Grayden (later a Life Member), Jim Cook, Cr Reg Orr, Coral Oswin-Wood (later a Life Member), and Nan Hopkins. Hilton Chadwick, hardware manager and Jaycee, became Treasurer at the second meeting.³ The first newsletter, which featured the slogan that Ken coined and which still guides PICS – ‘Save Wildlife Today for Tomorrow’ – was dated 15 May 1968.⁴

Then on 23 May 1968 in the *Wonthaggi Sentinel* there appeared another article: “Rhyll to be another Eildon?” accompanied by an artist’s drawing of a proposed three million dollar marina development at Rhyll; actually at the Rhyll Inlet (then known as ‘The Nits’). This area of saltmarsh, sand spits, mangroves, mudflats and woodland is an important habitat for migratory waders and marine species and has since received State significance ranking for its geomorphological (site # 178)⁵ and zoological (site #59) features,⁶ and is part of the RAMSAR agreement to protect the world’s migratory waders. Now managed by Phillip Island Nature Parks, whose website describes it as “a truly magnificent pocket...comprising tranquil saltmarshes, mangroves and tidal flats with views stretching across the Inlet over Western Port”.⁷ The Inlet was even at that time reserved in the planning scheme for flora and fauna.

The development had been mooted by Jim Mitchell, then a Phillip Island Shire Councillor. The Phillip Island Shire Council approved the plans and sent them to the Town and Country Planning Board, ostensibly for comment, but in reality for approval. That was the signal for the fight to begin.

The fledgling society went swiftly into action. The ‘pre-emptive strike’ committee meeting on 15 May adopted an effective course of action including:

- A protest meeting held in the Parish Hall, Friday 14 June.
- Relevant bodies were written to, expressing PICS’s strong objection to the proposal.
- The influential photo-journalist, Graham Pizzey, was enlisted to publicise the need to preserve the Nits through the *Herald* newspaper.
- 3,000 handbills were printed publicizing the cause and the protest meeting, the reverse side being a membership application form.
- The local press was contacted, and both advertisements and articles appeared from PICS.
- Various committee and general members used their personal contacts with personnel within the appropriate government departments and members of Parliament to get PICS’s message across.

As on so many occasions between then and now, a major planning controversy gave a substantial boost to PICS. Membership and meeting attendance grew, and the committee suddenly had their hands full with heavy lobbying of local and state government, and a letter-writing campaign by members. Valuable and powerful people were recruited to the cause; and the public were kept informed and educated by making the most of public speaking opportunities and the media. In these ways, this first campaign saw methods implemented which were to become the hallmarks of PICS’s campaigns for the next forty years.



Terry Nott: *Mangrove Boardwalk, Conservation Hill to Rhyll walk*

The public protest meeting on Friday 14 June attracted 120 people. Only six voted against the protest motion and eight abstained. Graham Pizzey was unable to attend, but Ken Pound showed slides of some of the ninety-eight species of birds recorded in the Inlet area, concluding with a warning to those present:

The habitat of wildlife on Phillip Island, and elsewhere in Victoria, is being destroyed faster than is generally realized. With the increasing presence of speedboats, bulldozers and pollution, there is an even greater need for preservation on Phillip Island. Remember: wildlife put the Island on the map. These assets were given to us; let us preserve them.⁸

The one councillor to oppose the plan was Trafford Morgan-Payler, son of first PICS President, Brook Morgan-Payler. The contributions of the other councillors present reflected the thinking of many people in the Australian community at the time (although even then the tide was turning). Cr Tom Hobbs insisted that “progress must go hand in hand with The Island’s flora and fauna, but progress – and population – must be No. 1.” Cr Kevin Shaw told the meeting: “I am impressed with Mr Ken Pound’s sincerity. But Mr Pound is an idealist; all conservationists are idealists....This project proposes to convert a stinking, useless, waste area to good use.”

However, PICS had some strong ammunition on their side. Professor John Swan (later to become a PICS Life Member) spoke against the development, as did Group Captain R Burrage, Rupe Harris (Phillip Island Shire Councillor for twenty years) and disability advocate and environmentalist Ethel Temby. Dr Alec Reith concluded that “The only thing it has achieved is antagonizing one section against the other!” In the end, the message from those present was loud and clear, but it still took lobbying from more powerful quarters to swing the council.

Because Ken Pound was at that time an employee of the council and his name had appeared as secretary on the reverse side of the protest handbill (for membership purposes), rumors circulated that he would be dismissed from his job, and he was subjected to a special hearing of councillors. A campaign to defend his civil liberties therefore ran simultaneously with the campaign against the Nits proposal, and expanded to include complaints over the number of matters of public interest discussed in camera at council meetings. By the end of the campaign, the council was not looking good, with pressure from Fisheries and Wildlife, bad press from Graham Pizzey’s comprehensive article “Hands off the Nit!” in the *Herald* on 26 October 1968 – and a partial Council election due within a year’s time.

Finally, Dick Hamer of the State Liberal government intervened, and the Town and Country Planning Board ruled that the Inlet be preserved, primarily because “The proposal involves the use of land reserved for the preservation of fauna and flora in the planning scheme adopted by the Board and submitted to the Minister for the approval of the Governor-in-Council”.⁹

The battle for Rhyll Inlet had been won in a stormy baptism of fire for PICS. The council’s support of the marina proposal was just one of many occasions when Council would vote against its own planning scheme in favor of inappropriate development.

By September 1969, Phillip Island Council looked very different, with three new councillors including one, Ken Pound, who had openly campaigned on a ‘progress and preservation’ ticket, and Bill Hopkins, later PICS Treasurer then Vice President. The winds of change had blown into Phillip Island with the arrival of articulate, far-thinking people combined with conservation stalwarts already within the community. Together they were a formidable force, all allied behind one banner: The Phillip Island Conservation Society.

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Patsy Hunt: Wallaby



Chapter 2 CREATING HABITAT – SWAN LAKE

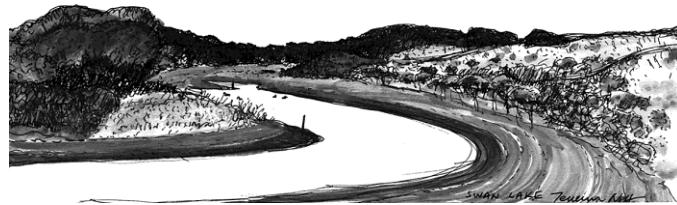
Bunurong Aborigines (also known as Boon wurrung and Boonerwrung) used Swan Lake for thousands of years and left many middens in the area, although they only appear to have visited Phillip Island over the summer months. With European settlement, before farm dams were the norm, Swan Lake was surveyed as a ‘Water Reserve’ for watering stock. In those days the stock was often just left to roam all over the area, beginning a pattern of long-term illegal grazing and burning of the dunes. All of this clearing caused serious erosion to one of a very few fresh water areas on Phillip Island.

In 1924 Fauna Reserves were established by the Victorian Government at Swan Lake, Cape Woolamai and Forrest Caves to protect the many Short-tailed Shearwaters (‘Mutton Birds’) nesting there. In the 1920s the Summerlands Estate was developed, which included a golf course. Swan Lake was not part of the golf course, but adjoining Crown Allotment 4 was, and the kikuyu grass planted for the greens there has been a curse on Summerlands, and at Swan Lake, ever since.

Swan Lake has long suffered from major interference with its catchment area, especially from large dams dug on farmland. The dams virtually ended what was an annual flooding of adjoining paddocks that had provided feed for thousands of water birds.

The dune erosion was slowed by marram grass planting in the 1960s. The land has now stabilized since cattle, sheep and rabbit numbers are controlled. The lake was, however, ignored as an environmental resource by everyone except Ken Pound and the keen boys from Ken’s place of work, St Paul’s Boys’ Home, Newhaven, who made frequent excursions there.¹ Even when PICS had just started in the late 1960s, members recognized the huge environmental value of the area and the need to protect and enhance it.

Ken Pound was one of the first conservationist Councillors in Victoria, and was on the Works and Finance Committee for the Shire of Phillip Island when they were discussing the location of their next sand pit. They had almost exhausted the sand dune at the entrance of Swan Lake, and decided to go into the lake reserve for their next pit. Whilst Ken sat mute in the meeting, he wasted no time in acting on his request of a few months before to the Shire Engineer, when he had asked if PICS could plant trees at Swan Lake. The Engineer had given permission, so, with the threat to the dunes, Ken rallied the PICS forces and within a few weeks a fence went up, a large patch of gorse had been cleared, and a forest of small trees met the Shire Engineer when he went to assess the situation.²



Terry Nott: *Summer height, Swan Lake*

These working bees proved to be the first of many held at Swan Lake from 1969 until the early 1980s. The plantings also encouraged several PICS members to grow their own trees, and the Council to establish its own nursery. At the time, PICS got plants from anywhere they could – mainly the Natural Resources Conservation League nursery. The Society was doing well in the 1960s to be thinking ‘native’. The great resurgence of interest in all things native Australian happened in the 1970s, and ‘Indigenous’ did not come in until the 1980s!

PICS started at Swan Lake with a very run-down paddock of gorse with little remnant vegetation. Before each working bee, a local farmer or PICS member would go in and disc up the forests of gorse in the areas to be planted. More gorse had to be dug out and trees guarded from rabbits. The main track from the entrance gate to the lake was already there, but much used by shooters and fishermen, who often got bogged. Up until the 1970s, shooting was rife on the island, with most road signs wearing gun holes, and any dam or reserve with ducks on it being ‘fair game’, including Swan Lake.³

PICS held many successful and enjoyable working bees at Swan Lake during the 1970s, when the area was the main habitat project on Phillip Island involving the public. Against the odds, many of the plants flourished and wildlife rapidly colonized the new habitat.

The Penguin Reserve Committee of Management took over management of Swan Lake from the Council in the mid 1980s, and set about controlling the many rabbits and foxes, and providing interpretation signs and facilities for the growing number of visitors. In 1996 the Phillip Island Nature Park resurfaced the paths, and put in raised walkways, two bird hides – one of which has a bird identification panel painted by PICS member Patsy Hunt - and an information shelter. PICS and the Westernport Bird Observers Club also celebrated the work of Australian bird observer, Roy Wheeler, (made an Honorary Member of PICS in 1984) and his wife Vera, by placing a plaque in November 1991 beside the banksias the two had planted at Swan Lake’s entrance.

There is much evidence of the dedication of PICS to this beautiful area. Wallabies and echidnas have appeared and reptiles are also very common. Ninety eight bird species have been found at Swan Lake and the rare Growling Grass Frog and a rare species of *Galaxia* (small fish) have been recorded there.

Swan Lake features as Walk 16: Swan Lake: Harmony in Nature in *Come for a Walk*.⁵

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Chapter 3 FROM ‘SANDGATE FARM’ TO ‘CONSERVATION HILL’

His Excellency the Governor of the State of Victoria, by and with the advice of the Executive Council thereof, doth hereby, in pursuance of section 14 and 21 of the Land Act 1958, reserve permanently from sale, from being leased and from having a licence granted in respect thereof and also exempt from occupation for mining purposes under any miner’s right, the land hereunder described...as a site for Public purposes (Conservation and Protection of Native Flora and Fauna)...¹

With these words printed in the Government Gazette of 14 August 1974, over two years of ingenuity, negotiation, correspondence and money-seeking came to a successful end. What had been ‘Sandgate Farm’ – first the location of the Rhyll Inlet marina proposal and later another proposal for a stock car racing track – became ‘Conservation Hill’. The prime movers behind this major achievement were PICS members Jack Oswin and his wife Coral, and John and Ailsa Swan, and John Barnard. Their combined recollections were typed up in 1993, and are quoted here to explain the process, which commenced in 1972, when PICS was four years old.

Eleven acres of Sandgate Farm, owned by Messrs Benjamin and Mitchell was up for sale at \$12,000. The adjoining part of Crown Allotment 95A, owned by Mr. Purves, was also available for approximately \$3,000. The Purves land (26 acres) separated the farm from the Shire rubbish Tip, and the two parcels formed a belt of freehold which, with the road, separated the Rhyll Inlet crown land from the freshwater Rhyll Swamp State Wildlife Reserve, the Oswin Roberts Reserve and now, the Koala Conservation Centre, the David Forrest Reserve, and Fiveways. The Purves land included saltmarsh and carried a large, dense stand of swamp Paperbark and a variety of other indigenous plant species.”²

PICS felt it was important to secure this strategically located land from the threat of inappropriate development once and for all. However, there was a real problem at that time since PICS was not incorporated and therefore could not buy land. And once land was bought there was no body within the government to take over such land until the formation of the Victorian Conservation Trust in 1972. But PICS, however, as such a new body, was not adequately prepared to take over Sandgate Farm at the time. The other issues were who would manage the land, and for what purpose? And how could PICS be involved once the land was handed over to the government?

The Society proposed a scheme to buy both parcels at a total cost of \$15,000. The money was collected from private donations, with possible support from government and industry. It was suggested that the land could be controlled by the then Koala Reserves Committee of Management, at least until the Crown found other means of managing it. Such a motion was put to a meeting of the Society on 13 May 1972 and carried.

A long process then started which involved Jack and Coral Oswin collecting a great many donations of \$100 or more from local business people, residents and visitors. John Swan was delegated to write to major industrial enterprises which could be seen across the waters of the Bay from Conservation Hill, and they contributed generously. During these

negotiations the Society also approached the Chief Secretary (the Hon. R.J. Hamer), the Minister for Lands and the Minister for Conservation (the Hon. W.A. Borthwick), the Secretary for Lands and officers of the Treasury. Treasury agreed to assist the Society with half the purchase price (\$7,500) provided the remainder was found by public donation. The land was to become a nature reserve and the Chief Secretary stated that he “strongly supported this fine conservation project” and took the necessary steps to carry it into effect.

The Society raised over \$1,500 from its own members and when the Australian Conservation Foundation agreed to offer its Tax Deductible Donation facility and the matter was publicised more widely, many more donors took part.

One small lot on the SW corner of that part of CA 95A to be purchased was owned by a Society member, Keith Grayden, who gave this land to the Crown.

The Society was not then incorporated and could not buy land. Knowing that it would take much time to arrange for purchase and transfer to the Crown, a deposit was made immediately to secure the land in the names of John and Ailsa Swan who took care of the paperwork, rates, taxes and fees in the interim....³

Jack Oswin’s friend, Graham Pizzey the journalist, lobbied to have the government take over the remainder of the purchase, and also approached people for donations. John Barnard worked with lawyers in Melbourne to facilitate the takeover process.

The Victorian Gazette published proposals to reserve the purchased lands consolidated as CA 22 of A “as a Site for Public Purposes (Conservation and Protection of Native Flora and Fauna)” and the final Order to Council to permanently reserve the land was dated 6 Aug 74. It was notified in Government Gazette of 14 August 1974 on p.3996.⁴

Total cost, including legal charges, etc, was \$15,872. Donations had totaled \$8,372, and the balance was paid by the Victorian Government.



Terry Nott: a bend in the Conservation Hill – Rhyll walking trail

Whilst PICS members rejoiced at finally securing the land for wildlife purposes, their trials were certainly not over. Not only was there was no easy way of transferring land to the Crown, there was no way at all of dictating terms such as preferred management. PICS had asked for, and assumed that as instigators of the project, it would have a say in what happened on the land; but that also proved to be a faint hope.

In the event, management of the land was handed by the government to the Fisheries and Wildlife Division of the Department of Conservation, and no advisory committee was ever established. At that time the Division had greatly increased their presence and influence on Phillip Island, and had several staff including a Wildlife Management Officer (Charles Nancarrow) and a Ranger Naturalist (Gary Barnes), based here. PICS assumed that there would be no development on the land, but within a few years a residence and large steel shed had appeared, and whilst PICS had been initially shown the plans, they had little real say in the final decision to place the buildings there.

PICS had also asked from the outset for a viewing platform, as the Rhyll Road side of the hill commanded excellent views over the Rhyll Swamp and the bushland reserves to the south, but the building of this platform was stalled for many years. We had further asked that there be no restriction on public entry to the reserve, but the house and shed precinct was soon fenced off, and the screen plantings were of mainly non-indigenous species. Again, PICS was given no say in any of this.

However, Charles Nancarrow had several achievements during his tenure here, the most prominent of which was the Conservation Hill to Rhyll walking trail. This involved the negotiation of the purchase from Mrs Dallas Kinnear at a generous rate of a large block of land adjoining Conservation Hill to the east, and the purchase of small areas of farmland bordering the coast to form a public walking track along the coastal bluff.

The mixture of good and bad experiences which PICS had with Conservation Hill led to a much firmer push by the Committee for involvement in conservation management decisions made by state and local government bodies. By the mid 1980s the Phillip Island Shire Council was instigating a number of Shire-community research and advisory bodies, and PICS was heavily involved in many of these, as will be shown later. The above-quoted document therefore concluded with the optimistic statement:

It would seem that we are moving beyond ‘representative democracy’ to the beginnings of ‘participatory democracy’.⁵

Most appropriately, when the Conservation Hill viewing platform was finally built, it was named ‘The Jack Oswin Viewing Platform’ and officially opened in January 1987, followed shortly afterwards by a visit by the Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephen. More appropriately still, Conservation Hill was the site of the ceremony on 21 September 1996, at which Coral Oswin-Wood, Keith Grayden and John and Ailsa Swan were made Life Members of PICS.⁴

Conservation Hill came under the management of the Phillip Island Nature Park in 1996. They set about upgrading the trail and added a ‘mangrove walk’ to enhance the experience. Conservation Hill is included in their current management plan, although the status quo basically

remains, along with the buildings. Ironically, the signage at the information shelter by the car park makes no mention of PICS.

This area is featured in *Come for a Walk* as Walk 5: Rhyll, Sea to Shore.⁵



Life Members at Conservation Hill, 21 Sep 1996. L-r: Coral Oswin-Wood, Ailsa Swan, Margaret Hancock (PICS President and later Life Member), Simon and Karen Eddy (representing Keith Grayden) and John Swan. Photo courtesy Anne Oswin

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Chapter 4 KOALAS AT RISK

Koalas are not indigenous to Phillip Island, but were brought here from other nearby Gippsland locations such as Grantville and Blackwood Forest, by islander woodcutters clearing those areas in the 1880s. Sometimes woodsmen would fell a tree in which a female koala sat with her joey. The doe would be killed by the fall, and the joey, if lucky, would be rescued and taken back to the island to be reared and later, released.¹ The numbers were not great and they did not thrive. Zoologist Roger Martin continues the story:

However, by 1928 koalas were reported to be common on Phillip Island and this was undoubtedly the result of a release of fifty animals from French Island in 1923. The population continued to increase until 1941 when, presumably because of concern about the browsing pressure on the trees, the Fisheries and Game Department began to translocate koalas off the island; initially 114 animals were removed, followed by another 177 over the following years. The translocation program began in earnest in 1944 The program was discontinued in 1978 and by this time in excess of 3,000 koalas had been removed from the island.²

For most of the time of the translocations the well-being of the koalas and their reserves on Phillip Island were the responsibility of the Phillip Island Koala Reserves Committee of Management. This body, established in 1944, consisted of interested locals, Councillors and public servants, and in the early years included Florence Oswin Roberts, whose name is synonymous with the care of koalas and their habitat on Phillip Island. Florence was not only responsible for giving the Oswin Roberts Reserve to the people of Victoria, she also directly cared for scores of koalas burnt in fires. She was the only woman permitted to privately keep a koala, ‘Edward’ – really a female. After dying Edward was stuffed and is now on display at the Phillip Island Heritage Centre.³ Edward spent her nights in a favored tree near her home at ‘Broadwater Guest House’, and the tree is still in Dunsmore Road with a plaque commemorating ‘Edward’s Tree’. The Koala Reserves Committee ran on a government stipend and an annuity paid from the estate of Florence Oswin Roberts.⁴

Florence died in 1957 and was replaced on the committee by her nephew, Jack Oswin, who was no less dedicated to the island’s koalas and served until 1982. Jack was determined to save as many mature ‘koala trees’, such as Manna Gums, Blue Gums and Swamp Gums as possible. The Koala Reserves Committee had quite a high profile because of the importance of koalas as a tourist attraction – more so than penguins for many years – and managed 574 acres comprising Five Ways Reserve, David Forrest Reserve (a stand of mature trees opposite the Five Ways Reserve, donated by David Forrest), Ventnor Koala Reserve, Oswin Roberts Reserve, Rhyll Reserve (“Rhyll Swamp”) and Crown Allotment 15 (‘Rowell’s Swamp’, adjacent to Rhyll Swamp). Fisheries and Wildlife director, Alf Dunbavin Butcher, who was also involved with the Melbourne Zoo, was a long-term secretary/chairman. Apart from Jack, PICS members included Bert Grayden, Murray Hilgendorf and Don Hopkins, whilst Coral Oswin-Wood and Nan Hopkins provided lunch and ‘afters’ on the days when the committee did not retire to the Isle of Wight Hotel!



Florence Oswin Roberts and helpers attending burnt koalas from fire in Oswin-Roberts Reserve, 1950s. Hammocks were set up on the verandahs and in the 'summer houses' at Broadwater Guest House.

Photo courtesy Coral Oswin-Wood

Fisheries and Wildlife took over the management role before the Phillip Island Nature Park was formed. However, koala numbers dropped dramatically in the late 1970s and 1980s, due to a combination of greatly increased traffic and dog numbers on Phillip Island, and the rapid spread of the *chlamydia* infection, causing 'wet tail' and infertility amongst the local koala population. PICS put so much pressure on the local Council and the Road Traffic Authority and Road Construction Authority, that a *Koala Working Group* was established in November 1985 to try to find a solution. Apart from PICS members Keith Grayden and his niece Christine, the Koala Working Group included representatives from the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, the Ministry for Planning and Environment, the two road authorities, the local Council, and zoologist Roger Martin from Monash University Zoology Department. The Council considered the issue a fairly high priority, and sent along the then Shire President, Stan Gates and Shire Engineer, Jock McKechnie, to the meetings at Cranbourne.

The Koala Working Group considered various angles to try to maintain a koala population on Phillip Island, and eventually came up with the idea of an enclosure, which would allow tourists to view the koalas in one location, thus taking pressure off other areas, and allow researchers to more easily study the koalas living on the island. The resulting document: *A Proposal to Establish a Koala Enclosure on Phillip Island*, edited by the Department of Conservation, Forest and Land's Gary Backhouse (Sep 1987) was eventually distributed to the public. Although some conservationists were uncomfortable with the idea of captive koalas, and felt that the problems of the wild koala population outside the enclosure were not being addressed, the enclosure became a reality as 'The Koala Conservation Centre' (KCC), opening on 28 June 1992, and located on land especially purchased for the purpose and combined with the David Forrest Reserve, all of which included magnificent mature Blue and Manna Gums. The total area, including land for plantations of feed trees, is 30 ha and was developed at a cost of several million dollars provided by the State Government, with the whole plan pulled together by John Cunningham.

Meanwhile the issue of wild koalas continued to be critical. PICS approached Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands officer Alan Crouch to conduct an island-wide count involving the public in both urban and rural areas and CF&L staff in the reserves. The first count took place in 1985 and recorded 172 koalas. The counts became an annual event, and, along with the recording of koala mortalities by CF&L staff and then by PINP staff, provide a grim picture of a wild koala population just hanging on. In 2007, an estimated fifty are left.⁵

Also during the 1980s, Churchill Island ranger Carroll Schulz was greatly concerned, along with PICS and CF&L, with the paucity of suitable koala habitat on Phillip Island. Remnant indigenous trees that had survived the chicory-growing era when hundreds were cut down to burn in chicory kilns, were in danger of disappearing from roadsides, farms, and new subdivisions. Carroll organized a meeting in August 1986 between PICS (Ailsa Swan represented PICS), CF&L, the Phillip Island Tree and Garden Association, the Victorian Farmers and Graziers Association and the Phillip Island Shire, to try and work out ways of making mass plantings on private land away from roadsides, in the hope that koalas would not have to use roadsides and be killed by cars.⁶

For Australia's Bicentennial year in 1988, PICS undertook a project suggested by Council Tree Adviser Gary Weir, to plant indigenous trees on public land sites at Ventnor, Rhyll, Smiths Beach, Sunset Strip and Wimbledon Heights.



PICS members with seedlings for the Bicentennial Project, 1987.
Photo: Christine Grayden

Three thousand trees, grown by John Eddy, John Swan and Phillip Island Shire with PICS volunteers were planted over a number of community tree-planting days. However, the real impetus for revegetating the island came with the establishment of Phillip Island Landcare in 1987, and the commencement of the 'Wildlife Corridor' project linking public and farm land with hundreds of thousands of trees planted by volunteers, including PICS members, over twenty

years. Hopefully this relatively new habitat will eventually be able to give wild koalas the safe haven they need.

A huge impetus was given to this work with the establishment of the Barb Martin Bush Bank in 1998, which involved many groups including Bass Coast Shire, Coast Action, Friends of Churchill Island, Friends of Koalas, Landcare, PICS, Phillip Island Nature Park and various sponsoring businesses. Set up to collect indigenous seed and grow plants in large numbers for use by Landcare, Council, PINP, community environment groups and the public, the bush bank is named after Barb Martin, a PICS treasurer, FOK member and Churchill Island volunteer, who was dedicated to ‘greening’ Phillip Island for wildlife.



*Barb Martin, after whom the Barb Martin Bush Bank is named.
Photo courtesy Anne Oswin*

During 1989, PICS, in discussion with ranger Carroll Schulz, felt the need for a specific group to handle koala issues, and asked the Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands, Kay Setches, a PICS member, to launch the ‘Friends of Koalas’ in January 1990. There clearly was a need for a ‘Friends’ group to assist with habitat restoration, research, publicity and fundraising, but PICS also felt it necessary to separate the ‘cuddly’ issue of koalas from the prosaic and occasionally unpopular work that PICS did in planning appeals and objections. In his address to the sixty-two people who attended the meeting to form FOK, Carroll said how much he saw “the need for extra help with conservation and management of the Phillip Island koala colony every day – e.g. monitoring movements of koalas, tree planting, maintenance”.⁷

Bob Dennis was PICS’s representative on the Penguin Reserve Committee and then the Phillip Island Nature Park Board during the period of the establishment of the Koala Conservation Centre. He took on multiple roles within the KCC, being involved with the planning, landscaping and planting of the site, and discussions on exactly how many koalas the KCC could support, initially and in the breeding program. His work for PICS, Friends of Koalas, Westernport Bird Observers Club, the Reserve Committee and Board is commemorated in a plaque on the large boardwalk at the KCC, unveiled in November 2007.

Nowadays, many PICS members are involved in FOK’s monthly habitat restoration days in all of the island’s koala reserves, and monthly koala counts in the KCC, but about 150 members of the public have also joined the group, described by PICS President Margaret Hancock as “our robust baby.” FOK produces quarterly educational newsletters. President and PICS member Patsy Hunt describes FOK’s major achievements as “habitat restoration, public

education, lobbying, comment on koala issues both on Phillip Island and state-wide, koala counts and monitoring.”⁸ The success of the Friends’ endeavours is testimony to the co-operation that exists between them and the rangers at the Centre, especially the long-term Head Ranger, Ashley Reed.

Achievements of the combined forces of Friends of Koalas and PICS have included the closure of Harbison Road to tourist buses. Passengers were causing damage by trampling undergrowth while looking for koalas in the roadside trees. Valuable koala habitat was being pruned to accommodate the buses. Also, PICS had been campaigning for years for a lowering of all speed limits on Phillip Island to protect both wildlife and humans, and the Friends and others joined in this campaign. They won some success when much of the island’s open road system was reduced to 80 km/h from 100 km/h in 2006, but the blanket 80/50 which PICS would prefer is yet to be accomplished.

The KCC’s koala breeding program has been extremely successful, and the aim of providing an easily accessed viewing experience of koalas as close as possible to conditions ‘in the wild’ has been fulfilled. Yet the question must still be asked: can Phillip Island’s wild koalas survive? Through FOK, PICS will continue to do all in its power to ensure that they can.

The Oswin Roberts Reserve features as Walk 7: Oswin Roberts Reserve: A Bush Chorus in the book *Come for a Walk!*⁹

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Patsy Hunt: Koala Studies



Chapter 5 PENGUINS AND POWER

Prior to the late 1920s the koala was the symbol of Phillip Island. Even the Phillip Island Band had a koala on their drum until after the Second World War. With the advent of a few cars on Phillip Island in the 1920s, several locals started hire-car and bus businesses to take tourists to popular spots. The most popular destination was the Nobbies. On the way to the Nobbies was Summerlands, even then a popular surfing beach including an adjacent golf course. Nearby was Summerlands Guest House and the (largely unsold) housing estate, all developed by the early entrepreneur, A.K.T. Sambell.

In those days, Little Penguins could be found around much of the south, west and northern coastlines of Phillip Island. A young man, Bert West, a keen birdwatcher, knew the penguins' habits and, along with other locals, Charlie Grayden, Bern Denham and Herbert Watchorn, began taking tours in the evenings to see the penguins come ashore at Cat Bay and Summerlands beaches. This became a life-long career for Bert, who was passionate about the welfare of the penguins. He became the honorary ranger in 1931 and manager in 1961 under the Phillip Island Shire Council, which was then the management body for the Crown Land foreshore on which the Penguin Parade was located. Bert stayed there until he retired in 1971. He was made an Honorary Member of PICS in 1970 for his dedicated work with the penguins and contributions to the study of birds generally on Phillip Island, and received a British Empire Medal in 1974 for services to tourism.¹

PICS was started by another dedicated 'birdo': Ken Pound. One of Ken's first jobs as Secretary of PICS was to put together a Phillip Island bird list and information on the Little Penguin, which was published in leaflet form for distribution to the general public.² In those days, there was little factual information available.

The Penguin Parade was run directly by the Phillip Island Shire Council until 1981, when the Minister for Lands and Conservation (as the person with the ultimate power over Crown Lands) Mr. Vasey Houghton intervened. This followed a period of major controversy when the council feared that the Fisheries and Wildlife Division would completely take over the Parade, as recommended by the Land Conservation Council report (1977). This was the signal for a major power struggle over control of Victoria's – and one of Australia's – most lucrative tourist attractions.

In response to criticism the Council appointed a Scientific Advisory Committee and also appointed Peter Dann as biologist in October 1980. Professor Mike Cullen, in giving a speech of appreciation to the Penguin Study Group's founder, Pauline Reilly (who was made an Honorary Member of PICS in 1972), remembered that event:

The Scientific Advisory Committee was set up in 1980 by the then Committee of Management, which at that time consisted of Phillip Island Shire councillors, one of them being Peter Reith. That particular Committee of Management changed the direction of the Management of the Reserve by instituting the Scientific Advisory Committee to advise Management on appropriate research directions, and make recommendations about ongoing operations and proposed new developments, which could affect the habitat and

well-being of the penguins and Short-tailed Shearwaters. The Management (with Peter Reith) also recommended that the Reserve employ a biologist, and accepted the recommendation of an early SAC meeting that one Peter Dann be appointed, a beady-eyed, bushy tailed Melbourne Uni student about to complete his PhD.

Pauline's advice in the nearly twenty years since that time has been always of great value. Peter and his team have built up the study from the first decade when Pauline and the PSG operated in spite of - rather than with the help of - the then manager. From our experience at that time it was clear that research was often crucial to making the right management decisions. And this was the reason that the chairman of the SAC was considered an appropriate person to have on the Committee of Management, now the Board of the Nature Park. Again and again we have been thankful that we could look back over a dozen years of data, or more, to assess the probable impact of some threat, from the land – like foxes – or the sea – like oil spills. And again and again we have found that the problems had already been noted and commented on in Pauline's *Earthy People* book.³

However, the Minister was still concerned by reports at the time from both local Fisheries and Wildlife officers and the press that the Council was not always operating in the best interests of the penguins and that many wildlife and land management issues were being neglected in favor of recreational and tourism outcomes.

An example of the council's ignorance of the management issues occurred in January 1972 when the council gave Crawford Productions permission to film *The Hands of Cormack Joyce* on top of the rookery at Cat Bay. PICS President Vern Johnson intervened, and eventually the filming location was moved to the coast near Berry Beach, away from penguin and Short-tailed Shearwater rookeries.

Another example was the Summerlands holiday flats case. An application by the owner John Merry, to extend the flats was supported by council, in part because they considered that "The proposed development will not detrimentally affect the wildlife in the area, in particular, the fairy penguin."⁴ The flats to be extended were located directly above the Penguin Parade and the land contained numbers of penguins. The council's decision to grant a permit was objected to by Ailsa Swan, Keith Grayden and David and Anna Landon – all PICS members – and the Conservation Council of Victoria, and was heard in the Town Planning Appeals Tribunal by Mr Hooper in February 1979. Hooper decided against the development after the evidence of the objectors, Professor Mike Cullen of the Scientific Advisory Committee, and Charles Nancarrow, the local Wildlife Management Officer of the Fisheries and Wildlife division, who had to be subpoenaed after the Fisheries and Wildlife Division refused to allow him to give evidence.⁵ A further attempt to rebuild the flats in 1989 saw PICS member Graeme Burgan give evidence of penguins being on the road at night adjacent to the flats, which he saw regularly in his work for the Parade. In fact the Merry land was such important penguin habitat that it was eventually purchased and became part of the reserve.

Ultimately a compromise was reached with the Council. A re-formed committee of management commenced, consisting of three councillors, one PICS member (John Jansson), one member of the Ministry for Tourism, and one member from the Ministry for Conservation. John Matthews from the Phillip Island Tourism Association was an adviser. This committee ran until

1984. Its course was very rocky and dogged by controversy for several major reasons. First, while the committee recognized the need for a management plan, few of the members were versed in basic management issues such as the need for controlled beach access and car parking, vermin control – especially foxes and feral cats, as well as roaming dogs – revegetation, and prevention of penguin road kills. Charles Nancarrow, Soil Conservation Authority officer David Hill, and Crown Lands superintendent Ron Hodges, produced the first management plan for the Summerlands Peninsula in 1983, causing a huge outcry from local residents by their suggestions of closing the road at night, and a buyback of the estate. Newspaper headlines declared: “PENGUIN MANAGEMENT REBUKED...Ratepayers Fear Proposal”⁶ PICS supported the recommendations at the time. Now, from the viewpoint of the twenty first century, these moves were necessary and perfectly reasonable. To a public virtually ignorant of wildlife management issues in the 1970s, they were shocking and dictatorial.



Terry Nott: A remaining house, Summerlands Estate

The second major cause of controversy was due to the Parade’s management. It seemed that a prime measure of success was the number of people who came to see the Parade each night. A local paper reported that on Australia Day in 1979, “An all-time record of nearly 18,000 packed into ... the Penguin Parade. “It was fantastic but chaotic,” said penguin reserve manager, Kevin Lott...cars were jammed to a standstill for three miles...up to 100 spectators queued to use the toilets.”⁷

The reality was that people were parking for miles back along Nobbies road (now Ventnor road), including on unprotected rookery areas. They walked in the dark to the Parade, creating a danger to the rookeries and to themselves. The Parade building was small, and offered virtually no information on the penguins. Moreover, there were inadequate money handling procedures in place, and more than once the expected monthly financial statement did not appear for the committee meeting. When the committee tried to dismiss Lott he went to his union for help and, following months of unresolved controversy, the Minister reinstated him.⁸

Through all of this, PICS representative John Jansson stuck to the issues: the need for protection of penguin habitat, for drastic reduction in fox numbers, for protection of penguins on roads and on the Summerlands Estate.

Soon after, the new Minister for Planning and Environment, Evan Walker, sacked the committee and decided on a completely different approach to the management of Summerlands Peninsula. He created a larger, broader Penguin Reserve Committee of Management with a wide range of expertise, and with a Chairperson from Melbourne. The new committee consisted of Garth Newman, Director of Fisheries and Wildlife, (Chairman); Ian Weir, Deputy Director of National Parks (Deputy Chairman); John Corcoran, representing Don Dunstan, from Tourism Victoria; John Matthews from Phillip Island Tourism Association; Christine Grayden from PICS; Cr John Bailey from Phillip Island Shire Council; Professor Mike Cullen from the Scientific Advisory Committee.

The first job of the new committee was to appoint a manager. Confronted with many issues – land and wildlife management, and inadequate facilities, business practices and staffing – the committee decided to appoint Peter Thomas, head ranger at Wilson's Promontory National Park, who had experience in many of the issues that needed most urgent attention. Thomas was manager from 1984 until 1996, when he left and was replaced by Ray Lievers, also with a National Parks background.

During the life of this committee of management (1984-1996) a huge amount was achieved. Joan Kirner soon became Minister and was very supportive, gaining funding for penguin research and a government commitment to the Summerlands Estate buy-back program. She was also very supportive of Christine Grayden in her role as PICS representative on the Committee. Thanks to several Commonwealth Government employment schemes, much protective fencing and car parking, and many beach access tracks and boardwalks were built. The Penguin Parade was revamped, with new stands and a new building. The Ventnor Road was closed from Green Lake onwards from dusk until dawn, immediately plummeting the number of penguin road kills. The Summerlands Estate buy-back intensified. A substantial revegetation program for both the Peninsula and Estate took place, with help from the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers. Both the Education and Research programs increased. A holiday environmental education program commenced at the Penguin Reserve.

Staffing numbers increased appreciably in all areas of operations. Promotion of the Parade, both in Australia and internationally, also greatly increased, whilst a limit of 3,500 was placed on the number of Penguin Parade patrons on any one night.

Realising that foxes preying on Summerlands Peninsula penguins and Short-tailed Shearwaters were coming in from other island areas, an Island-wide fox eradication program commenced and continues. PICS's representatives have always stressed the importance of such a program.⁹

After being an active committee member for five years, Christine Grayden retired as PICS representative at the end of 1989, and was replaced by Bob Dennis.

In 1992, Land Conservation Chairman David Scott visited Phillip Island with his staff and lunched with Bob and Pat Baird and Ailsa Swan, who were PICS members. Ailsa took the

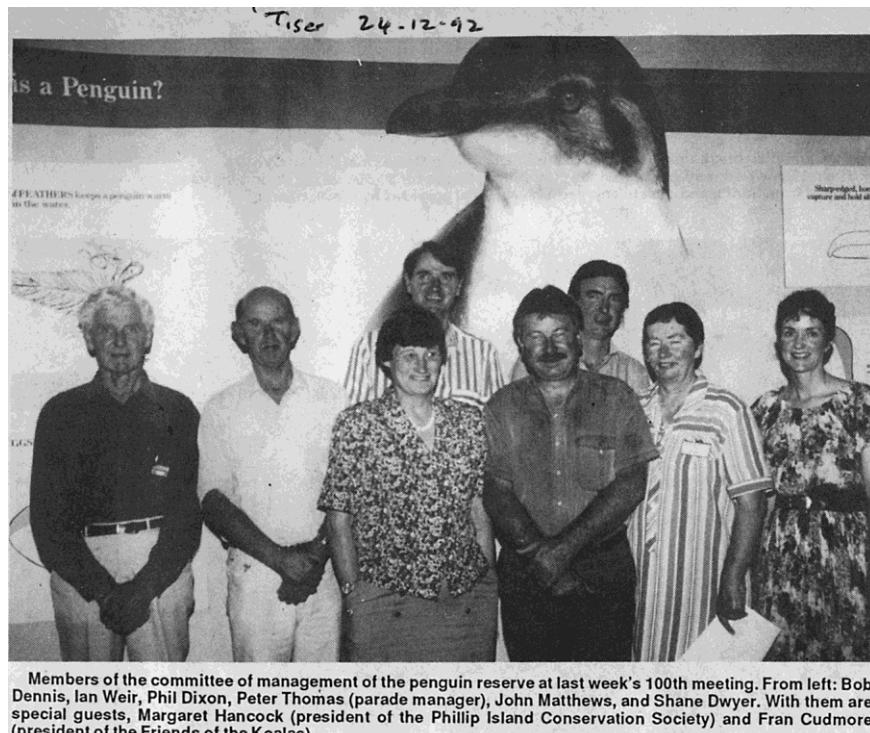
opportunity to tell Scott of her idea for the creation of a separate Nature Park on Phillip Island encompassing all of the island's reserves.¹⁰ This idea had been mooted in 1991 as 'Phillip Island Fauna Island' by the Department of Conservation and Environment's John Fisher, but the concept did not go very far at the time. Ailsa's idea found its way into the LCC recommendations for the Melbourne District 2 "including an unusual suggestion for the *National Parks Act* to be amended allowing the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to delegate part of the park management to the Penguin Reserve Committee of Management."¹¹ Ailsa's dream was realised in 1996 with the creation of the Phillip Island Nature Park, encompassing the Penguin Parade and Summerlands Peninsula, the bushland reserves previously controlled by the Koala Reserves Committee of Management and Fisheries and Wildlife – Ventnor Koala Reserve, Rhyll Swamp, Oswin-Roberts Reserve, Five Ways Reserve, Conservation Hill and Rowell's Swamp – Cape Woolamai and the Koala Conservation Centre, along with Phillip Island's coastal reserves from the Little Rookery at Ventnor to Cleeland Bight.

The first Phillip Island Nature Park Board initially included nominated representatives from PICS and the Phillip Island Tourism Association. PICS's representative was Bob Dennis, who relished his new role, knowing as he did so much about all of the island's reserves because of years of voluntary hands-on work with PICS, Westernport Bird Observers Club and Friends of Koalas. Bob served on the committee until 1999, when he resigned and was replaced by PICS President, Margaret Hancock. Another PICS member, Bob Baird, was nominated by the Bass Coast commissioners as an environmental representative, and two other local residents, Owen Bentley and Anne Penaluna, were also appointed to the board.

This board lasted from 1996 – 2003, although Margaret Hancock replaced Bob Dennis from 1999-2002. Bob Baird recounts the major environmental achievements of the board as:

1. The planning and implementation of the Hooded Plover protection program on Phillip Island's beaches, including the exclusion of dogs from breeding beaches.
2. The official abandonment of the idea of rebuilding the South Coast Road.
3. The continued support of the Scientific Advisory Committee and the establishment of the Environment Committee.
4. Taking over the active management of Churchill Island, resulting in the refurbishment of the historic buildings, the rebuilding of the access bridge, and the building of the visitors' centre.
5. Funding the fencing of parts of the south coast to protect foreshores from wandering stock.
6. Sponsoring of two major conferences: Australian Sea Mammals and Birds Australia – waders.¹²

With the reconstituting of the board in 2003, PICS had no direct representation on the board, but did have members on the Environment Committee, i.e., Penny Manning, Bob Baird, Bessie Tyers (Westernport Bird Observers Club) and Mike Cleland, representing Landcare. The Environment Committee has played an important role in keeping environmental issues on the agenda. Bob Baird and Bessie Tyers worked tirelessly to obtain the best possible outcomes for the Special Management Zone in Rhyll Inlet. Their focus has been on the waders and on keeping disturbances to a minimum. Most importantly, the committee put forward the need for an Environmental Manager, which was accepted by the board and resulted in the appointment of



Members of the committee of management of the penguin reserve at last week's 100th meeting. From left: Bob Dennis, Ian Weir, Phil Dixon, Peter Thomas (parade manager), John Matthews, and Shane Dwyer. With them are special guests, Margaret Hancock (president of the Phillip Island Conservation Society) and Fran Cudmore (president of the Friends of the Koalas).

Photo courtesy Anne Oswin

Richard Dakin in 2006. Moreover, several PICS members were appointed as individual community representatives to the Community Consultative Committee, i.e. Margaret Hancock, Anne Davie and Patsy Hunt. It was for some time chaired by local Steven Davie (a Nature Park board member), who resigned through dissatisfaction with the operations of the board in June 2006, citing the “damaging culture that continues to prevail”.¹³

There have also been occasions on which the worth of the Research department has been under question by management. PICS has never doubted the value of research as a prime management tool, and has always supported the Research department and the Penguin Study Group in their research endeavours. (An overview of research past and present can be found at the Phillip Island Nature Park website: www.penguins.org.au under ‘research’.)

This board completed its term in July 2007. The new board does not include any community organisation representatives, and therefore has no PICS representative.

As Phillip Island’s Little Penguins go about the business of surviving and reproducing, a great many power plays by the humans entrusted with their care have gone on around them. Through all of this, the PICS members involved have determinedly avoided the politics and continued to focus on the real issues of protection of wildlife and habitat, as encapsulated in the Society’s motto: *Save Wildlife Today For Tomorrow*.

The Summerlands Peninsula area features as Walk 15: Summerland and the Nobbies: Wildlife Peninsula in *Come for a Walk! Exploring Phillip Island*.¹⁴

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Patsy Hunt: Little Penguin

Chapter 6 A LOAD OF RUBBISH

Rubbish disposal is a constant and costly headache for local government. On Phillip Island there have been various attempted solutions to the rubbish problem and many have come in for strong criticism from PICS, while others have been supported.

Prior to the formation of PICS, the Phillip Island Shire Council had had a succession of Tip sites: first on the reserve adjacent to the foreshore at the western end of Church Street, then on private land on the southern end of Pyramid Rock Road. Both of these sites proved to be unsuitable because of fire hazard. Around 1950 the Shire decided to use the saltmarsh on the northern side of the ‘sand track’ – then the notorious rutted road to Rhyll. What is now a hill of waste and soil was then a gentle slope down to saltmarsh on the border of Rhyll Inlet. The sanitary depot for dumping ‘night soil’ was also adjacent to the Tip for some years.¹

By the time PICS was formed in 1968 the Tip was already of a substantial size. Tips on Crown Land were the norm, and common on foreshore reserves in coastal shires. Phillip Island had additional problems by then with holiday home owners wanting access to the Tip facilities at weekends when they were on Phillip Island, rather than during the week when the Tip was open. The policy of regularly burying rubbish with soil to contain wind-blown rubbish and reduce the fire risk was also fairly new at that stage. Silver gulls, ravens and ibis were extremely numerous, scavenging full-time on the Tip contents (still a major problem with many inefficient Tips). It was then fairly common to not tie down trailer loads, and rubbish of all sorts was often strewn along the road to the Tip. Papers were blown across the road into the neighbouring wildlife reserves, creating an unsightly mess and a fire hazard and causing PICS to write to Council in 1972 requesting that the roadside be fenced to catch wind-blown rubbish.² Recycling was virtually unheard of, as was separating out dangerous chemicals and other hazardous products. However, this was an era prior to the explosion in packaging, consumerism and built-in obsolescence, and so the Shire got away with the situation for many years.

The first alarm-bells were rung by PICS in 1970 over the mass shooting of silver gulls at the Tip.³ Shooting was rife on the Island at that time and the Tip gulls were an easy, albeit illegal target. With the arrival on the Island of Fisheries and Wildlife ‘Wildlife Management Officer’ Charles Nancarrow in the mid-1970s, Council came under more pressure. Backing up calls made by PICS since its inception for the Tip’s relocation, Charles immediately recognised the inappropriateness of having a Tip adjacent to Phillip Island’s major wildlife areas of Rhyll Inlet, Conservation Hill, Rhyll Swamp and the Oswin Roberts Reserve. PICS again called for the Tip to be relocated in 1977, but the Council refused to do anything unless it could be proved that chemical seepage from the Tip was affecting the Rhyll Inlet. Charles did carry out samples testing, but the results were inconclusive.⁴

To try and counter the problem of weekenders dumping rubbish at the Tip gate or on reserves and roadsides on weekends, Shire Engineer Eric Marks, who had succeeded Jock McKechnie, trialed a policy of placing hoppers in foreshore car parks around the Island during the late 1980s. These were emptied mechanically on a weekly basis by the Council garbage crews, but resulted in rubbish being spread around the hopper area by birds and the wind, especially during the mechanical emptying operation on windy days.

PICS formed a 'Tip subcommittee' in July 1989 and began a number of initiatives. Concerned that service clubs doing recycling were not getting enough support, PICS wrote to the Shire suggesting that signs should be put at dumpster sites indicating the location of Shire Tip and recycling areas. Also, recycling areas should be more thoroughly signposted with signs near Shire Depot to be reworded to say 'bottle, paper, etc recycling depots'. PICS also suggested that lighting at beach dumpsters might help and that notices to ratepayers about the rubbish situation should be multi-lingual. Finally, PICS stated that there could be more signs on roads indicating the location of the Tip.⁵ The dumpsters were obviously unsightly and a fire hazard in coastal areas and the practice was eventually dropped. As for the Tip site itself, the visual impact was softened by PICS planting many indigenous trees (many grown by John Swan) on the roadside during 1981.

PICS recognised that a lot of the landfill problem came from the lack of recycling in the Shire. At one stage fewer than ten per cent of shires in Victoria were NOT recycling – and Phillip Island was one of them! Slowly but surely, practices did improve. Private enterprise came on board since money was to be made in recycling metals, paper and some plastics. PICS had encouraged mulching of green waste to save landfill area and make available for residents to use in order to reduce garden water usage, and in fact PICS members visited the *Enviromulch* company in operation in Rye in 1998. The Shire did adopt the practice of bringing in the large mulcher on a regular basis later that year.



Terry Nott: Rhyll Transfer Station

The idea of a regional garbage and recycling transfer depot had been discussed by PICS since 1989.⁶ Following the Environment Protection Authority's order to close the Rhyll Tip to putrescible waste in 1992, the Shire of Phillip Island reached an agreement with the Shire of Bass to have garbage taken to the Grantville Tip. Rhyll Tip then became a transfer station, where waste was sorted and distributed, but not stored for any length of time. Following amalgamation of the Shires of Bass and Phillip Island with the Borough of Wonthaggi, public perception combined with economics and public health issues meant that the Phillip Island, Inverloch and Wonthaggi transfer stations and Grantville landfill had to operate as efficiently as possible if Bass Coast Shire were not to quickly run out of landfill sites. However, the actual location of the Rhyll

Transfer Station right on the saltmarsh and immediately adjacent to wildlife reserve was still highly problematic and it was inevitable that the station would need to be relocated sooner rather than later.

PICS felt the need to investigate further in order to be able to make a clear judgment on where to locate such a facility. Penny Manning and Margaret Hancock spent a day in Melbourne visiting large undercover municipal facilities and as a result, suggested that the old Shire of Phillip Island Council Depot on the corner of Dunsmore Road and Settlement Road might be suitable, as it was by then in a light industrial area. From what they saw of the operations of large-scale municipal activities, such transfer stations could be classified as industrial. Bass Coast Shire Council seemed to be still thinking in terms of a paddock operation, however, and while both the Depot and another six sites were considered in a 2006 options paper, the Council's preferred option seemed to be near the sewerage plant in Ventnor.⁷ Local residents were appalled, as the main access, Ventnor Beach Road, was fairly narrow and the route along which much traffic would have travelled to get to the transfer station passed through Wimbledon Heights residential estate.

Once more the Council was faced with a seemingly insurmountable problem: where to locate the transfer station?

In 2006, the Patton family, who operate a large trucking and earth-moving company located on Gap Road between the Tourist Road and Back Beach Road, proposed contracting to Council to have a privately operated undercover transfer station on their land, where they were prepared to handle all waste materials and to turn green waste into different grades of mulch and composted material. Their property has easy access to recycled water from the sewerage treatment plant. This water would be needed for various processes. The Pattons have been to the United States to investigate various types of state-of-the-art waste management processes, but any proposal for private contractors will have to be advertised.

However, opposition exists from some nearby residents and the proposal requires rezoning of the land before a planning permit may be issued. At this stage, PICS supports the proposal.⁸ Meanwhile the Department of Sustainability and Environment recently purchased the Rhyll Tip site from the Bass Coast Shire Council and made Phillip Island Nature Park the Committee of Management, which PICS had been requesting of the Minister since 2001⁹. The Nature Park has leased the site back to the Council until June 2010, by which time the rehabilitation of the site, including correct capping and planting of shallow rooted indigenous species, will have been partly completed.¹⁰ Rehabilitation of the transfer station site will conclude the process once the gates have been closed to the public.

Ideally, Bass Coast Shire transfer stations would all have 'Tip shops' to enable the reuse of items such as usable furniture. No recycled plastic should go to landfill as local recycling facilities should be able to cope with plastics with numbers higher than 1 and 2. PICS has been supporting the use of calico shopping bags instead of plastic singlet bags for some years, presenting an Environment Award to the local Red Cross for their fund-raising initiative of making and distributing calico bags in Cowes, and was right behind the 'Plastic Bag Free Challenge', initiated in 2006 by Phillip Islander Steve Fuery. Through PICS's membership of Environment Victoria, PICS is also supporting Zero Waste initiatives, calling for manufacturers to take responsibility for products such as information technology and audio visual items which

have built-in obsolescence, and to also manufacture these items from all recyclable materials. All of these initiatives are aimed at reducing landfill, creating responsible manufacturers and consumers, and preventing waste ending up in our waterways, bays and oceans.

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- 9 PICS Outwards Correspondence to Sheryl Garbutt, Minister for Conservation, November 2001
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John Eddy: Blue Gum

© John Eddy - in trust
5-2-08

Chapter 7 SPREADING THE WORD

*If you go down to the woods today
You're in for a big surprise!
If you go down to the woods today
You'd better go in disguise.
For every bear that ever there was
Is gathered there together because
Today's the day the teddy bears have
Their PIC - NIC!*

With these words, sung with plum-in-the-mouth correctness, a classic black and white short movie crammed with images of cute koalas ‘at play’ completed a night of nature movies presented by PICS at the Parish Hall in the summer of 1969. The hall may have been hot and stuffy, the chairs hard and the mosquitoes biting, but the crowd – mainly of families – stayed on until the end. Why?

What Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*¹ did for the consciousness of so many Americans in 1962, Vincent Serventy’s *Continent in Danger*² did for Australians in 1966. By the end of the decade, many Australians craved knowledge of the flora and fauna of their own country, and of how to protect them from the many real dangers Serventy had so clearly described. Yet the media lagged behind the public. PICS did not. As far as getting the message out to the people goes, PICS hit the decks running, and has not stopped since.

Whilst the film nights petered out as television nature programs increased, the speakers at General Meetings three to four times per year maintained the enthusiasm. These days, with the pace of life many times’ faster and everyone’s diaries so much fuller, speakers are booked six months or more in advance. But they still come.

To single out individual speakers from the hundred and more excellent men and women who have given freely of their time and expertise to address PICS meetings would be unfair. However, the topics they have covered can be roughly divided as follows:

- Flora and Fauna: seals; whales and dolphins; Little Penguins; waders of Westernport; Lyrebirds; crown of thorns star fish; dinosaurs; flower and insect life of South Gippsland; classifying vegetation; seagrass dieback; ground orchids; life on the rock shore platform; and a memorable session on bats, one of which, a chocolate bat, had been taken from the refrigerator (where it had been peacefully sleeping) especially to meet the audience!
- Issues: development of Port of Hastings; Marine Parks; eco-tourism; pollution of San Francisco Bay; Lake Peddar; noxious weeds; planning in Victoria’ draft management plan for Summerlands Peninsula; public land management on Phillip Island; sustained development versus locking up sensitive areas; Saltwater Creek development; Linfox development; blue green algae; Crib Point redevelopment; future management of Phillip Island’s nature reserves; the Grand Prix circuit; aquaculture; tidal energy; wind energy;

solar energy; significant roadside vegetation; and ‘Greenhouse effects on the natural environment, including wildlife’ (1990).

- Practical Information: Cleaning oiled seabirds; noxious and environmental weed control; ‘Weeds out, trees in’; rabbit control and Calicivirus; Companion Animals Act; building with environmentally friendly materials; fox control methods; living humanely with wildlife; planning workshop with Jock McKechnie, Shire of Phillip Island, 1988.
- Other Organisations: Landcare; Penguin Reserve Committee of Management; Phillip Island Nature Park; Shire of Phillip Island; Bass Coast Shire Council; Conservation Council of Victoria; Phillip Island Boardriders Club; Fisheries and Wildlife; Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands; Victorian Conservation Trust; Environment Defenders Office; Westernport Regional Management Authority; Town and Country Planning Association; Marine Studies Centre; Arthur Turnbull Institute; Shell; Mobil; Hastings Port Authority; National Parks; Parks Victoria; Westernport Biosphere; South Gippsland Conservation Society.³



PICS members with guest speakers. L-r: Anwyn Martin, Jan Fleming, Albert Thomas, Susan Davies, MP (speaker), Esther Abram (speaker), Margaret Hancock. Photo courtesy Anne Oswin

Apart from meetings addressed by expert speakers, PICS sponsored public forums. These concerned the Saltwater Creek marina development (see ch.12); Phillip Island Grand Prix (ch. 13);, proposed upgrading of the Crib Point oil terminal (see ch. 16); the Linfox golf course housing development (ch.11); and duck hunting. Most of these took place in St Philip’s Parish Hall, scene of so much public action since being built by volunteer labor during the Depression.

Nature display weekends were held at the Masonic Hall in Cowes in the early 1970s, and included text, poster and photographic material along with an eclectic display of Phillip Island specimens, dead and alive. These pre-dated the modern era of requiring collections to have permits for each specimen. In the pre-event and pre-festival era, the displays were extremely popular, especially with families.

Before any of the levels of government or the various bodies who have controlled the Penguin Parade became interested in disseminating environmental information, PICS was producing pamphlets, brochures and information sheets on a wide variety of subjects:

Is That a Phillip Island Bird? Booklet; penguin information sheet; mutton bird information sheet;⁴ a (multi-lingual) tree-planting guide for Phillip Island; three editions of an information pamphlet on how to protect Phillip Island's wildlife and coast which was distributed in its thousands through the Newhaven Information Centre; a poster showing four different Phillip Island coastal habitats – twenty years before coastal photography became a popular art form; a Weed Atlas of Phillip Island which went out with shire rates notices; a guide to Cape Woolamai's walks; and a Growing Indigenous Trees pamphlet.⁵ PICS also co-operated with Bass Coast Shire and Landcare in producing weed and indigenous plant information across the Shire.

PICS has always made use of the local press to reach the community. Christine Grayden wrote several series of articles over a ten-year period, including a popular series of naturalist's observations, and an information series on the planning process, written in conjunction with the Planning Officer of the Shire of Phillip Island at the time, Aroon Joshi.⁶

Preceded by an unnamed quarterly newsletter beginning in 1969, *The Penguin* newsletter has appeared quarterly since 1993, and is distributed widely, including to all levels of government and State and Phillip Island libraries. This has been edited variously by Ken Pound, Coral Oswin, Ailsa Swan, John Jansson, Christine Grayden, Margaret Hancock, Marg Johnson, Sandy Shively, Bruce Howe, and Christine Grayden and John Eddy together. An analysis of the contents and language of *The Penguin* tells us much about the concerns and methods of the various eras and editors. From the hippy era to the moral high ground, imploring action with great urgency, fearlessly criticizing opponents, through to describing the landscape and wildlife in loving detail – all is evident in the newsletters.⁷

Margaret Hancock introduced the 'letter to members' in February 1986, which allowed even the busiest newsletter recipients to quickly gauge the current issues and activities in a few paragraphs. These have often reflected Margaret's droll sense of humor. Margaret also introduced the practice of publishing the complete annual report in the March newsletter. This comprises individual reports on all facets of PICS operations and those of associated groups.

Children's Environment Mornings commenced in spring 2004 to cater for kindergarten and primary school children. The sessions always include an art/craft or experiment component aimed at capturing the children's imagination. Relying heavily on the goodwill of community members and Phillip Island Nature Park personnel, the Environment Mornings have delivered very high quality, free, environmental education to hundreds of children. The eight-month seasons have been variously funded by PICS, Bass Coast Shire and Coastcare.

Bass Coast Shire's World Environment Day Expo, run over two days each June at the San Remo Recreation Centre, has provided a forum for PICS, Westernport Bird Observers' Club and Friends of Koalas to get together with all the funded environmental organizations. There they have mounted displays for hundreds of school children each year. In different years the three voluntary organisations have created static photographic displays, a 'forest' and a scene of mega-aqua fauna for the children to explore.

All ages have participated in PICS 'Seasonal Walks'. These walks were commenced in 2002 to give members a chance to just enjoy the environment without having to do work in it! Each walk explores a different corner of Phillip Island and Bass Coast Shire, with knowledgeable guides. Detailed notes taken on the walks appear in the following *Penguin*, so that the newsletters

form a first-rate reference. Several of the walks were adapted for the excellent book: *Come For a Walk! Exploring Phillip Island*, a collaborative community project which included five PICS members on the committee.⁸

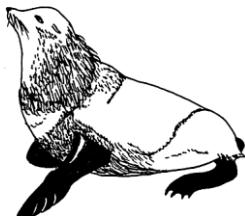
During 2001 PICS member Diane Baird developed the outline for a PICS web site, which went online in January 2002. The site, hosted by *vicnet*, includes a home page, issues and action section, events information, the newsletter, links and contact details. Hits become more frequent during controversial campaigns when both the public and the media search the site.⁹

Beginning in the nineteenth century with amateur scientific, bushwalking and field naturalist groups, and continuing to the present time, environmental groups have often led the way in informing the public on environmental issues. This has certainly been a major activity for PICS, and has contributed significantly to the education of both permanent residents and visitors to Phillip Island. Even today, with schools, Bass Coast Shire, the Nature Park, Landcare, Parks Victoria and others all involved in environmental education, PICS fills in the gaps. This history is another attempt to fulfill that role.

PHILLIP ISLAND NEEDS YOUR HELP TO CARE FOR WILDLIFE AND COAST

The Island's abundant wildlife needs natural habitat to survive. Unthinkingly we may be the cause of damage...This pamphlet may help you prevent further damage and

PROTECT OUR WILDLIFE



*Produced by the Phillip Island Conservation Society, Inc.
1987.*

PHILLIP ISLAND CONSERVATION GUIDE



Help Care for Wildlife and Coast

There is a great variety of wildlife on Phillip Island including koalas, seals, penguins, pelicans and swans. You may see frogs, echidnas, swamp wallabies, insects, and nocturnal creatures such as owls, bats, and possums. Reptiles such as blue-tongued lizards and snakes often sun themselves on roads and sand dunes.

Remember that all animals and plants have their uses in nature. Most are protected by law.

Published by the Phillip Island Conservation Society with grant assistance from the Department of Conservation and Environment. Printed on recycled paper.

Front pages of two conservation pamphlets produced by PICS

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*PICS-Friends of the Koala's New Year's Eve float, ready for the parade.
Photo courtesy Anne Oswin*

Chapter 8 THE COAST AND THE COMMUNITY – The Phillip Island Foreshore Advisory Committee

PICS has a long history of concern about Phillip Island's foreshores, and so it was natural that PICS members would jump at the chance to be involved in any detailed study of the foreshores proposed by the Shire of Phillip Island (as managers of the foreshores). The opportunity came in April 1984, when Shire of Phillip Island Chief Executive Officer, Barry Hayes, outlined his idea for a Foreshore Advisory Committee at a public meeting called by the Council and attended by over 60 people. Prompted by the number of comments about foreshore problems sent in to the 'Forward Planning' exercise of 1983 – including three pages of detailed recommendations from PICS covering 12 coastal areas, and concluding with the question: "Foreshore Reserve Committees: where are they?"¹ – Barry gained permission from the Council to throw the gauntlet down to the community, concluding that:

A total strategy plan showing carefully considered and documented aims is a very difficult claim for Government to refuse. And such a plan which has been prepared with very heavy community consultation and involvement is what the public purse opens for.²

The Steering Committee included PICS members Graeme Burgan, John Eddy and Keith Grayden. Terms of reference were developed and objectives defined as:

- a. Advise the Shire Council on all matters pertaining to the use of Phillip Island's foreshores
- b. Promote awareness within the Phillip Island community of all matters pertaining to the foreshore
- c. Gather all relevant information on the foreshore
- d. Act as an independent voice for the community³

The terms of reference "also included a structure consisting of an executive committee and various working committees. The role of the executive committee is to gather and co-ordinate information supplied by the various working committees on local resources, uses and recommendations for future conservation or development".⁴

During this initial work, Keith Grayden (a professional fisherman who knew the beaches very well) became impatient with the theoretical approach being taken, so loaded the Executive Committee on to the carry-all of his tractor and took them all along the beach (with Council permission) from the Cowes Boat ramp to Flynn's Lagoon and back again. This enabled the members to clearly see the problems they were dealing with. Public meetings followed in July and August 1984 to elect working committees for the fourteen areas into which the coastline had been divided. These 'Area Working Committees' contained a broad cross-section of people including farmers, business-people, a solicitor, a sculptor, a teacher, an engineer, a garbage contractor, a draftsman, women engaged in home duties and retired folk. Whilst many were PICS members, many others would have shied well away from the description 'green'. But somehow the mix worked well.

There were also five special interest groups appointed for swimming and surfing; boating and fishing; tourism and commerce; wildlife and conservation and outdoor recreation; education and history. In the event, no tourism and commerce group actually got going – a major gap considering the extreme importance of the foreshores to Phillip Island's tourist industry.

Involvement in the working groups and special interest groups (described in the report as the 'eyes and ears' of the executive committee)⁵ meant a great deal of time and commitment. Graeme Burgan and John Eddy devised a series of *pro formas* for their use, enabling the groups to examine their areas in detail while considering:

- a) The natural resources present
- b) Man-made resources already existing
- c) Present use patterns
- d) Potential and/or desirable future recreational use
- e) Facilities needed for future use (e.g. proper access and car parks)
- f) Impact of past and present use
- g) Programs needed to combat problems such as erosion, damage to wildlife habitat and natural vegetation, woods, rubbish, loss of scenic value.⁶

To achieve this, each group did a coastal resources inventory and a survey of twenty four categories of foreshore use, and concluded by giving recommendations for needed action in their areas. Meanwhile, the special interest groups assessed the use of the whole of Phillip Island's foreshores for their particular category, and the impact of that use. These groups also made recommendations. Forty-four people were involved in the working groups, including 14 PICS members. Special interest groups involved nineteen people, including seven PICS members.⁷



Typical informal tracks leading directly from houses to the beach. Photo: G.Burgan

Much of the information was presented in a first volume of fifty seven pages of text plus seven appendices typed by Christine Grayden (PICS), cross-referenced to a second volume of sixty three maps. Graeme Burgan and John Eddy did the bulk of both the maps and text. This substantial study represented many hundreds of hours of work by the community, and presented

the Council and government departments with a well researched, documented and substantiated series of recommendations in an easy-to-follow format. So, after all that, what became of it?

PIFAC continued to be active under a new Executive Committee, which included PICS members Bob Dennis and Michael Cleeland, for a few years after the report was produced. Collie Planning and Development Services P/L took many of the relevant ideas on board to prepare sections of the *Phillip Island Strategy Plan*⁸ No doubt the engineer's department and government departments were very impressed with the report and had it on hand when needed. But unfortunately this was at a time when funds for foreshore works were very difficult to come by. However, the Phillip Island Nature Park has made use of the report since they gained control of much of the island's coastline⁹ whilst the Coast Action groups auspiced by Bass Coast Shire Council are achieving many of the site-specific recommendations.

Most of the ten priority recommendations have been achieved. The first priority recommendation in the PIFAC report was:

1. Establish a comprehensive management plan for the Phillip Island coast, including the recommendations in this report. This plan to be implemented by the most appropriate Committee of Management, supported by adequate funds, expertise and community input.¹⁰

Such a committee was set up soon after; a description of its work appears elsewhere in this book (see ch. 18 – Graeme Burgan) Priority 2, to redevelop the Woolamai Surf Beach facilities has been achieved, and priorities 3 and 8 relating to foreshore facilities and drainage works have largely been fulfilled. PICS undertook a study of the north shore, as requested in recommendation 4 (see chapter 9). Boat ramps have been upgraded and no new marinas have been approved, as per recommendation 5. PINP has taken “steps to protect penguin and muttonbird habitat”, as in recommendation 6,¹¹ and have also established “an educational and awareness program”, and, in conjunction with BCSC, have “increased monitoring and surveillance by rangers” (though more is needed) as per recommended in 10.

In mid-1986 PIFAC became embroiled in controversy when the Executive Committee took the advice of the Ventnor Area Committee regarding the proposed Saltwater Creek canal development and expressed their opposition directly to the Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands. The Council was already under a great deal of pressure from the developer (see ch. 12), and strongly criticized PIFAC for its action. The media had a field day over the issue, which was eventually resolved with PIFAC agreeing “to direct any opinions, recommendations, etc, only to the Council”.¹² Nevertheless, consensus reached at a regular PIFAC meeting held at the time ensured that opposition to any similar future plans was included in the recommendations of the final report.¹³

PIFAC continued to advise the Council on a wide range of foreshore issues until 1988, when the group lapsed for want of funding and support from Council. In the interim, PIFAC had tackled many issues including identification of foreshore boundaries; Woolamai Beach redevelopment proposals; boardwalks and other beach access; Rhyll monument and environs; the sighting of the Phillip Island Board Riders Club clubhouse; riding of horses within foreshore reserves; hovercraft and jet skis on mudflats; and the implementation by Council of an emergency beach numbering system.¹⁴

Annexation of the foreshore by adjacent landowners was and still is a significant issue and has resulted in a great deal of abuse of the foreshore since European settlement. PIFAC also addressed this issue, but outcomes were slow in coming. For example, stock incursion on south coast foreshores into archaeological and rookery sites was not addressed until the Nature Park completed the fencing in November 2000. Even the Kitty Miller Area Working committee, which included adjacent landholders, had tried to stall on this issue by suggesting a recommendation that “fencing of foreshore boundary could be counter-productive and impractical”. This was not included in the report’s final recommendations.¹⁵

At the first meeting, Barry Hayes had issued a challenge:

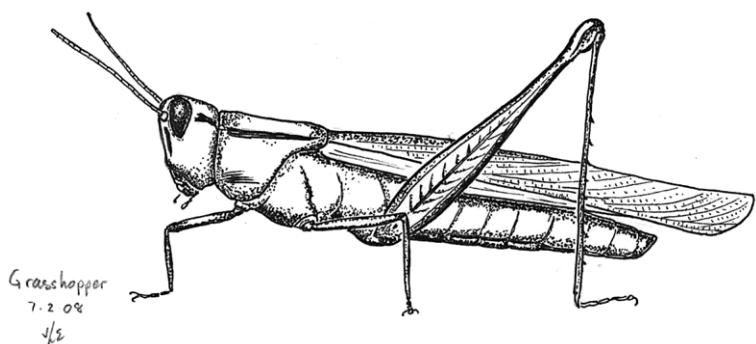
This meeting decides whether the community wishes to leave the problems and the decisions to the likes of Council, Ports and Harbours, Soil Conservation Authority, etc, or wants to become involved as innovators and initiators – with sleeves rolled up.¹⁴

As usual, PICS members rolled up their sleeves, and made a major contribution to the work of PIFAC for the duration of its existence.

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John Eddy: Grasshopper



Chapter 9 A SMALL GRANT WELL SPENT

The North Shore Position Paper

There was a knock at the front door at dusk on a cold, wet Sunday evening. There stood a ten year old girl with her grandmother; both were bedraggled, and both triumphant! Yes, thank you, they had had a ‘good’ afternoon. All the measurements which were their particular responsibilities had been taken. The check list was complete.

So wrote PICS President, Margaret Hancock, on 18 December 1987, in her letter of introduction to *The Problem of Beach Erosion on the North Coast of Phillip Island. A Position Paper*.¹ The experience she describes of conservation crusader Ethel Temby and her granddaughter, Heather, was typical of the community involvement in this project which ran over twelve months in 1986-87, and also involved the eminent coastal geomorphologist, Dr Eric Bird, fresh from a study of the Somers sand system on the other side of Western Port.

The impetus for the study came from the fourth priority recommendation from the Phillip Island Foreshore Advisory Committee’s Report:

4. Initiate a programme of study of the erosion problems due to wave action along the north shore of Phillip Island, from Ventnor to Rhyll, to identify causes and most appropriate courses of action.²

The PIFAC report itself was the result of huge community input, so that this recommendation came directly from community concern over many years. Phillip Island’s north shore, especially from Cowes to Observation Point, had been subject to a significant, sometimes spectacular, amount of erosion observed since European settlement. West of Coghlan Road “the present coastline is about 110m behind its 1866 position, while at Sanders Rd it has receded 30m from its 1953 position”.³

The Division of Ports and Harbours responded to this direct threat to roads, power lines and private property by putting in place a series of groynes, boulder ramparts and timber walls (many of which had severely deteriorated) from 1947 onwards.⁴ At the time of the PIFAC recommendation, further severe erosion was occurring, leading to calls from adjacent residents for more protection barriers to be put in place. PICS did not feel that this was the answer, but clearly the dilemma could only be solved by reviewing all the existing information, doing further research and getting the help of an expert to draw the appropriate conclusions. To do this, grant money and a subcommittee to steer the whole project would be required. The motion to pursue the grant was passed at a PICS committee meeting on 23 March 1985, and a subcommittee of Ailsa Swan, John Eddy and Graeme Burgan was established at the July 1985 committee meeting.⁵ John Jansson also later joined the group.

PICS sent out letters outlining their proposal to eight government departments and received back letters of support.⁶ A grant of \$2,500 for Assistance for Environment Groups was obtained from the Ministry of Conservation, Forests and Lands. A further \$1000 came from member donations. Ailsa Swan approached Dr Bird, and to everyone’s surprise he agreed to undertake the writing of the Position Paper.

A long meeting was held with the Ports and Harbors; Conservation, Forests and Lands Department; Planning and Environment; Coastal Management and Co-ordinating Committee personnel, and others with Dr Bird, to determine the direction the research and final document should take, and what type of tasks were required. A pamphlet was produced for local residents and a press report outlined the project.⁷ A public meeting was held in November at which Dr Bird spoke, describing beaches generally and the mechanisms that affect them. Ailsa Swan spoke about the historical research she had undertaken on the Smythe coastal survey of 1842 and the Cox Royal Navy survey of 1865, and John Eddy gave information about the research being undertaken and called for willing helpers.



Christine Grayden's sketch of the Cowes shoreline, showing various types of works aimed at protecting the coast: rock walls, groynes, timber wall and fencing. From front cover of Position Paper.

A huge amount of research activity was undertaken by a total of fifty-one participants, twenty six of whom were PICS members; others were from the Foreshore Advisory Committee and the Silverleaves Conservation Association. The main activities were:

- The compiling of a twenty eight page detailed descriptive record of the shoreline from Penguin Rock east to Observation Point over two days in April 1987, and an equally detailed annotated photographic record over 1986-87, based around the Ports and Harbors marker posts, by Dr Bird and John Eddy.
- The placing and monitoring of two series of ‘anchored cords’ “to obtain some measurements of changes in sand bar topography on Cowes Bank...and to use the results to help elucidate the extent and pattern of sand movement”.
- Daily wave and wind direction observations at Grossard Point, Anchorage Beach, Woodlands Beach and Observation Point, undertaken by dedicated beach walkers in all weathers from August 1986 until July 1987 – a big commitment!
- Tide current and tide height observations from boat and shallow water at seven stations along the Cowes Bank at fifteen-minute intervals over twelve hours in both January and May 1987. This made use of ‘deflector gauges’ made especially for the job out of “standard stubby beer bottles tied at the neck with fishing cord and suspended from long 18 cm radius wooden protectors, which were also fitted with a plumb bob”.

- Surveyed beach profiles, or transects, taken using level and staff in early 1987, based on all thirty seven of the Ports and Harbours markers then set in sand along the upper beaches. This created great interest for beach users, especially when a rather pregnant Christine Grayden was the ‘staffer’, and, on another occasion, Keith Grayden and John Eddy were working in the fog and a jogger, thinking they were working for developers, told them: “Just as well you blokes are doing this in the fog or the ‘Greenies’ will get you!”
- Beach counts, where the coast was divided into fifty areas and counts were made of beach users by volunteers at 11 a.m. on 26 January, 9 March and 28 December, 1986, and at 3 p.m. on 26 January, 9 March, 28 December, 1986, and 18 January and 25 January, 1987. The weather was cool on most occasions, but the least number counted was 235 on 9 March, 1986, and the most was 6123 on 18 January, 1987.
- Historical research, undertaken by Ailsa Swan, examined the files of the State Library; Ports and Harbours (later Port of Melbourne Authority); Titles Office; Royal Navy; Royal Australian Navy; Public Records Office; Central Plan Office; and the Phillip Island and District Historical Society. Locals donated historical photos, and Ailsa also studied many aerial photos and maps. Unfortunately, Ailsa’s proposed “Historical Review of Coastline Changes” was never completed.

All of the results were tabulated and compiled into a ‘Resources Document’ file, which is stored by John Eddy and available for research purposes.

All of this work resulted in a thorough and useful document which confirmed PICS suspicions regarding the usefulness of mechanical barriers for beach protection, concluding that “The prospect of gradual extension and elaboration of structures of this kind carries a risk that the coastline will eventually become artificial, with little if any upper beach left exposed at high tide”.⁸ This, combined with a period of reduced erosion, lessened the panic that had produced the strident calls for more barriers. Furthermore, results confirmed Dr Bird’s hypothesis that lobes of sand moved gradually along the coast from west to east, with localized erosion occurring in the sand-deficient stretches between lobes.

The Position Paper concluded with some suggested management options, including a discussion of beach re-nourishment and various management conditions, including “Projected Sea Level Rises”,⁹ a subject not widely known to the public in 1987. Sixty copies were printed initially, thirty four of which were sent out to a relevant distribution list, including the Commission for the Future, which made it available at the ‘Greenhouse 88’ conference in September 1988. The report was extremely well received, with many letters of praise coming in, including one from the Chief Executive Officer of the Shire of Phillip Island, Barry Hayes, who wrote: “Congratulations on the initiative. The Report is a document in which your Society should be proud. It is very well presented indeed”.¹⁰ The excellent presentation was the word-processing work of PICS Life Member John Swan. Peter Sheehan, Regional Manager, CF&L, wrote: “It is great to have such a well researched and presented analysis available. The small grant was certainly well spent”.¹¹

PICS members and the public purchased the remainder of the first print run. Many additional copies were photocopied and bound as demand required. The Phillip Island Library copies fell apart with use and were recently replaced with another two new copies, while students and academics borrow parts of the Resources Document from time to time.

The North Shore project continued community involvement in the Phillip Island foreshore management planning that had been initiated by the Foreshore Advisory Committee, and ensured that the Committee's recommendation for a detailed study was acted upon. But most of all, "people came to realize that the beach was part of a dynamic system, a whole natural process, that would come and go over time".¹² And everyone from grandparents and children, pregnant women, fishermen, beach walkers and academics had a great time doing it!

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Terry Nott: looking westward to Cowes.

Chapter 10 ‘WELCOME TO MOONAH GROVE’ Foreshore Protection and Red Rocks

Much of Victoria’s coastline is Crown Land Reserve, and Phillip Island is no exception, although the background of its coastal reserve varies from most areas. The original leaseholders, the McHaffie brothers, were members of the Acclimatisation Society, and in the course of an eight-year battle to keep the island to themselves, had a half mile wide strip circumscribing the Island declared as a buffer for the protection of released animals, and as a barrier against smuggling. The Acclimatisation Society wanted to make the whole of Phillip Island a reserve especially for the release of birds and animals from the ‘Old World’. However, due to “the remarkable number thereon of sea eagles and large hawks which have destroyed all of the pheasants liberated on Phillip Island”,¹ and much else besides, as well as a concerted effort by the Lands Department, the bid failed, and Phillip Island was opened up for closer settlement in 1868. What was left of the reserve by then was in parts retained, but the majority became ‘permanently reserved for public purposes’, mainly one and a half chain (99 feet) above high water mark.

When PICS began in 1968, the Shire was the Committee of Management for the foreshore reserves, and foreshore works were dependent primarily on grants from the Soil Conservation Authority, managed through the Shire Engineer’s department. However, foreshore works were not a priority of that department, since most of Phillip Island’s roads were in a poor state and were assessed as requiring more immediate attention. Furthermore, there was no Planning Officer until the mid-1980s; the Shire Engineer also had that role until then.

PICS felt that attention to the foreshores was of great importance. Erosion, a plethora of uncontrolled tracks, annexation by adjacent private landowners, grazing, *ad hoc* parking areas which were quagmires during spring and winter, trampling of penguin and mutton bird areas and no protection for existing vegetation were all major problems of that era. Most coastal shires faced the same problems experienced by Phillip Island. And so, when the Federal Government made funds available through the Department of Environment in 1974, PICS applied for, and was given, a grant of \$3,300 – the first of many grants over the years – to investigate foreshore management in relation to the preservation of flora and fauna on Phillip Island. In the submission, PICS had pointed out Phillip Island’s importance to the Australian tourist industry, the high scenic and wildlife values of our coasts, and the impossibility of the local council’s financial resources to keep ahead of the ever-increasing problems on the coast.

PICS approached the Centre for Environmental Studies at the University of Melbourne to see if they would undertake the study, and they agreed. Staff involved included Professor G Seddon, Professor J Turner and Dr E C F Bird (who was to assist PICS in the 1980s with the North Shore Position Paper; see ch. 9). Their study included much of the north and west coast of Phillip Island as well as Cape Woolamai. After investigating this entire foreshore, it was decided that three areas required priority treatment: Red Rocks, the western Summerlands coast (particularly Cat Bay) and Cape Woolamai.²

These areas were identified as being extremely important habitat for flora and fauna, and also areas of high, uncontrolled, human visitation. Red Rocks was most distinctive due to the tuff outcrops on the beach, formed millions of years ago by compacted volcanic ash, and of course for the beautiful old Moonah trees. The authors suggested renaming the site 'Moonah Grove', and erecting a welcome sign to encourage goodwill towards the area.



Terry Nott: Moonahs at Red Rocks

The report broke new ground by clearly defining such aspects as the purposes of coastal reserves and principles of management (e.g. administration, access control guidelines, and proposals for public education). These principles were then applied in the report to the specific examples.

It is difficult to conceive now just how innovative these ideas and proposals were considered in 1975. However, PICS believed the theoretical aspects of the report to be so important that a copy was sent to every coastal shire in Victoria. Meanwhile, the Phillip Island Shire, much to their credit, took parts of the report on board – especially specific recommendations for Red Rocks, which became something of a showpiece for foreshore management.

However, the Red Rocks area reached a stalemate for many years, so that noxious weeds returned, fencing was not maintained and a plethora of tracks from the car park branched out into major sand-blows at the beach. PICS had the occasional working bee to try to minimize the damage, but clearly a major input of funding and effort was needed.

Bass Coast Shire commenced participation in the Coastcare/Coast Action network as part of the Port Phillip East Coastcare region (Facilitator: Maree Shelley, followed by Denis Cox) in the mid 1990s, with Bass Coast Shire Council Environment Officer Paul Smith doing much of the groundwork as groups began to form around Phillip Island's coast. PICS eagerly took on the Red Rocks Coastcare group in 1996, with the first co-ordinator being Rose Thomas (from 1996-2000). Her priorities were to tackle noxious weeds, dune and cliff erosion, the minimal natural vegetation regeneration and uncontrolled access. Rose described both the frustrations and joys in her Annual Reports, but concluded that:

This is really a never-ending story that has brought together people sharing a common love of the environment. Some of our best moments have been when we've been all sweaty and dirty from our labors and have tucked into the mandatory BBQ sausage at the end of the a working bee.³



Happy PICS Red Rocks Coast Action volunteers celebrate the opening of a timber staircase down to the Red Rocks beach.

PICS was successful in several rounds of Coastcare and Department of Sustainability and Environment funding from 1997-98 onwards, so that, with the help of volunteers, including local residents Daryl Major and his crew of Fred Huitema and Paul Cummings during their Christmas break, and a Greencorp team (in 2001), new fencing to control beach access and protect vegetation went up quickly, woody weed removal rid the area of pittosporum and boxthorn, and solid, attractive wooden stairways were built by contractors to allow for easy beach access whilst protecting the dunes. Bob Dennis, Sandy Shively, Tim Patkin and Albert Thomas also put in huge efforts. Locals began to take more pride in the area, with ‘regulars’ doing rubbish collection duty on their daily walks.

Rose was followed by Greg Johnson, co-ordinator from 2001-02, who envisaged the need for a Coast Action group for the Ventnor coast to tackle the ‘views before vegetation’ attitude. Gillian Collins followed from 2003-05. Both achieved further funding for access, weed and revegetation work. Soft weed removal and revegetation became priorities, along with additional well-designed stairways further towards ‘Penguin Rocks’, (so-called because Little Penguins used to nest there, in common with much of the island’s coast). With the appointment of Derek Hibbert as Coastcare co-ordinator for Bass Coast Shire, Coast Action groups had a specific individual within the Shire to liaise with.

The major funding bodies are now Envirofund and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Although access between Red Rocks Rd and Penguin Rocks is now satisfactory, the weed eradication, protective brush matting and revegetation continue, and the ‘fire track’ – eastern end – of the Red Rocks reserve is now receiving attention.

The hands-on nature of Coastcare work is described vividly by Gillian:

My proudest achievement was getting two grants to build the steps at the Penguin Rocks end of the beach. One of the residents described it to me (before the steps) as the ‘cardiac climb’, and many of the residents, being elderly, had a hard time getting to and from the beach. There was also considerable erosion around a magnificent Manna Gum, and building the steps the way we did was intended to help stop the erosion.

Derek Hibbert, Bass Coast staff, was a major inspiration. He was unfailingly optimistic and helpful.

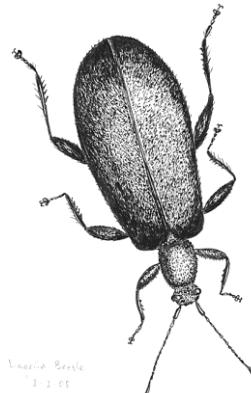
The day we cut Pittosporum in the area between Red Rocks and West Cowes stands out in my memory. Derek had brought a Bass Coast crew with a chipper, and the volunteers cut the large trees, dragged them to the fire track, and the Bass coast staff chipped them. Every single volunteer was over 60, and we did an amazing amount of work that day! The right people and the right tools make a lot of difference.⁴

Several working bees are still held each year, augmented by Shire staff and contractors such as PICS member Mike Cleeland’s company *Southern Environmental Contractors*, who remove large woody weeds, spray large areas of soft-leaved weeds and perform various other tasks. A few Red Rocks residents undertake weed removal independent of PICS, but under Shire direction, while others regularly collect rubbish. Seventy-six individuals have contributed around five hundred hours of voluntary work since 1998. Many have come often, some have come when they can, and several have brought children and grandchildren along! Nearby residents also join in on occasion.

Phillip Island now has eleven active foreshore groups: Ventnor, Ventnor West, Red Rocks, Cowes, Silverleaves, Rhyll, Newhaven, Cape Woolamai, Woolamai Waters West, Smiths Beachcomber and Surf Beach/Sunderland Bay.⁵ There is no doubt that Coast Action/Coastcare has been the savior of much of the Phillip Island coast, and a success story in terms of the remarkable co-operation between the funding bodies, Coastcare/Coast Action, Bass Coast Shire, Phillip Island Nature Park and the dedicated volunteers who give up hundreds of hours of their time to protect and restore our extraordinarily beautiful coastline.

Although there is still much to be done at Red Rocks, PICS’s efforts there are a prime example of this co-operative success.

The Red Rocks area features as Walk 10: “Red Rocks Area: Red Rocks and Blue Wrens” in the book *Come for a Walk!*⁶



John Eddy: Lagriid beetle

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Patsy Hunt: Blue Wren

Chapter 11 ALL IN A DAY'S WORK PICS and Planning

Planning is not an invention of the twentieth century. Many ancient civilisations had planners, and, occasionally, public participation in planning. However, of all aspects of PICS's activity, none is more controversial than planning.

The original surveys of Phillip Island made during the 1860s represent quite forward thinking for their time. It is almost as though Phillip Island was seen as an opportunity for creating a small Utopia. Four towns were spaced regularly along the bay coasts, adjacent to coves suitable for loading boats, and were to have gridded roads and reserves for schools and recreation.¹ In-between, smallholdings averaging 80 acres (32.4 ha) were made available for what was meant to become a happy, active community of farming families and merchants which would not only be self-sufficient, but would also supply a growing Melbourne population with cropped food-stuffs. Moreover, Phillip Island's survey included a public foreshore reserve, 90 feet above high water mark, and several 'water reserves' for watering cattle. The rationale behind these reserves may have been based on memories of conditions in the 'Old Country', where much of the best fishing, hunting and recreation resources were tied up in privileged, private hands.

The efforts of many early settlers failed due to drought, caterpillars and difficulties with transport, but by the end of the 19th century Phillip Island was already a popular holiday destination. Guest houses sprang up, with about forty operating at the height of their era.² By the 1920s land speculation for holiday housing was already occurring, with subdivisions at Summerlands, Pyramid Rock and Berry's Beach. Only Summerlands was ever developed.

By the 1960s, the era of the motel and caravan park had arrived, largely replacing the old guest houses. Septic tanks replaced the pan service in Cowes, but the need for planned services, such as reticulated water and sewerage, became evident. So too did the need to protect the environmental resources – for example, eighty years of unrestricted access to the foreshores had created serious erosion problems.

Meanwhile, community pressure for public participation in urban planning in cities was increasing, so that during the 1960s the Victorian Government passed legislation requiring all municipalities to prepare a Planning Scheme to control land use in their areas, and to guarantee the public a say in any changes to the use of private land. Phillip Island Council duly embarked on this exercise. However, the responsible officers at the time had no experience in this field and the Phillip Island Planning Scheme was to undergo a long process of revision before it was accepted. Meanwhile various unsuitable schemes were being pushed at Council (including the "Nits" marina – see ch. 1 – and subdivision plans for 16,000 blocks!). By the 1960s the state government was forced to place an Interim Development Order on Phillip Island, thus curtailing development here until completion of the Planning Scheme in the mid 1970s.

Due to population redistribution and different demands on land and infrastructure, all planning schemes needed revising by the 1980s. This next planning scheme process was more public than the first, and the Planning and Environment Act 1987 made many improvements on the first Planning Act. The Act was now written in 'plain English', and prescribed forms were to be used for Planning Permit Applications and Amendments to the planning scheme. Public advertising of the processes clearly spelled out the public's right to object. Naturally PICS made submissions where possible on the development of this legislation.

However, the 1987 Act only covered *private* land. Approximately twenty one per cent of Phillip Island is public land, at that time managed by the Phillip Island Shire Council on behalf of the Crown. The Land Conservation Council had the responsibility of assessing existing public use and making recommendations for future use of public land. They twice scrutinized Phillip Island as part of the Melbourne Study Area, and PICS contributed major submissions to each draft.³

The Forward Planning exercise of 1983⁴ left the Council with a document full of ideas, but a lack of definite direction and an inappropriate staffing and budget structure to implement the major ones. That, plus the numerous amendments to the planning scheme, meant another step in the planning process was required. That step was the Phillip Island Strategy Plan. The Strategy Plan process, whilst mainly involving Shire and government department staff, did allow for public input and went to two drafts for public comment before being finalised. PICS had major concerns with several aspects of the draft plans, and took every opportunity to make these views clear. The Strategy Plan, whilst officially lacking ‘teeth’, gave clear directions for urban and non-urban areas, services and networks, social, economic, and administrative strategies.⁵

PICS was incorporated in 1986, after which it was able to appear as an entity at planning tribunals. Prior to that date, PICS President Murray Hilgendorf and member Ailsa Swan were way ahead of their time in objecting as individuals to development on the grounds of destruction of rural land and valuable landscapes. Between 1986 and the present, PICS has actively participated in the planning process on over sixty occasions. This has included consultations, mediation sessions, written submissions, objecting and subsequently appearing at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal, as well as assiduously participating in the formulation of policy documents bearing directly on the planning scheme.

During the 1980s PICS was mainly involved in assisting other islanders on planning issues, and made a major submission when a marina/hotel complex was proposed for San Remo.⁶ The 1990s started with the Logan proposal for a ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ theme park which PICS objected to as being far too intensive use for the rural site proposed and being incompatible with the concept of ‘The Natural Attraction’. The Council eventually rejected it.⁷ Equally inappropriate was the ‘Dune Buggy entertainment facility’ proposed for rural land near Wimbledon Heights, which was something of a test case to limit tourist attractions to within the tourist precinct. The proposed site was outside the tourist precinct, and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal ruled against it.⁸

Various subdivisions were mooted during the 1990s, but none as novel as the Newhaven airfield subdivision which proposed a private hanger with each unit, plus a hotel/motel and an aquarium. This case went to VCAT mediation, but the plan was never developed.⁹ In 1993-94 the owners of ‘Wintersun’ farm at Berry’s Beach tried to get a 500 bed hotel as well as everything else they had permission to do on their land. They had previously done a deal with the Minister of Lands and the Minister of Planning to exchange 24 ha of land adjacent to the foreshore (the so-called “Partridge Gift Land” which was partly used to create the Berry’s Beach to Pyramid Rock walk; Walk 17: Along a Volcanic Coast in *Come for a Walk!*¹⁰) in exchange for the consolidation of 400 lots of a 1929 subdivision into a number of large housing lots adjacent to the Gift Land,¹¹ and had won planning permission for a host farm, golf course, building blocks, two

farm lots and a convalescent home or health farm, The hotel case went to an independent panel appointed by the Minister for Planning, which ruled basically that either the previously permitted uses or the hotel were allowable.¹²

None of the uses has ever been developed, but the owners have recently applied to Bass Coast Shire Council for further development of the land as a ‘Health Farm’. In discussing the matter before refusing to endorse the plans, Cr Simrajh commented that “This seems more like a de facto conference centre with a bar, restaurant and conference facilities...” and Council concluded that “it was unusual for a development to be given a 25 year permit, saying that the proposal did “not stack up with current local planning” and was not in accordance with the sensitive coastal environment.”¹³ This latest case went to VCAT, where the health farm was approved, with strict conditions applied to the permit. PICS objected to both the airfield and the previous ‘Wintersun’ proposals and appeared on all occasions.

Since 2000 PICS has been involved in approximately thirty planning matters. In several cases, as with the Seagrove and Shearwater residential developments, and the Eco Resort, (all in and around Cowes) since no avenue existed to object, PICS worked with the developers, in some cases along with Landcare, the Westernport Bird Observers Club and the Friends of Koalas, to get the best outcome possible. Regarding the ‘Toscana Rise’ subdivision, Greg Johnson recounts how:

In November 2001, PICS appealed against a decision by the Bass Coast Shire to allow a five lot subdivision of a 4.3 ha area adjoining the foreshore between the mouth of Saltwater Creek and Penguin Avenue. Marg Johnson and I organised and ran the appeal on behalf of PICS.

The land had been zoned residential for over twenty five years but never developed. Approximately 1.6 ha of indigenous vegetation, much of it Coast Banksia woodland and Swamp Melaleuca, was threatened by the proposed subdivision. For many years locals had seen swamp wallabies, echidnas and koalas in the area and bird observers had reported seeing at least thirty six native bird species there. Environmental impacts on the foreshore dunes, wetland and habitat values would have been inevitable. A tributary of Saltwater Creek (northern part of the linear wetland) runs through the centre of the site.

VCAT found in our favour requiring that the subdivision plans be amended to confine development to the mostly already cleared elevated area of the site and that the areas of Banksia woodland and Melaleuca wetland be protected and managed in accordance with a conservation management plan.¹⁴

With the Gullaren subdivision on Smiths Beach Road, negotiation by PICS won a ‘whole farm plan’ from the owners, whose properties were in need of such a plan, and which Phillip Island Landcare has finalised.

A proposal for a heliport at Ventnor saw PICS and the other parties, together with the VCAT panel, assembled on the suggested location for a trial run. PICS had argued that helicopter joy-flights in this location would cause too much disturbance to the prolific bird life in the area. When the helicopter rose, so did all the birds in the area – right on cue! The whole area is now a

‘Fly Neighbourly’ zone, along with the Rhyll Inlet and forest reserve areas, and Cape Woolamai, with restrictions on just where aircraft can operate.

In the case of the Linfox golf course resort plans adjacent to the Grand Prix Motor Racing circuit, which propose the staged development over eight years of 382 multi-storey villa units, a 300 seat conference centre, a hotel and an 18 hole coastal golf course set on what is now coastal farm land, both the Council and PICS objected on the grounds of the development being against numerous State and local planning policies designed to protect rural and coastal land. As this book goes to press, PICS is awaiting the decision of VCAT on the Linfox appeal versus the Bass Coast Shire Council’s refusal to grant a Permit for the development. PICS, aided by the Environment Defenders’ Office, supported the Council at this eight-day hearing held in March 2008.

The most important example of PICS assisting in developing planning policy was the participation over several years by PICS members Anne Davie, Margaret Hancock, and Peter Dann in the formulation of the *Phillip Island and San Remo design framework, February 2003*, a major document which “establishes a vision, strategies and guidelines that will help shape the structure, function and appearance of Phillip Island and San Remo over the next twenty years”.¹⁵ Frameworks are being developed for all areas of the Bass Coast Shire. These are necessary owing to the inadequacies of the process of combining the Phillip Island, Bass and Wonthaggi planning schemes after shire amalgamation. PICS members are also participating in the community involvement stages of framework documents for other areas of Phillip Island, and in the three-yearly review of the Bass Coast Planning Scheme and Municipal Strategic Statement.

More recently, PICS, Westernport Bird Observers Club, Friends of Koalas and concerned individuals took part in the panel hearing to determine C46. This was a ‘grab-bag’ of amendments relating to the inclusion of different Strategic Framework elements and proposed changes to Phillip Island’s Vegetation Protection Overlay, which had its origin in the Phillip Island Planning Scheme. Bass Coast Shire staff claimed that implementation of the Overlay was too demanding of their time and resources, and protection of rural vegetation was in part duplicated elsewhere in the Bass Coast Planning Scheme. PICS and the other participants saw a real danger in the detail of the proposed changes, which would have required affected residents to have a sound knowledge of plant species; considerably increased the size of native trees which could be removed without a permit; and that no permit would be required for pruning and maintenance by qualified arborists “for the removal of dead vegetation or for work undertaken by public land managers in maintaining public land”¹⁶

The Panel agreed with many of the concerns expressed by PICS and others, concluding that

vegetation protection of Phillip Island is essential for conservation, habitat and landscape reasons. Mechanisms to protect vegetation should be appropriate, clear, easy to understand and not duplicative; the degree and nature of control over vegetation should not just be restricted for administrative convenience”.¹⁷

Mindful of the examples given to them of destruction of vegetation by “public land managers”, the Panel also determined that “native vegetation on public reserves and roadside reserves strongly contributes to the character of the island and the maintenance of habitat corridors and it therefore requires planning scheme protection via the Vegetation Protection

Overlay”.¹⁸ Not only did the Panel support the intent of the Overlay, but the members recommended reinforcing penalties and heavily policing infringements. Their findings were a great relief to PICS.

Another instance where PICS appeared at VCAT with like-minded organisations and individuals was in regard to the proposed complex at Swan Bay Caravan Park at Rhyll. The proposed resort of two and three storeys represented a major land-use change and had “the potential to vastly alter the existing character of Rhyll”. Moreover, with the removal of 150 mature trees required for the development it did not meet environmental and vegetation retention policies.¹⁹ Thanks to the galvanising of the community by the ‘Rhyll Raid’ group, 450 objections were received by Council, which rejected the proposal. VCAT also determined to reject it, citing many problems with the proposal and concluding:

Although some problems could be addressed by conditions, we consider that the quantum of shortcomings requires a comprehensive rethink of the whole project. We consider that the permit applicant should start again with a clean sheet of paper and a fresh approach to the scale and character of development that may be possible on this site.²⁰

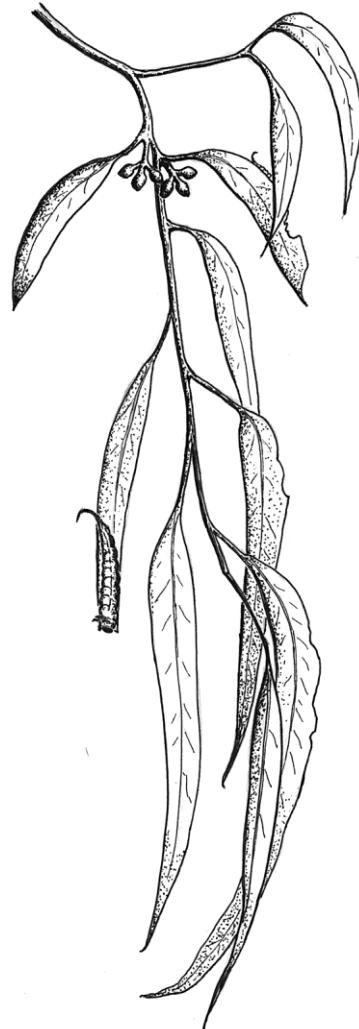
Similar in scale and approach to the SWAG campaign (see ch. 12), Rhyll Raid’s campaign was effective in not only getting the exact nature of the proposal out to the public, but was also able to successfully educate affected individuals about the planning processes they needed to follow in order to have their voices heard. PICS was happy to help.

Within the context of this planning maze, Phillip Island has seen more than its share of controversy. Billed as an ongoing irreconcilable clash between ‘Greenies’ and ‘Developers’, with accusations that certain people are ‘professional objectors’, the debate has at times become personal and one-sided. This has not helped the planning process. On the other hand there have also been times when the community has stood back with the attitude: “We don’t like it, but PICS will object, so we needn’t bother”. Fortunately we are seeing more and more people affected by an advertised amendment who *are* prepared to object, or at least go to mediation. But one has always had to be pretty tough to object to development on Phillip Island!

The planning work of members such as Murray Hilgendorf, Ailsa Swan, Greg and Margaret Johnson, Margaret Hancock, Anne Davie, Pauline Taylor, Ross Lloyd, Suzanne Chadwick, Bob Baird, Terry Nott, Peter Dann, Patsy Hunt, Bessie Tyers, Graeme Burgan, Ian and Val Weir, John Jansson, Penny Manning and many others, has ensured that a balance of views are considered by the Council and Tribunal whenever controversial development proposals appear. PICS’s planning work was recognised in 1987 with a major award from the Town and Country Planning Association. While PICS is a ‘conservation’ society, we have always been involved in planning. This is an essential part of PICS’s work because, as PICS President Margaret Hancock says: “Get the planning right and the rest will follow”.

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John Eddy: Saw-fly larvae on Manna Gum

Sawfly larva on
Manna Gum
3-2-08

Chapter 12 A SWAG OF PROTESTS

The Saltwater Creek campaign was a major one for both PICS and the Ventnor community. In 1985 the Saltwater Creek property at Ventnor was fringed by subdivision and the grazed valley paddocks were almost bare, except for a coastal reserve of dense Banksia woodland surrounding the lagoon, and covering aboriginal middens.¹ Whilst the degraded farmland and eroded creek banks were in need of a great deal of rehabilitation, the coastal reserve and lagoon were rich in important flora, fauna and archaeological values, and the ‘incised floodplain’ was of Geomorphological significance.²

However, the low elevation of the creek flood plain led a developer to believe that this was the perfect place to be completely excavated to make an inland canal/marina facility for a private residential development. Anchorage Beach (on to which the creek sometimes flowed) was to be cut by the canal and rock retaining walls reaching out into Western Port. All this was to enable the building of a \$75m dollar resort of 265 residential allotments, of which 120 will abut the canal; hotel-motel tourist accommodation, with convention facilities and various ancillary businesses. Or so John Delaney, the developer of Patterson Lakes, thought.

PICS committee members Greg and Marg Johnson were heavily involved. Greg gives this account of the fight for Saltwater Creek:³

Achieving a satisfactory development outcome for this environmentally-significant area fell into two stages:

1. Stopping the canal-based residential proposal (i.e. amendment L1), 1985 until May 1988, when Council abandoned the amendment, and
2. Negotiating an acceptable and secure long term future for the area culminating in Amendment L21, May 1988-May 1991.

PICS was aware of the environmental issues posed by the canal proposal as early as October 1985 when PICS wrote to the Minister about it. In 1986 both PICS and the Ventnor Progress Association had expressed opposition to the idea and had made submissions to the draft Phillip Island Strategy Plan opposing any intensive development of the Saltwater Creek area, and proposing the subject land as a permanent green wedge between Cowes and Ventnor.

In January 1986 PICS established a Saltwater Creek sub-committee comprising Sally Bowtell, Ross Lloyd and Greg Johnson. Despite written opposition from PICS, the Progress Association and farmers, the final version of the Strategy Plan clearly favoured the canal proposal.⁴ The Saltwater Creek Action Group committee was appointed at a public meeting called by the Progress Association on 22 January 1988. A motion adopted by the meeting called on the Action Group to plan and co-ordinate a public campaign to stop the canal-based development proposed for Saltwater Creek. The Action Group consisted of Julie Box, Anne Davie, John Anderson, Ross Lloyd, Gerry Lee, Greg Johnson, Josie Kent, with John Eddy and Marg Johnson being co-opted. An *Objector’s Guide*, prepared by Christine Grayden and John Eddy, who also provided the catchy acronym “SWAG”, was distributed at this meeting.

A four month campaign followed, the aim of which was to change the Council's mind about the future of Saltwater Creek by using the weight of numbers. The campaign consisted of events and actions designed to:

- Maximise awareness and number of written objections. Publicity included local and Melbourne radio interviews; a media kit produced by Marg Johnson for metropolitan and local media, including TV coverage of a beach rally by three TV channels; bumper stickers; objectors encouraged to use the *Objector's Guide* and to send a copy of their objection back to SWAG.
- Marg Johnson organised regular newsletters.

When the Shire Council finally came to vote on Amendment L1 on 18 May 1988, they faced "a SWAG of protest"⁵ with 518 written objections and a packed gallery, described as "the most massive opposition to any development proposed in the history of South Gippsland local government".⁶ In the event they voted to abandon the Amendment.

With the defeat of the canal proposal it was likely that the proponent would either be looking to cut his losses by quickly on-selling the land, or modifying his proposal to recover some of his losses. If the land was sold, the community could face the uncertainty of another environmentally unsuitable proposal from yet another unsympathetic developer. Would the community be able to find the energy for another struggle to protect this area?



Greg Johnson (with megaphone) addresses some of the concerned public at the SWAG Beach Rally. Photo: Margaret Johnson

In early 1989 SWAG indicated a preparedness to discuss the future of the land with the developer and this resulted in an invitation from Planning Officer Aroon Joshi to a meeting in March 1989. Present at this meeting were PICS members Bob Dennis, Ross Lloyd and Greg Johnson, Planning Officer Joshi, Councillors Phil Dixon and Heinz Froelhich, and developer John Delaney. Delaney wanted two subdivisions (one of which was poorly sited) on the fringes of the land but refused to discuss either a creek reserve or any arrangement for the balance of the rural land. Council made it clear they had no interest in having to administer another (creek) reserve on the Island. But, when the proposed amendment L21 was advertised in September 1989, the committee was relieved to find that it included a creek reserve ('Council drainage

reserve') and building set-backs from the creek ('viewlines'). It was, nevertheless, very disappointing that there was no guarantee against further subdivision of the balance of the land.

In the five months from September 1989 to February 1990, between the exhibition of L21 and the Panel Hearing on the amendment, Ross Lloyd and Greg Johnson were kept very busy in discussions with: the Victorian Conservation Trust (Warwick Forge); Alistair Kellock, the Regional Manager of Planning and Environment; and the developer, John Delaney. Following a visit to Saltwater Creek, the Conservation Trust confirmed that they would accept the land as a candidate for a conservation covenant, and following discussions with the Department, they called for a creek reserve to be a Crown Land Reserve.

By far the most significant of these discussions were with Regional Manager Kellock on 21 September and developer Delaney on 29 September. Kellock suggested that an S173 agreement under the Planning and Environment Act could be used to secure an agreement preventing any further subdivision of the land, and Delaney was persuaded to sign a statement agreeing to alter amendment L21 so that a covenant would be enacted.

At the 13 February 1990 Independent Panel Hearing, Delaney reneged on this undertaking. However, it served the purpose of underscoring with the panellist the community's determination to achieve a permanent agreement preventing future subdivisions around Saltwater Creek.

At the Panel Hearing, arguments in favour of having an S173 agreement, with third party involvement preventing further subdivision, and of imposing vegetation controls and landscape plans on the three rural allotments were all accepted and recommended to council. PICS agreed to be part of the S173 agreement and following some hesitation on the part of council, this offer was finally accepted. On 5 June 1990, Council adopted the redrafted amendment L21 incorporating most of the panel's recommendations and in May 1991 it was finally approved by the Minister.



Terry Nott: Saltwater Creek Lagoon

The outcome for Saltwater Creek was always going to be a compromise. Had Council accepted the panellist's building height recommendations, only low profile buildings would have appeared on the rural land. And had his vision for extensive, informal revegetation of indigenous species across the farmland occurred, a more natural landscape would have emerged. The amount of residential subdivision allowed on the fringes of the land could also be questioned. On the other hand, to have achieved a permanently protected creek with its new Crown Land Reserve, surrounded by three 10 ha. farmlets forming a permanent green wedge are positive outcomes for the community and the environment.

The importance of the S173 agreement which includes PICS as a third party should not be underestimated. The only way such agreements can be lifted is with the consent of all parties. It is conceivable that the Council and the landowner may one day see an advantage in lifting the agreement, but while PICS continues to have conservation as its central purpose and places importance on landscape protection, we can surely be confident that PICS will keep the agreement in place to prevent any intensive development of the surrounds of Saltwater Creek. This agreement, written into amendment L21, is unique for Phillip Island and perhaps also for Bass Coast shire. It is also a first for PICS. The agreement appears in the Bass Coast Planning Scheme under "*Incorporated Overlay – Saltwater Creek, Ventnor*".

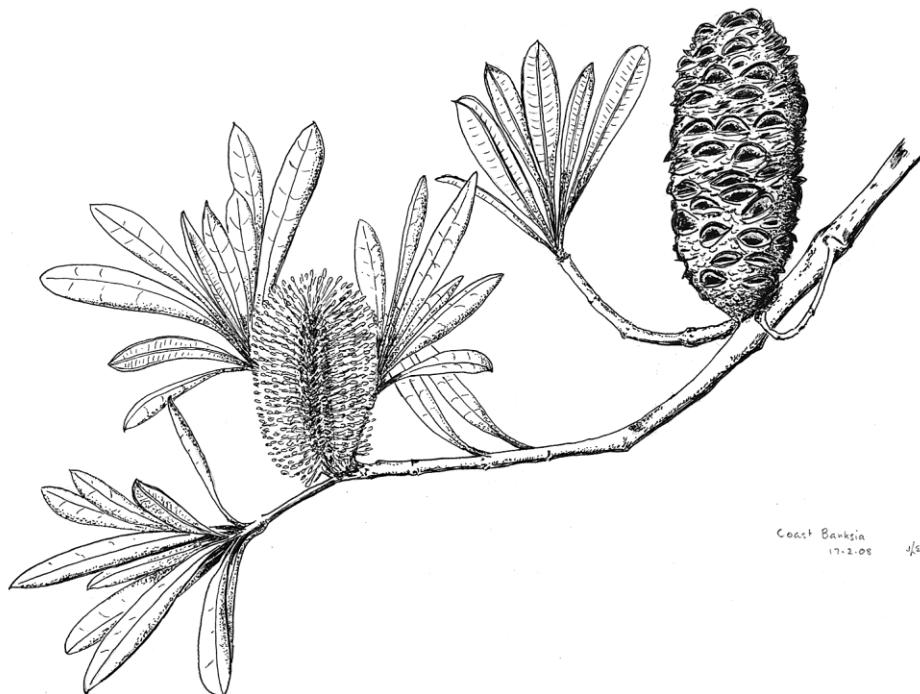
John Eddy reported to PICS "on behalf of SWAG 'veterans'" at the Annual General Meeting on 4 January 1992 that "as originally intended, the Saltwater Creek Action Group was formally disbanded at a Special General Meeting of the Ventnor Progress Association on August 9 1991. More than \$2,000 remaining in the SWAG account was redirected to a special VPA account and committed exclusively for the establishment, revegetation and maintenance of the new Saltwater Creek Reserve."⁷

Certainly PICS was very active in assisting Landcare's planting of the creek reserve, based in part on a draft management plan developed by John Eddy. Bass Coast Shire Council has since incorporated management of the Creek and coastal reserves in with that of Ventnor Common, forming a reserve of some 43 ha., including swamp, grassland, Banksia woodland, foreshores and both Boat Creek and Saltwater Creek Reserves, under a broad committee of management, of which PICS is a member. The areas now have a Management Plan.⁸ Whilst PICS remains ever alert regarding further efforts to inappropriately develop the remaining rural B land, John's final words in his Saltwater Creek report of January 1992 sum up the significance of this astounding campaign: "May the new Creek Reserve be a fitting monument to this support (of SWAG) and to the constant vigilance a caring community needs".⁹

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John Eddy: Coast Banksia

Chapter 13 READY TO ROAR? The Motor Cycle Grand Prix

Writing in 2001, Simon Eddy summed up the three-stage history of motor racing on Phillip Island:

First came road racing from 1928-38, including the Australian Grand Prix from 1928-35. Second came the first circuit, which the Phillip Island Auto Racing Club (PIARC) built in 1952. It was raced on from 1956-61, then rebuilt and raced on from 1968 until late the 1970s. Finally the Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix circuit was built on the same site in 1988 and has been raced on since...¹

His great uncle, Keith Grayden, clearly remembered the road races, and how “thousands of fans travelled to Phillip Island on the ferries, the *Alvina*, *Killara* and the *Narrabeen*. They walked to the track, where facilities were very primitive.”

There were few toilets but lots of scrub. Litter was a problem because people just dropped their rubbish where they were. We always had wind and the papers would blow into the scrub. Roads weren’t closed for practice because there weren’t many cars on the island then. If people wanted to get somewhere they just walked along the side of the road, even while the races were on. The drivers just had to look out for them. Only the corners were sealed, and the dust got so bad that drivers sometimes had to navigate by looking up at the trees.²

Well after road racing had been abandoned in 1938, the Phillip Island Auto Racing Club was formed in 1952 and purchased the site on which the track is still located. Len Lukey purchased it from them and remade it in 1964, leasing it back to the Auto Racing Club for \$2 a year to facilitate the races. Racing ceased in the late 1970s after Lukey died, leaving the property to be farmed and the track to fall apart. Thus there were approximately ten years during which no motor racing noise was heard from the track.

It therefore came as a shock to the local population when, following Placetac Pty Ltd’s purchase of the track in 1985, Barfield Pty Ltd was actually awarded a round of the World Motorcycle Championships at the Phillip Island Circuit and Bob Barnard commenced rebuilding the track in 1988 in preparation for up to 100,000 fans, riders, crew and the media to invade a permanent population of around 5,000 people accustomed to a peak holiday population of around 40,000.³ The advertising slogan was ‘Ready to Roar’.

It did not take long for the ramifications of reopening the track and the running of an event of such magnitude to sink into the local community. Traffic chaos, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of electricity and water infrastructure, enormous strain on the local hospital emergency and ambulance services, lack of movement in and out of estates by residents, safety hazards in rudimentary camping sites and car parks, insufficient toilet facilities generally around the island, damage to wildlife, habitat and livestock, lack of effluent control in camps and at the track, the risk of frequent similar major events at the track, lack of permanent infrastructure at the Phillip Island track and access to it compared with Sandown in Melbourne, and, above all,

NOISE. All were cited as problems, and not without precedence, as even the police were fearful of the type of riot behaviour that followed events such as Bathurst.

PICS responded by going first to the Phillip Island Planning Scheme, drawn up in 1975. Town Planner, Aroon Joshi, and the council, insisted that 'racing' was a 'pre-existing use' which did not require a planning permit to restart, and that what happened on the track was beyond the council's control. This meant there was no recourse for the public through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. However, recognising the enormity of the coming event, and the community's insistence on being involved, council did appoint a committee, headed by Cr Steven Fullarton, and having as its consultant recently retired Shire Engineer, Jock McKechnie (leading to the cry of "jobs for the boys" from Cr Heinz Froelich⁴).

In early January 1989, PICS invited Cr Fullarton to its General Meeting. PICS was not happy with his responses, and shortly after joined with farmers, doctors and other concerned residents to call a public meeting for 27 January at the Parish Hall. In the event, 400 people turned up resulting in a strong vote of no confidence in the Council. The motion moved was:

The Phillip Island Council be informed of the concern of this meeting that it is so out of touch with its community that it could set up a co-ordinating committee for the Grand Prix that omitted such obvious groups as the Phillip Island Conservation Society, local services such as the Country Fire Authority, and that so clearly (sic) from this meeting has not the confidence of local residents.⁵

Attendees also made it quite clear that they were not happy about ratepayers funding the Grand Prix at all. The State Government offered \$30,000, which arrived late and was used mainly to pay for Jock McKechnie. The meeting voted to form a 'Phillip Island Community Association Committee' (later renamed Phillip Island Concerned Citizens Association at a further meeting attended by 300), which immediately set about lobbying Members of Parliament and called another meeting for March, at which 400 people again crammed in and around the Parish Hall. The Grand Prix was scheduled for 6-9 April, and residents were clearly alarmed by press reports about the lack of organisation. Chief Inspector Bannon addressed the second meeting in an attempt to allay fears. Even so, in the minds of residents and weekenders near the track, crime was not the issue: noise was. Even as early as February 1989, council had received a petition from 162 irate residents, many from nearby Smiths Beachcomber estate, whilst ninety six objections were received regarding an application for a helipad at the track.



Concerned residents voice their protest at continual noise emanating from the Phillip Island race track last Sunday.

Noise protest at Grand Prix circuit. Photo courtesy Anne Oswin

Consequently, even though the two Grand Prix in 1989 and 1990 (before the race went to NSW and Eastern Creek until returning in 1997) ran more smoothly than expected, it was the constant testing and events and unacceptable noise emanating from the track which became the major intractable issue. Phillip Island had been touted as ‘The Natural Attraction’, and four years of work and much community consultation had gone into the Phillip Island Strategy Plan which was clearly based on the island’s natural environment being its major asset for both tourism and residents. People came here for peace and quiet and beauty, which they happily shared with 40,000 others once a year because even though there were peak holiday crowds, it was nothing like living in Melbourne.

The sense of powerlessness felt by the locals over the dominance of the track was expressed by Cr Hilton Chadwick in council in May 1989, when he asked “Who is running Phillip Island? Council or Bob Barnard?” The other councillors did not heed his warning at their peril, and in the elections of August that year, Phillip Island saw a ‘Green sweep’ of the Council, with Concerned Citizens Association members Anne Davie and Phil Wright replacing the pro-Grand Prix Steven Fullarton and Heinz Froehlich, whilst PICS member Graeme Burgan was returned. They soon challenged council’s lack of control, calling for planning permits to be required for ‘testing’ not related to racing, as being an ‘ancillary use’ under the Planning Scheme.⁶ A ‘noise protest’ outside the race track later in the month attracted eighty banner-waving residents, whilst the Smiths Beachcomber Association, Concerned Citizens Association and PICS continued to lobby hard for the Environment Protection Authority to require reasonable noise limits and also set limits on the number of days and hours the track could actually operate. The EPA’s initial response was to allow 100 days of testing and fifteen events per year which they considered satisfactory. “The residents do not”, Anne Davie stated bluntly in council.

In response to the formation of the Concerned Citizens Association (which included many PICS members), the conservative and pro-track Phillip Island Commerce, Trade and Citizens Association was formed in September 1989. This group campaigned actively in favour of activities at the track. A joint ticket ensured that their supporters John Matthews and Geoff Cohen were elected in the 1990 council elections,⁷ following the sitting Councillors’ refusal of a permit for ancillary motor vehicle testing at the track.⁸ The ban did not hold.

The wrangle over noise control continued for years, and is still a major issue. Nearby residents do not consider noise monitoring to be stringent enough. In 2007 there were ninety one event or ‘ride’ days (when members of the public can ride their bikes around the track), plus many days of testing. A quick search on the Internet shows that noise is in fact a common issue at many tracks around the world. There are now several events per year on Phillip Island that attract tens of thousands of people, and which continue to cause some of the sorts of problems at first feared, though the infrastructure is somewhat more organised than for the initial events. As Society member John Eddy put it after the 2006 Grand Prix:

Ahh! Spring! It brings on the Bikies.
Three days of racing and beer.
But except for the mess,
The noise and the stress...
You’d hardly know they were here!⁹

Although the track is currently part of the island economy, the Phillip Island economy survived without it before and would no doubt do so again should the track close. The same could not be said if Phillip Island were to lose the penguins to an oil spill, or its remaining sense of tranquility to further invasive commercial and industrial activities.

The issue of sustainability is also relevant here. Perhaps we are not far from a time when ‘motor vehicles’ will run quietly on a non-polluting fuel source. Would the fans keep coming to race meetings without the roar and smell? Meanwhile, motor racing could certainly be made less environmentally disastrous by track owners and race organisers sponsoring carbon reducing projects such as reforestation, so that patrons pay a surcharge on their ticket towards the project, based on an accurate calculation of emissions produced per meeting. Phillip Island’s Landcare and Coastcare programs offer obvious local projects which would benefit from such a scheme.

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Chapter 14 A LANDMARK SITE

The Isle of Wight Hotel

None of the economic reasons advanced in support of the proposal outweigh these adverse consequences. (His Honour Judge Wood, 17.11.2000).

Planning in Victoria is a complex and frightening beast. Until quite recently, many members of the public shied away from planning issues, suspecting that what an owner did on their own land was their own business entirely. The owner had paid for the land, after all. Of course from the outset, PICS did not agree with that sentiment – the Society was formed from the planning issue of the Nits at Rhyll. But a farm paddock between a swamp and a small Inlet is a very different case to the only truly ‘landmark’ site in Cowes, worth many millions of dollars and ripe for redevelopment. Or is it?

PICS has fought long and hard for the right of the community to participate in the planning process, and the battle over what goes on that landmark site embodies this fight like no other issue. The landmark site is that of the Isle of Wight Hotel. Whilst two hotels had existed in Cowes until the licence of the Phillip Island Hotel on the corner of the Esplanade and Walpole Street lapsed in 1959 (the building was burnt down in the 1960s), the location of ‘the Isle’, just above the jetty triangle and on the hill above Cowes main beach, ensured it was the more popular and lasting of the two. Commenced before 1870 and undergoing many ownership changes, refits and rebuilds (including being completely rebuilt after a fire in 1925),¹ the Isle has generally managed to move with the times. By the 1980s, however, everyone agreed a major rebuild was necessary.

The 1980s saw a real surge in interest in planning by everyday people. On Phillip Island planning was given a friendly face by CEO Barry Hayes’ ‘Forward Plan’ exercise of 1983² which specifically invited the community to submit their ideas for Phillip Island’s future. As we see in other chapters, this led directly to the formation of the Foreshore Advisory Committee, whose work eased the way for the establishment of Coast Action groups. It also led to recognition of the need for a Phillip Island Strategy Plan, which also involved much public participation over several years in the mid to late 1980s. The Strategy Plan did not deal with the Isle site in detail, except to label it as a ‘Tourism Precinct’, and to ensure sufficient car parking was available with any development in the commercial and tourism areas of Cowes. How prescient this was.

When the Isle of Wight redevelopment was advertised in October 1987, Phillip Islanders were not focused on Cowes urban development. Their minds were concentrated on the Saltwater Creek canal development, and a little later on the coming storm of the first Phillip Island Motor Cycle Grand Prix. A cursory look at the plans by PICS and a few concerned individuals, however, quickly brought the issues into focus. From a rustic two-storey shambles of main building, motel units, drive-through bottle shop and outbuildings, all acting as a ‘local’, the Isle was to become a massive eight storey building covering 9,200 square metres. Shops, 217 accommodation rooms, restaurants and a major conference facility were to be included in this \$20m project. In an era of big spending on big projects, the Council saw this as a way for Phillip Island to share in the spoils, and, “awed by the project’s scope, for the hotel will offer a new

concept in local design and standards”,³ the Council passed the plans. Objections were lodged, and the issue went to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

The nine objectors (including PICS) were represented by Town Planner Natalie Gray, who cited the excessive height and bulk of the plans – largely caused by the atrium design – and insufficient car parking as the main problems. Whilst the AAT did uphold the council’s decision to grant the permit, they were not happy with the scale of the development either:

The objectors’ strongest point, in our view, is the case that the whole building is so large that it would over-dominate and be quite out of scale with the township of Cowes. The argument is that it would destroy the balance and proportion of the town and the amenity of its important locale. We indicated during the hearing that we were concerned about this question.⁴

Due to the application fulfilling all of the other requirements, the AAT allowed the permit.



Photo montage of early Isle of Wight Hotel redevelopment courtesy Graeme Burgan

Nothing was done with the permit, although the Shire, then Commissioners, then Bass Coast Shire did review it from time to time to keep it ‘active’. By the time of the next permit application in November 1999, much had happened to interest Phillip Island’s residents and business-owners in the planning process. Consequently, an eleven storey proposal for the Isle site aroused much antagonism, setting in train a process that saw PICS requesting that the Planning Minister put in place height control policies similar to those agreed to by councils administering urban foreshore precincts adjacent to Port Phillip Bay foreshore, fifty-six objections were lodged (including PICS) and the Department of Infrastructure became involved, conducting three public workshops on the matter. In April 2000 Bass Coast Shire adopted the *Cowes Foreshore Precinct Urban Design Report*: one of several documents produced in this era with considerable public input, which did not include mention of the 7.5 storeys the final document allowed for the Isle of Wight. However, the report identified a “major threat” to the Isle area as: “Buildings standing above tree canopy could reduce the impact of the dominant landscape that underpins the present character”.⁵

PICS later received information from a licensed surveyor that the Hoop Pine located in the Isle car park was 34.8m (Australian Height Datum).⁶ The proposal for a 41m high building was patently unpopular, so the developer submitted modified plans in April. Cr Loretta Leslie, a PICS member, successfully moved at the next council meeting that, while the council supported redevelopment of the site, “the development represents an overdevelopment of the site”; required “a minimum of 550 parking spaces”, and “supporting documentation demonstrating the need and viability for such a facility in Cowes”.⁷ This represented a much harder line from the council towards developers; too many of whom had won permits only to sell the sites on for higher profits. However, a new application of 10 levels lodged in June, was eventually approved by Bass Coast Shire in July, and, with objections forthcoming, the case was sent to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

With so much at stake, PICS approached and was accepted by the Environment Defenders Office for assistance, and so all objectors ('applicants') received *pro bono* representation from Mr Tony Southall QC and Mr James Gorton, as well as the EDO's Ms Megan Bowman. With the race track hotel appeal running concurrently in VCAT, PICS Secretary Margaret Johnson performed miracles to ensure both campaigns ran smoothly. With strong expert witnesses, and a forceful case made on the grounds of urban design and architectural considerations, car parking and tourism imperative, the objectors' Isle case won. Clearly, “the Urban Design Report was created as a direct response to a governmental and community desire to work together and define the parameters of appropriate development within a coastal context”⁸

The hotel went back to the drawing board for five years, but meanwhile the Cowes Foreshore Precinct Urban Design Report was not the only document to express alarm about the potential for over-development of the Isle site. A revised Urban Design Report prepared in 2003 by Hassell, again with public participation, contained a revised Cowes Foreshore Precinct Appendix, which clearly stated:

The analysis undertaken by the project team concurs that while the Isle of Wight site is acknowledged as being a landmark site, building heights should not exceed five storeys mid-block, with a maximum of two storeys at street level....Other ways (than height) to highlight the site's landmark status would be more appropriate in the Cowes context. These would include: High quality architecture, arrangement of activities that contribute to an attractive context and incorporation or interpretation of local heritage and culture, are considered as important.⁹

Again, the Phillip Island and San Remo Design Framework, completed after thousands of hours of community participation, stated that “Due to its highly visible location and its high social profile, it is crucial that new built form (on the Isle of Wight site) is compliant with the design guidelines outlined in this document”.¹⁰ The ‘implications’ for this are outlined below:

It is important for the scale and character of Cowes that the current trend for bulky, homogenous buildings does not continue. Instead, new development should aim to reflect the traditional fine grain of Cowes. While buildings should be no higher than the tree canopy, a set height will need to be established as the tree line is not a reliable benchmark to set building height limits.¹¹

Pressure from developers is a powerful force, and so the period from 2003-2005 saw intense lobbying for further massive development of the Isle site. The most recent application was handled differently by the Shire, as an Amendment to the Planning Scheme was prepared to rezone the hotel's tennis courts and adjacent land to 'Mixed Use', and at the same time a Permit for the building of the hotel was issued. This meant that VCAT was excluded from the process and a Panel was appointed by the Minister. PICS again appeared, along with PICS member Terry Nott as an Expert Witness on Architecture and Sustainable Design. The whole application was short on detail. The planned structure is, however, not as unsustainable as previous models. The building will make "extensive use of new technology (including) a geothermal heat pump to power the air conditioning, which has the added benefit of generating hot water for free...A lot of the water used by the hotel will be recycled, and re-used in the garden area".¹²

This time the Panel approved the plans, which effectively ends any chance of further public participation in the development of the Isle site for the foreseeable future. PICS had asked for Canary Island palms to be excluded due to their being harbourers of exotic birds, and this was granted. It is also gratifying that constant calls by PICS for sustainable building are at last being acknowledged.

The 'Jetty Triangle', of which the Isle of Wight site is the focus, is precious and significant. But how many times must a community tell its council that a treasured landscape – be it rolling hills, forest, coast or urban – needs to be retained? Why do administrations continue to distrust the judgment of community members, who live and breathe their locale daily, at the expense of developers who simply see a piece of real estate?

The Isle of Wight is placed into historical context in 'Walk 9: Historic Cowes: Down Memory Lane' in the book *Come for a Walk!*¹³

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Chapter 15 NOBBIES ACTION

At the south west extremity of Phillip Island lies Point Grant and the Nobbies, described by Rossengren in 1975 as “the most viewed coastal landscape in Victoria”,¹ which may still well be true today. Offshore lies Seal Rocks, home to approximately 20,000 Australian fur seals, visible from Point Grant with binoculars or telescope, or from the sea by boat. No landing is permitted. Also at Point Grant are several middens, including one directly on the beach. Given the existence here of the two prominent ‘Nobbies’ islands, made up of several weathered volcanic layers, it is possible that this area was in fact a sacred site to the Bunurong people. Certainly it is a site of considerable spiritual significance to many people today, and this was a major reason why so many thousands of people opposed ‘the Nobbies’ development.



Terry Nott: The Nobbies

Since Phillip Island evolved into a tourist destination quite soon after settlement, visits to the Nobbies by horse-drawn drag became popular pastimes early in the twentieth century. In the period after World War One, an octagonal shelter shed was provided, but in 1930 Richard Grayden paid one pound per year to the Crown to build ‘Ye Olde Tea House’ at Point Grant, selling two scones, two cakes and unlimited cups of tea for one shilling, from Christmas until Easter. He also had mounted telescope-viewing for sixpence. The tea house had several owners and major rebuilds and refits until 1987 when it was taken over by the Penguin Reserve Committee of Management.² Their intention was to remove the existing ‘kiosk’, and replace it with a modern, though relatively modest, information, food and souvenir venue. Despite having two sets of architectural draft plans drawn up, they never got the chance.

Two critical events decided the course of the Nobbies development. First was the election of the Kennett government in 1992, which was committed to an aggressive privatisation policy. The second was the amalgamation of shire councils and the appointment of Commissioners to run the infant new shires in 1994, which temporarily removed direct avenues for constituents to air their views through their local councillors. Thus it became possible for a consortium represented by Ken Armstrong to win a private contract to develop facilities at Point Grant, which was Crown Land. The announcement of their plans in September 1996 caused a major public furore, primarily because they involved the closure of the road, basically from the Penguin

Parade car park all the way around Summerlands southern coast, thereby denying car-based viewing to the public. Visitors would be required to park at the Penguin Parade and take a shuttle bus to the Nobbies, where bus parking and ten disabled car spaces were to be provided. However, although this issue somewhat high-jacked the debate, there were many issues involved.

‘Seal Rocks Australia’ proposed an extremely large building dominating Point Grant and containing a 150-seat restaurant, water ride, souvenir sales, kiosk, large video displays, etc. To sustain such a building the consortium estimated that they would require 5,000 visitors per day. A ten year management contract required an annual payment to the government, and at the expiry of a twenty five year lease, the whole area was to be handed back to the public. Some information was given at a public meeting attended by 100 people and called by the Bass Coast Shire commissioner, Bill Power, on 4 September 1996, but the detail of the contract was secret, and the members of the Penguin Reserve Committee, who managed the area, were also sworn to secrecy. PICS (along with many members of the public) was greatly concerned about these plans, and called a public meeting for Sunday, 21 September 1996.

Over 230 people attended this meeting, where the access issue dominated discussion. However, many other issues surfaced in the ensuing months, including:

- The existence of a large restaurant and the need for so many visitors indicated that the centre would need to open after dusk. Further, the Planning Permit issued by the Minister for Planning and Local Government, Robert Maclellan, in March, 1997, stated that “The permitted use must cease on each day no later than 90 minutes after dusk”.³ This was totally unacceptable given the high number of penguins that used the road to the Nobbies from dusk until dawn. This road had been closed from dusk since the mid 1980s to prevent penguin road kills.
- It was considered unacceptable for private enterprise to take profits from Crown Land, rather than profits going to the Penguin Reserve for wildlife protection. Moreover, many day visitors would just concentrate their visit to the Summerlands Peninsula, giving no economic benefit to the rest of Phillip Island.
- Excavations for the building would be used to create mounds which would totally obscure the view of the Nobbies and Bass Strait from public areas. Visitors would be forced to pay to enter the building to see the view.
- The scale of the building, which became known when Seal Rocks Australia was forced to paint the building’s outline on the ground, and hoist a balloon up the Point Grant light to show the height, was far too large for the site. The architecture was described as “brutal” by one objector.⁴
- Despite the large scale of the proposal and sensitive nature of the site, no environmental impact statement had been required.
- If a private contract could be entered into by the government for the Nobbies, what of Churchill Island and Cape Woolamai? Would they be next? This fear was heightened by the proposal to allow major private development at Wilson’s Promontory National Park, eventually quashed by the successful ‘Hands Off the Prom’ campaign.
- Seal Rocks Australia touted their development as ‘eco tourism’. However, as Society member Bob Baird pointed out, eco-tourism involved “travelling to relatively undisturbed areas to study and admire plants, animals...it should be ecologically and socially responsible in ways that minimise environmental impact...The glass wall (visitor centre) is 10 and 12 metres high. That is an enormous environmental impact. I do not believe this is eco-tourism...”⁴

- The Society pointed out many problems with the proposed Traffic Management Plan, including the rushed nature of the process, the necessity of widening the road at the environmentally sensitive Shelley Beach area for a control point roundabout, the increase to eighty two car spaces at Point Grant (the Society had asked for a maximum of fifty), and the lack of staff available for traffic supervision.⁵
- The second stage of the Seal Rocks Australia development proposed a railway tunnel to be dug under the sea floor to a point just offshore from Seal Rocks, where a tower including a restaurant would give a view of the seals. Many people felt that this was totally impractical and environmentally inappropriate.
- Since the Penguin Reserve Committee had already developed an award winning building at the Penguin Parade, it was felt that they were the body to build and run a more suitable building at Point Grant.
- For many people, the Nobbies area had extremely high spiritual value, and the proposed development represented a violation of the area.

Due to the exceptionally high environmental values of the Point Grant/Nobbies area, PICS became immediately involved in trying to stop the development, or, failing that, getting a much better outcome. At a second public meeting called by the Society and addressed by the Chief Commissioner, Cr Hopper, on 20 October 1997, the Nobbies Action Group (NAG) was formed, including several prominent PICS members. This group was to guide the campaign, but the Society also continued a parallel campaign of its own. Both groups encouraged members and the public generally to put objections to the council who were to consider the development. The council received 115 submissions, 109 of those against the proposal. In the end, though, their hands were virtually tied, and they approved the development. Twelve objectors then appealed to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, whilst Armstrong appealed against the log of sixteen conditions imposed by the council.

During this time the Phillip Island Nature Park Board was formed as a successor to the Penguin Reserve Committee of Management, and was insistent that the road be closed at dusk. Minister Maclellan exercised his right to ‘call the matter in’ to conduct his own review because “it is an issue of state significance, which raises many issues of policy for both the use and development of public land and tourism infrastructure”.⁷ PICS was disappointed that the matter did not go to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for a proper hearing, especially since objectors had paid \$157 each to appear, and a meeting between Nobbies Action Group representatives and Maclellan turned out to be a farce when the minister refused to hear their concerns without the developer being present. NAG collected 12,000 signatures against the effective denial of public access to, and overdevelopment of the Nobbies. They also set up a ‘tent embassy’ at the Nobbies to inform visitors of the proposals. A blow came when NAG was denied a Freedom of Information application to view relevant contract details in December 1996. (This was obtained later for some documents).

But Maclellan *did* make a site inspection in January 1997, at which he was heckled by 500 protestors, and then made several days available to hear the views of all parties before he finally recommended in late January that the centre proceed. In addition, he set up a ‘Nobbies Working Group’ on which Penny Manning and Margaret Hancock sat for the Society, and NAG also participated. This was to try and reach a compromise on several issues, especially that of car parking; landscape and layout; public access; building design; visual image and bulk; and the

light tower at the development.⁸ This process resulted in some limiting of the bulk and height of the building.



*Minister Rob Mclellan faces a hostile crowd at The Nobbies.
Photo courtesy South Gippsland Sentinel Times*

Independent candidate for the seat of Bass, Susan Davies, was a strident critic of the Seal Rocks Australia development all along, and was elected to the seat in the February 1997 by-election, riding on a wave of anti-Kennett feeling compounded locally by the issues raised by ‘The Nobbies’. Meanwhile, the Bass Coast Shire Council commissioners were replaced by an elected council in March 1997. This new council was clearly interested in being seen to encourage public participation and held a briefing with NAG, PICS and the Summerlands Progress Association in November 1997 to try to resolve the residual traffic management issues. This process coincided with the development of a Phillip Island Nature Park Management Plan by the Board. The Society’s submission on the management plan included the suggestion that the south coast road – proposed for closure by Seal Rocks Victoria – be made one-way from the Nobbies to the Penguin Parade, with the only stopping places to be in designated lay-backs, and for there to be no major road making.

The Seal Rocks Sea Life Centre was opened in April 1998, and was embroiled in controversy within months. A complaint about contaminated water being released into the sea was followed by reports of staff breaking the dusk curfew, and what Armstrong claimed was an “attack on the centre” by disgruntled former employees resulting in some flooding within the building. Over the next two years Armstrong would accuse Society President Margaret Hancock of having a conflict of interest because she had replaced Bob Dennis on the Nature Park Board and was vocally against Seal Rocks Victoria; would accuse Susan Davies of scuttling Stage 2 of the development by scaring off potential investors; would try to prop up Seal Rocks Victoria by proposing a live seal display for injured seals (amongst other things), which the government rejected; and would claim that “Seal Rocks will ‘topple Bracks’” for “reneging on agreements made between Seal Rocks and the Kennett Government”.⁹

By May 2000 the Bracks Government had issued Seal Rocks Victoria with a notice of dispute and notice of default for non-payment of more than \$300,000 owed to the government. Armstrong issued a notice of compulsory arbitration against the government. Amongst other accusations, he asserted that the closure of the centre at dusk, insisted on by the Nature Park Board, had cost him the business. Roger Gillard, Q.C., was appointed in August to hear the matter, and after 170 days of hearings, found that the government had indeed breached the

contract. Following some legal wrangling, the government ended up paying Seal Rocks Victoria \$60m in compensation. The Sea Life Centre languished until being hit by a large water spout in August 2002, resulting in considerable damage. The whole building was handed back to the State soon after, with temporary repairs being done. For two years and more, only the kiosk was in operation.

The government had appointed a task force to recommend options for future use of the building – revealed some time later to have recommended the removal of the building to be replaced by a more efficient and modest building to contain a kiosk, toilets and interpretation centre; a concept which had a large public following. However, the government decided that having spent so much taxpayers' money on the whole business already, they would allocate \$7.1m to rebuild and refit the centre to operate as an information centre, cafe and souvenir business, with free admission. With the refit almost complete, NAG wound up after nearly ten years of operation. Their remaining funds of \$1,382 were donated to the Barb Martin Bush Bank.

To much fanfare, the new centre opened in April 2007. Even though many were impressed with the displays and more user friendly aspect of the whole building, including various sustainability additions such as a large solar collector array and rainwater tanks, Society member Jan Fleming summed up the feelings of many conservationists when asked by *The Phillip Island and San Remo Advertiser* reporter to comment at the opening: "I don't think this development is appropriate in this wild and beautiful area".¹⁰

Basically, locals seem to have decided to make the best of a bad job, and are once more happy to visit the Nobbies. Whether the Phillip Island Nature Park remains happy with the situation once government recurrent funding ceases and they are left to operate what is still an unsustainable building, remains to be seen. However, many lessons have been learnt from this sorry saga, the most important being that Crown Land belongs to the people, and environmentally sensitive land belongs to the environment.

The Nobbies area features as 'Walk 15: Summerland and the Nobbies: Wildlife Peninsula' in the book *Come for a Walk!*¹¹

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Western Port

- [Dashed Box] Ramsar Boundary
- [Stippled Box] Marine National Park
- [Dark Grey Box] Proposed Port of Hastings Development Area

Chapter 16 WESTERN PORT PERSPECTIVES

Western Port is of course east of Port Phillip Bay, but when it was discovered in 1798 by George Bass it was the westernmost bay known at that stage to Europeans. Much of the northern part of the bay is mudflats, with many parts of the coast fringed by White Mangroves (*Avicennia marina*). A deep channel runs up the western arm of Western Port, and as a result the bay has been used to some extent by tankers and large freighters since the 1930s. This has always been a point of controversy, especially since dredging has been required both in the channel and for the creation of docking facilities.

59,297 ha of Western Port was declared a Ramsar site on 15 December 1982, as it is recognised for its extreme importance to many thousands of migratory waders, while the mangroves are nurseries to numerous species of marine life and the remaining seagrass beds are vital to the overall health of the bay. The inclusion of Western Port was one outcome of the detailed Western Port Bay Environmental Study of the early to mid 1970s, which resulted in the *Shapiro Report*¹ in 1975 and a series of technical papers over the next decade. The official Ramsar website explains the Convention:

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 158 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1717 wetland sites, totaling 159 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.²

It is Western Port's inclusion in this Convention which governs PICS's attitude to everything that happens in the bay.

PICS and PICS members have been involved in many ways with Western Port issues, from 1969 right up to the present time. In this chapter, some of the various PICS members most involved give their version of events.

MARGARET HANCOCK – OIL

In 1800, Lieutenant James Grant summarised his survey of Western Port with these words:

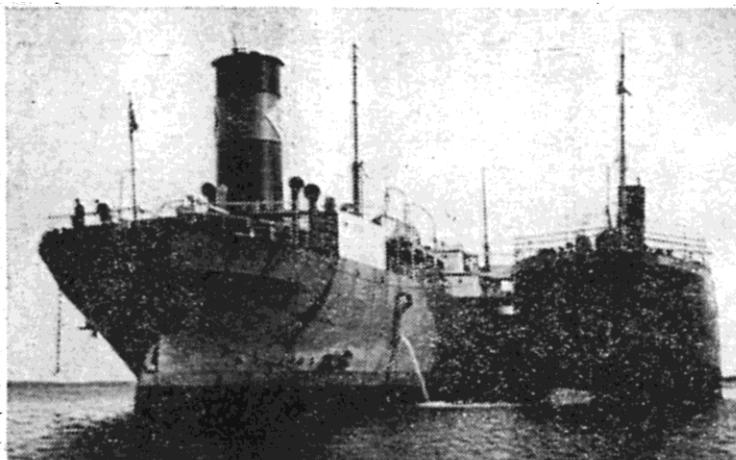
Western Port is capable of containing several hundred sail of ships with perfect security from storms, and will admit of being fortified. It is a convenient harbour for going in and coming out at all times, is situated in a country which may easily be improved by cultivation, and in an excellent climate.³

Grant was right! Western Port does offer ‘security from storms’, it is ‘a convenient harbour for going in and coming out’. It is also now recognised as a place of local, national and international environmental significance.

In 1931 the first tanker arrived at Stony Point. The load of 2,000 gallons of premium petrol had to be discharged into forty gallon drums to be ready for transport. This method of operation proved to be uneconomic and was abandoned in 1933.⁴ A modern (?) \$30 million British Petroleum Refinery at Crib Point was ready, in 1966, to receive its first crude oil from the 42,000 ton tanker *British Power*.

A year later came the big news, when the Premier of Victoria, Henry Bolte, announced his dream of Western Port becoming Victoria's 'Little Ruhr'. It was planned that 8,000 acres would be taken from the sea for a general cargo port and industrial complex, and Hastings Inlet would be dredged to provide the cargo port. The plan also provided for road, rail and gas and fuel pipelines to serve the complex. It was envisaged that a causeway to carry motor vehicles would be built to connect French Island with the South Gippsland Highway. The State Electricity Commission requested that 400 acres on French Island be set aside for a future power station, which possibly would use a nuclear reactor.⁵

At the same time, a permit had been granted for oil drilling off the Victorian coast from Cape Schanck to the Corner Inlet area.



• **Ninna Borthen transferring a petrol cargo to Vincas at Stony Point in May, 1933.**

Environmental 'alarm bells' were ringing all around Western Port! It wasn't long before PICS members realised that their sphere of concern included Western Port. The Western Port and Peninsula Protection Council was established soon after PICS. These two groups soon discovered their mutual interest in the wellbeing of Western Port, and have worked co-operatively for over thirty years.

Always, when shipping is considered, the big risk is an oil spill. The *Western Port Research Coordination Stage 1* document of the Coastal Co-operative Research Centre and CSIRO states that "the hydrodynamic system means that the residence time for pollutants entering Western Port range from only days in the Western Entrance to months in the East Arm (eastern Upper North Arm, Corinella basin and Rhyll basin) (Hinwood, 1979). Consequently, pollutants entering these basins from the catchment or from other sections of the marine environment are likely to remain in that area for some time".⁶

When the Crib Point Terminal was proposed in 1993, PICS convened a Public meeting which roused considerable public and media attention. The Shire of Hastings called for a committee of community representatives whose task was to help formulate the *Oil Spill Prevention and Response Plan* for Crib Point Terminal Pty. Ltd.⁷ This Plan was released in October 1994. I represented PICS on that Committee.

The plan that was produced consisted of four parts: *Contingency Plan, Contingency Plan Appendices, Strategy Plan and Terminal Operations Manual*. The Strategy Plan identified forty-six areas of specific sensitivity on Western Port's coast, while the Appendices identified:

- 16 sites of Zoological significance
- 48 sites of Avifauna and Fauna areas of population concentration
- 19 high tide roosting sites for wading birds
- 16 sites of Botanical significance
- 166 sites of Archaeological significance on the Phillip Island coast and 3 at Corinella
- Sites of Geological significance: 2 International, 5 National, 41 State, 40 Regional and 10 local⁸

The Strategy Plan found that

The available data indicates that Western Port Bay contains areas of high environmental sensitivity. These include, but are not limited to, intertidal mudflat areas supporting seagrass and mangrove vegetation, habitats for juvenile and adult fish, breeding grounds for a number of commercial fish species, roosting sites for significant populations of birds including migratory waders, and breeding and feeding areas for the Little Penguin.⁹

With regard to inter-tidal vegetation, the Strategy Plan concluded that

Particularly mangrove and seagrass is important for a number of reasons including shoreline stability in the case of mangroves, as habitat for marine species and avifauna and primary production in the Western Port ecosystem.¹⁰

Having acknowledged the importance of these areas, the Appendices section of the report also acknowledges that many shoreline types within the Bay would take from weeks to years to recover from an oil spill, and that the effectiveness of means of protection such as booms and dispersants are dependent on many variables. What was discussed but not included was the fact that we just don't know whether it is better to clean up an oil spill or leave it to natural forces in Western Port. Given the value of the tourist industry, it would be difficult for a government to opt for the latter. Furthermore, the great weakness of the plan was that no work would be done on an oil spill during the night, so that there could be fifteen hours between a spill occurring and a clean-up commencing. Significantly the authors concluded that available modeling systems

indicate that spill response plans at Crib Point need to be implemented rapidly if the full potential effectiveness of the response is to be achieved and the impact on coastlines is to be minimised.¹¹

One good thing is that in the event of an oil spill in Western Port the Phillip Island Nature Park has highly skilled staff who are able to achieve great results in their cleaning of oiled sea birds, and able to co-ordinate the efforts of volunteer helpers.

GRAEME BURGAN – FROM FORESHORE EROSION TO THE PORT OF HASTINGS

My first involvement for PICS with Western Port was with the Foreshore Advisory Committee which was established to produce a report to the Shire Council based on a community study of foreshore impacts and recommended actions. I was nominated secretary and collated the report. One of the Foreshore Committee's recommendations had been a study of Phillip Island's North Shore. Ailsa Swan involved me with noted geomorphologist, Eric Bird, John Eddy, John Jansson and a few others in a study of sand movement eastwards from Grossard Point around the north shore of Phillip Island. This was in response to concerns about beach and foreshore erosion and remedial works proposed as a response. Virtually the same team that produced the Foreshore Report, worked on the North Shore.

About this time there was a Senate enquiry into the protection of Australia's coastal zone. I gave evidence on behalf of PICS with regard to coastal management issues on Phillip Island, including issues in Western Port.

I stood for a vacant position on the Shire Council. One of my platforms was to get a formal response to the Foreshore Report. I was elected, and consequently the Phillip Island Shire produced a Foreshore Management Plan.¹²

Concern was being shown for seagrass loss in Western Port along with the occasional oil spill that was impacting particularly on penguins. I became the Shire's representative on the Western Port Regional Planning and Coordinating Committee. I began to raise the issues of land-based impacts on the waters of Western Port. Issues included stream pollution and sediment entering Western Port; storm-water from expansion of the south eastern growth corridor; shoreline erosion; and loss of mangrove and salt marsh. Consequently, I was involved in the Western Port Bay Strategy. PICS submitted a detailed response for this significant report. The report ultimately led to a review of the Western Port State Environment Protection Policy,¹³ a document that guides protection of Western Port by the Environment Protection Authority and other statutory bodies.

Just when oil production out of Bass Strait was declining, and production and export by shipping in Western Port was on the way out, a proposal to reintroduce oil imports through Western Port was initiated by Mobil. PICS, together with the Western Port Protection Council, mounted a campaign to fight the proposal. As a Shire Councillor, I helped to gather support, through a public meeting convened by PICS, to send a delegation to Canberra to meet with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and politicians, to challenge the decision to allow the project to proceed. Ultimately the proponent withdrew the project proposal. However a number of important community actions were achieved:

- a community representative position was created on the Western Port Marine Pollution Committee and I was nominated for that position and filled it until 2007.
- a Senate enquiry was established in 1998 to review the regulatory legislation relating to environment impact assessment. Together with Brian Cuming representing the Protection Council. I represented PICS in making a submission on the inadequacies of the legislation that

was supposed to have been enacted to deal with the assessment of the reintroduction of oil importation into Western Port. The Act has since been amended.

In 1993 the Western Port Protection Council, through Brian Cuming, engaged the services of Peter Greilach of the Victorian Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) to produce a simulated model of an oil spill at 3 different locations in Western Port. VIMS was the nominated agency supervising the implementation of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) Oil Spill Simulation Model (OSSM).

Through me, PICS contributed input for establishing the data set and locations and raising financial contribution for the cost of the simulations. The Shire of Phillip Island also contributed financially. The modeling looked at three separate locations within Western Port and used real weather data from the Sandy Point and Rhyll automated weather stations for each of the four seasons to predict where the oil would go within Western Port. A report to the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council was produced - 'Simulation of possible oil spill trajectories from three sites in Westernport Bay'. ¹⁴ Together with a written report was a computer graphic simulation model showing the results of the modeling over time. The reports were used as graphic evidence of the risks of an oil spill in Western Port and were shown widely to the public, the Shire Councils around the bay and to other Government departments.

Around this time there was a push to develop marine reserves in Victoria. This process took well over a decade to be realised. I helped write submissions for PICS as part of the process and attended meetings. I also made submissions on behalf of PICS and attended meetings for the Federal Government's South Eastern Marine Plan.

There were proposals to introduce non endemic shell fish to aquaculture and I represented PICS at these consultations. This proposal was ultimately shelved.

GILLIAN COLLINS – PORT OF HASTINGS

In 2002, the Port of Hastings, operated then by Toll Holdings, set up a 'Community Reference Group' to monitor their Environmental Action Plan. PICS was invited to be represented on the group, and I agreed to attend the bi-monthly meetings. I was then Treasurer of PICS.

It was a fraught exercise from the beginning. The Port had a plan that was supposed to be evaluated every two years, but it was clear from the start that it was a desk-top exercise at best. Representatives of BHP (soon after changed to "Bluescope") and Esso were represented on the group, and they claimed that their plans were included under the Port plan, but they were not open to scrutiny or evaluation from the group.

In 2003, I requested an oil spill exercise to test the assumptions made in the plan. The exercise was held, with much emphasis by the Port on the communications structure that would be set up to deal with the press.

Rice hulls were used to represent oil, and the Port Captain predicted with great assurance the direction the hulls would travel based on the time and the tide. They were introduced into the water from the BHP dock, and they moved in exactly the opposite direction. Within 5 minutes they had clung to every structure in sight and every inch of the adjacent beach and mangroves.

Two hours later, the tug with the oil containment boom arrived from Stony Point, but there was nothing for them to contain, since the rice hulls had already dispersed.

At the next meeting of the Committee, PICS requested an evaluation of the exercise be conducted. Included was a request that an oil boom be added to the BHP dock. The oil boom *was* added to the dock about 6 months later, but an evaluation was never completed. Instead, the State decided that every Port should have its own 'Environmental Management Plan,' and this was used as an explanation for the Port of Hastings Plan not being evaluated.

It is distressing to note that representatives of the Environment Protection Authority, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Channel Safety organisations were there representing the State. Perhaps that is why a new State-wide planning process was put in place!

In the meantime, Committee meetings consisted of reports on any interesting shipping news, and much discussion of the changes taking place within the organisation, including the introduction of Lindsay Ward (Manager for Ports, Patrick Ports Hastings) to the group.

In 2005, it was announced without notice to the group that the Fire Tug, at that time on round-the-clock stand-by at Stony Point, would be changed to a three hour stand-by; meaning that instead of being always available and being stationed in Western Port, the tug would be a minimum of three hours' steaming time away – a huge and alarming difference in an emergency. I was vocal in opposition from the start, stating that fire was a huge environmental danger to Western Port's sensitive ecology, in addition to its danger to personnel.

Tug personnel were so grateful to PICS for supporting their cause that we were asked to testify at the VCAT hearing they had when they took WorkCover to task for not protecting their interests. Although our testimony was prepared, negotiations between WorkCover and the tug personnel reached an equitable outcome that included training for local CFA in port-side fire-fighting.

At the time of writing, the Port of Hastings Corporation is making submissions to government for an expansion to the Port that will be the largest infrastructure project in Victoria's history if it proceeds. PICS actively opposes the project, and is fighting, through its membership in the Southern Victoria Community Action Group Inc., to derail yet another threat to Western Port.

JANE JOBE – THE BIOSPHERE

The Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve was nominated by the community and declared by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation ¹⁵ under its Man and Biosphere Program in 2002. The MPWP Biosphere Reserve Foundation (a non-profit company) was established in December 2003 to implement the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program in this biosphere reserve. ¹⁶ The foundation is in effect a partnership between the Victorian Government, the five local government authorities within the biosphere reserve (Bass Coast, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston and Mornington Peninsula), and community roundtables – one in each of these municipalities and one on French Island. Community roundtables are the mechanism through which foundation members meet, discuss, plan, and network. They have their own committees, implement their own projects and participate in activities with other

roundtables. Each roundtable appoints a director to the board.

The Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation is a non-profit, community organisation that aims to empower the community to become more sustainable. We are fortunate that the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in which we are based is rich in individuals and organisations concerned with various aspects of sustainability. The unique value of the foundation is its ability to draw together community members, businesses and governments to work towards the internationally recognised objectives of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Program. This involves brokering collaborative partnerships that would not otherwise occur. It also involves hosting showcase events, so that the community can more easily tap into the resources available to live and conduct business sustainably. The Bass Coast Roundtable of the foundation meets at San Remo every two months. For further information, visit the Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere website.¹⁶

JOHN JANSSON – SEAGRASS COMMITTEE

Seagrass in the eastern part of Western Port died off over most of the mud banks over a number of years, the start of which seemed to coincide with the dredging for the new Port of Hastings in the mid 1960s. The decline continued over the 1970s yet the government departments refused to acknowledge that there was any problem with this part of the bay. (The northern end of the bay had also been in decline but this was known.) It took several letters to local and Melbourne newspapers and lobbying from the Shire of Phillip Island during 1982 before anything was done.

A working party was set up by the Western Port Catchment Co-ordinating Group, consisting of Dr Doug Bulthuis from the Conservation Ministry's Queenscliff Laboratories, Murray MacDonald from the Fisheries and Wildlife Department, Corinella fisherman Kevin Hamilton, Newhaven fisherman Bill Mitchell, PICS member Bruce Ridgeway from Lang Lang, Councillor Jim West from the Shire of Phillip Island, and I was representing PICS. The committee met monthly at Cranbourne during 1982 and 1983, and assembled information on the seagrass from fishermen, and obtained the latest aerial photographs. This indicated that most of the bay's seagrass had died over the past fifteen years. Catches of fish that depended on the seagrass had all declined, with whiting down by seventy per cent.

Research done by Dr Bulthuis could not determine the cause of the loss though it was associated with a lot of turbidity. Major causes were likely to be the main drains from the Koo Wee Rup swamp to the north of the Bay and the dredging for Western Port. Chemical runoff from the ACI quarry near Lang Lang may also have contributed.

No further funding for research was provided by the Government and work ceased. There has been little improvement in the seagrass beds since then. Research work has again been taken up by a volunteer group in recent years (see John Swan, below).

JOHN SWAN – THE WESTERN PORT SEAGRASS PARTNERSHIP

The Western Port Seagrass Partnership¹⁷ was founded some seven years ago in a desire to alert the Western Port communities to the fragility of the bay and its need for ongoing environmental protection. The loss of about seventy per cent of the valuable seagrass beds in the 1980s and 90s was a major impetus to this concern. It is now believed that a major factor in this

extensive loss of seagrass has been the major, continuing, input of land sediments into the bay waters. The word ‘partnership’ in the title name was intended to emphasize the intention of the founders to act as a partner with the numerous organizations and government bodies involved in the protection and enhancement of the waters, shorelines and catchments of Western Port. It was also our aim, wherever possible, to share the responsibilities and programs of these groups on an equitable basis.

The Partnership is a ‘company limited by guarantee’ and has tax-deductibility status as an approved environmental organization. The Board has established a Public Fund under the regulations of the Department of Environmental and Water Resources. An informative brochure has been prepared and widely distributed seeking tax-deductible financial support from members of the public for seagrass and mangrove restoration, sediment control of drains, rivers and creeks entering the bay and community education regarding environmental problems. The brochure is also aimed at tourists, holiday makers, and people who are engaged in commercial and recreational activities on the waters and along the shorelines.

We have developed a policy regarding the possible establishment of ‘environmental offsets’ to counteract any losses of shoreline flora and fauna that might result from any future industrial or domestic expansion. An agreed policy of offsets and local environmental management could provide a reasonable balance between the desired preservation of the natural environment of Western Port and the employment necessities and suburban lifestyles of an expanding population.



Founding WPSP Chairman Prof John Swan - pulling a sledge for transporting mangrove seedlings across the mudflats at Lang Lang.

Photo courtesy Anne Oswin

A major aim of our activities is to research the decline of the seagrass beds and to establish possible methods of recovery. This research is based on our belief that the viability of the seagrass reflects the quality of the water, its ability to sustain plants, fish and animals and to be attractive to all users. These research activities began in 2001 and included attempts to grow seagrass in the laboratory and in greenhouse conditions and to understand the impact of muddy sediments which settle on the young plants.

Much effort has been expended in both seagrass and mangrove research and much useful information has been gained. Dr Tim Ealey, a Director, has demonstrated leadership in gathering

a group of volunteers, including members of the staff and pupils of Bass Valley Primary School, to collect seeds, to cultivate mangrove seedlings, and to plant many hundreds of these seedlings along mud-flats of Corinella and Coronet Bay and to measure their survival and growth rates. The survival rate of the trial plants has sometimes been low due to poor nutrient levels of the mud; tidal and storm effects; desiccation by summer heat; mortality due to cold weather; and an inconsiderate and callous act of vandalism. The work continues actively and is greatly enjoyed by the school children.

A major related project is to restore and cultivate extensive mangrove stands along a seven km stretch of coastline north of the Lang Lang River, where major erosion of the low-lying cliffs is occurring. This erosion is contributing about thirty per cent of the sediments currently entering the bay, and these muddy sediments settle on the leaves of young seagrass seedlings and cause death by blocking photosynthesis. We believe that restoration of fringing mangroves will greatly reduce the impact of waves and storms on this coast, and eventually allow seagrasses to be re-established.

This research has been made possible by a substantial grant from the department of Sustainability and Environment, allocated to the Bass Valley Primary School. The funds were used for the purchase of a small glasshouse, propagating material, safety equipment and in meeting transport costs. The endeavors of Dr Tim Ealey, the school community and all the many volunteers are to be highly commended.

This project has now received major additional support over the next three years as a result of a fine levied on a major corporation for environmental damage resulting from of an industrial accident. Recent legislation allows such fines to be remitted, not to the State Treasury, but to an environmental organization with the capacity to help remedy the damage caused. The Western Port Seagrass Partnership argued successfully to this effect in the Magistrate's Court.

The Partnership is also developing plans to encourage State agencies with responsibility for management of public saltmarshes around Western Port to work collectively in preserving and enhancing these areas, especially in relation to the implications of the Ramsar Agreement for bird habitat, especially migratory waders. Eventually we would hope to persuade farmers and land-holders along the northern and north-eastern shorelines to become involved.

Amongst the longer-term goals of the Partnership is a desire to alert the Western Port communities to the fragility of the bay and its need for environmental protection. To this end it was resolved to create an educational and communications tool for wide distribution. Board member John Clarke has applied his professional skills and film industry contacts to this task and a DVD has been eighteen months in production. This has involved aerial photography of the catchment; filming underwater plants and sea creatures; and interviews with a wide range of experts and local citizens. It will be made available to the media and the public during 2008.

BOB BAIRD - MONITORING THE MIGRANT WADERS AND LOCAL SHOREBIRDS OF WESTERN PORT

The remarkable 35 year survey of Western Port's birds was started by the Bird Observers' Club of Australia (BOCA) in 1973 and it is still in operation¹⁸ Bessie Tyers of Westernport Bird Observers Club (WESBOC) organises the Phillip Island section of the count. 2008 is Bessie's twenty fourth year as a wader monitor.

As a relative newcomer I was conscripted to monitoring in 1989 (representing Birds Australia) and have enjoyed the challenge of getting to Observation Point three times a year at some very high tides for the past eighteen years. We have done it by canoe, rowboat or mostly on foot. However, advancing glaucoma probably means my retiring from this pleasant activity fairly soon.

We have observed and reported all sorts of threats to the feeding and roosting birds including yacht crews camping; jet skis; dogs and people on beaches; canoes and kayaks; commercial bait harvesting; and of course foxes. Many of the species have declined in numbers at Observation Point, in particular since the early 1990s. Some of the rarer species in decline in Rhyll Inlet include: Bar Tail Godwit, Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel and Greenshanks – all seasonal migrants making the remarkable flights to and from Northern China, Japan, Korea and Siberia.

The causes of these declines are still to be determined but enough is known for us to be very concerned that increasing human activity in the vicinity of the birds' feeding and roosting areas is a large contributor. These birds are a priceless asset to all people of the world who have concerns for the survival of natural systems.

We have conveyed our concerns with ongoing representations to Phillip Island Nature Parks and their response has been mostly helpful with signage and 'No Dogs' regulations. A notable improvement in shoreline management has been responsible for the remarkable return of a breeding pair of Hooded Plovers to East Silverleaves beach in 2007 – 2008 after an absence of fifteen years. My own records show that the last nest in 1992 was 'Lost to humans – family picnic on top of nest!' The story concerning seaward threats is still of major concern, as jet skis, canoes in groups, and boats in general, cause serious disturbance to roosting and feeding waders. Our representations to Parks Victoria over 15 years to relocate the ridiculously-sited boat speed sign in Rhyll Inlet which permits water craft to legally tear through the channels and mud banks where waders feed and roost, falls on deaf ears

As Rhyll Inlet (a special management zone) is in the process of being handed over to Phillip Island Nature Park, we have high hopes that better management will eliminate all threats to these extraordinary birds in the near future.



Waders, Western Port. Photo: Roz Jessop

POSTSCRIPT:

With current proposals (again) for major Port of Hastings developments and question marks over dredging in Port Phillip, the issue of Western Port being further open to traffic as Victoria's *major* port persists. PICS remains adamant that the delicate environment examined by the Shapiro Report over thirty years ago can not withstand the impact of huge port development. Shapiro concluded his report with a wake-up call as relevant today as it was then:

*"Westernport Bay is more than an amenity, it is a treasure to be cherished for many generations to come. It is in your hands."*¹⁹

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Chapter 17 PICS LIFE MEMBERS

KEITH GRAYDEN, 1920-2006

When Keith Grayden died on 10 April 2006, PICS and Phillip Island generally lost a great campaigner and a wonderful worker. Keith was involved with PICS from its inception, serving on the Committee from 1968 – 1985, including terms as Vice President from 1977 – 85. He was the main worker behind Swan Lake. He raised money for the purchase of Conservation Hill and donated a small parcel of buffer land between Conservation Hill and the Rhyll Tip. He worked in a paid and voluntary capacity as lead hand on the Cape Woolamai dune restoration project for ten years; cleared massive amounts of boxthorn from the north and west coasts of Churchill Island; helped in replanting Ventnor Common where he also cleared huge amounts of gorse; and did much roadside weed clearing – amongst many other things.

He was very active in the Saltwater Creek campaign, and a member of the Foreshore Advisory Committee. Keith had no hesitation in approaching the Phillip Island Shire Engineer, Jock McKechnie, when problems arose which were the Shire's responsibility, e.g. foreshore erosion, grazing on foreshores and incursion by private landowners onto Crown Land. He advised Phillip Island Nature Park staff regarding fox control, and was a fund of information on historical matters. His knowledge of Phillip Island's mammalian history (was) published as part of an article by Mammal Biologist Roger Kirkwood.¹ Keith was a Life Member of both PICS and the Friends of Churchill Island, although he spent much of his life avoiding recognition! Keith was dedicated to the environment in so many ways – both practical and theoretical – that one wonders if we will ever see his like again.²



Life Members Keith Grayden, John Swan and Ailsa Swan after a working bee, Swan Lake, 1970s. Photo: Christine Grayden

AILSA SWAN, 1922-1998

This information is based mainly on an obituary by Ellen McCulloch, Bird Observers Club of Australia.

“A career in science was coupled with a practical commitment to the protection of bird life in Victoria.”

Ailsa Swan was known for her passion to protect and enhance the natural attractions of Phillip Island and Western Port Bay. Born in Sydney, her childhood included years in Melbourne, London and Wellington, New Zealand. Her early ambition was to be a surveyor, but this was judged unseemly for a girl in those days. Between 1939 and 1941 she completed an intensive war-time Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Melbourne with a major in chemical engineering. In 1946 she went to London, where she obtained a fellowship and completed a PhD in physical organic chemistry at the University of London. On return she worked with Dr Ian Wark, chief of the CSIRO division of industrial chemistry on the stability of bubbles in the process of mineral flotation.

While raising a family of four children and nurturing several foster children, Ailsa was an active member of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. School holidays were regularly spent on Phillip Island, and she was a founding member of the Phillip Island Conservation Society. Increasingly, she became involved in conservation issues, particularly as they affected birds. For more than twenty years she was a regular participant in the long-term and continuing Western Port Survey, which monitors waterbirds and wading birds at high tide roosts.

She became an expert on environmental planning and its relationships with legislation. On every possible occasion she actively represented the Bird Observers Club of Australia, the Phillip Island Conservation Society, and Environment Victoria (formerly the Conservation Council of Victoria) by making submissions, by researching and preparing material, and by appearing at hearings of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. She also served on the Western Port Regional Planning and Coordinating Committee, and participated in many delegations to the Land Conservation Council.

Her commitment to the environment was not confined to research and legal matters; she actively battled entrenched weeds such as blackberries and gorse, and planted hundreds of native trees on...Phillip Island, at ERA School at Donvale and elsewhere. As her health declined through Parkinson’s disease, she never stopped working for and contributing to the causes in which she believed. Her persistence and enthusiasm encouraged others and provided a splendid example of what can be achieved by patience, understanding and a love of the natural world.³

Ailsa did so much for the Phillip Island environment, from participating in many tree-planting and working bees, to funding restoration works, to encouraging others to participate in the planning process to protect the environment. She was thorough, rigorous and open, to such an extent that she was consulted on occasion by bureaucrats, even those who had been on opposite sides to her in planning arguments. Her husband, John Swan, shared her interests.

JOHN SWAN

John and Ailsa had a holiday house on the Silverleaves foreshore and a 20 acre farm at Rhyll, where they implemented weed control and tree-planting well before Landcare came along. Although John was always busy with many scientific and community activities, he still found

time to dedicate to PICS and Phillip Island. He and Ailsa were prime movers in the campaign to acquire Conservation Hill (see ch. 3). John was also far-sighted in seeing the need for marine parks around Phillip Island, and for the Island's reserves to be merged into a National Park – ideas which were supported by PICS's membership at general meetings. John was on the Victorian Conservation Trust (now the Trust for Nature) at the time of the purchase of Churchill Island and was very active in the island's restoration, which was also a PICS project in the 1970s and 1980s. Being foundation Professor of Organic Chemistry, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and later Dean of the Faculty of Science at Monash University, John organised an early excursion for PICS members to tour the University's Marshall Zoological Reserve.

John has made major contributions to Australia's environment in many ways. He was Chairman of the Crown-of-Thorns Starfish Research Committee of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; Chairman of the Australian Marine Sciences and Technologies Advisory Committee of the Federal Government; and a member of the Victorian Coastal Council. Locally he was a long-serving member of the Westernport Region Water Authority and served on the Candowie-Lance Creek Catchment Management Group. In both of these capacities he worked to encourage landholders in the catchment to plant trees, to install treatment ponds for animal waste on dairy farms and raised awareness of the effects of chemical use in the catchment on water courses and the reservoir. As reported on the occasion of the receipt of his ANZAAS medal in 1994,

he recognised the part farmers had to play in the management of the catchment area of the Candowie Reservoir, from which our water is drawn. Professor Swan regards the farmers as partners with the board, in ensuring a clean water supply, something town residents take for granted. He has also been responsible for arranging research to be done in the catchment area by Monash University students and graduates.⁴

These days he is a Director of the Western Port Seagrass Partnership (see ch.16), and although in his eighties he still participates in working parties to directly plant seedling seagrass into mudflats and to restore the mangrove forests in the north-east of Western Port. Despite being so busy in life, John maintains his support of the work of PICS. John was recognised for his services to science and the community with an AO in 2002 and is also an Honorary Life Fellow of Museum Victoria.

CORAL OSWIN-WOOD

On 26 February 1973, the Shire of Phillip Island wrote to PICS:

Council asks if the Society has any objection to a commencement of the construction of a tourist road to the end of Cape Woolamai.⁵

Naturally this was hotly discussed in committee and Coral, as Secretary, was asked to pen a reply, which read:

We thank you for your letter of 26th February. The Society is against any roads, tracks, etc, into Woolamai or any areas, until such time as a careful study is made of what impact vehicles and people may have on the survival of flora, fauna and landscape. At present it seems unwise to embark on any such project until we can protect, and perhaps improve areas already being destroyed by the public.⁶

Coral wrote hundreds of such letters – polite, sufficiently detailed and to the point – in her eight years as the second PICS Secretary following Ken Pound. She also served as Treasurer in 1970-71, was on the Committee from 1968-70, and provided the venue for Committee meetings for many years following her retirement as Secretary. But, most importantly, she was a fitting partner for her first husband, Jack Oswin, a life-long conservationist who was responsible for much of the reserve system Phillip Island has today. Jack served on the Phillip Island Koala Reserves Committee of Management for thirty five years, following on from his aunt, Florence Oswin Roberts (who donated the Oswin Roberts Reserve to the people for wildlife).

With the assistance of Coral and other PICS members he helped secure Conservation Hill, and was responsible for the purchase of Rowell's Swamp as an eastern buffer between Rhyll Swamp and farmland. When fundraising for land purchase he would sometimes ask for "loans", making it clear that these may become outright donations. As a reward to donors he would put them in a punt and show them around Rhyll Swamp to see the many waterbirds, an experience which most donors regarded as ample reward.

He implemented tree-planting schemes and wetlands creation in several reserves. The plantation of native trees on the northern side of the Phillip Island Cemetery driveway were planted by Jack and Coral in memory of Dora Evans who funded the project. Jack also "served on a committee prior to the Shapiro Environmental Study which was funded jointly by government and industry. Jack's presence on that committee quietly included conservation in matters they considered. No doubt his contact with people like Alf Butcher (Director of Fisheries and Wildlife) and Shapiro was beneficial to all and it certainly benefited our Conservation Society."⁷ He was also passionate about Churchill Island.

Through all of this, Coral was secretary, hostess, confidante and telephonist. She quietly shared Jack's passion for the environment, and while Jack had no tolerance for red tape and would bypass it at every opportunity, Coral had the patience and tact to work with others to produce letters, reports and submissions – many hand-written with carbon duplicates. Jack's work is commemorated locally at the 'Jack Oswin Viewing Platform' at Conservation Hill, and in a plaque (relocated from a commemorative plantation at Rowell's Swamp) at the Koala Conservation Centre. Jack also received a BEM for his contribution to conservation in 1979, but much of his work would not have been possible without the support of Coral. Jack and Coral were foundation members of PICS.



Coral and Jack. Photo courtesy Coral Oswin-Wood

KEN POUND

On Phillip Island in the 1960s, Ken Pound was considered an eccentric hippie with unrealistic ideals. The media portrayed him as “the be-whiskered naturalist” and in an era when keen shooter Tom Gannon was the main journalist for the local paper, Ken, who had petitioned to have firearms banned from Phillip Island, received bad press whenever possible. But, despite appearances and a limited formal education, Ken was very well read, and his reading informed his vision for an effective conservation organisation for Phillip Island. How and why Ken came to start PICS is recounted in the first chapter of this book. Many of the people who came on board with him are also described there and elsewhere in the text.

1968 had been a big year. The constitution (framed by Ken) had come into being and financial members numbered sixty. Seven committee and three general meetings (with speakers) had been held along with a packed protest meeting regarding the Rhyll Inlet development, which was defeated. PICS had an entry in the form of a swan drawing a float depicting Phillip Island’s main wildlife in the ‘Back to Phillip Island’ celebrations and was awarded second prize. PICS took action on: egg collecting; shooting; new koala warning signs; fencing of penguin and mutton bird rookeries at Cat Bay; stopping the recommencement of quarrying at Cape Woolamai; and objecting to proposed oil exploration in nearby waters. In addition, tree-planting was organised for Cape Woolamai (200 banksias) and Swan Lake (300 natives). Ken, as Secretary, was instrumental in much of this getting done.

Ken attempted to frame a philosophical outlook for his readers in PICS’s first newsletter. He begins by quoting Australian conservationist Vincent Serventy:

Conservation Societies: These will obviously be the backbone of all conservation movements. Every new society should be encouraged. Every town of any size should have some form of conservation group. Whether it is called a National Parks Association, a Tree Society, a Gould League or a Naturalist Club does not matter.

Changes often need catalysts to set them going. Passive communities need individuals to fire them into enthusiasm and action. It is to this task that conservation societies should be dedicated.⁸

But he realised that “our honeymoon, as it were, is over”. He encouraged the members to

Do a little introspection – pause a moment and ask yourself – “Do you really believe that wildlife conservation is a service to mankind?” Have you joined the Society to implement the purposes of wildlife conservation? The responsibility surely is apparent.

FIRSTLY – we need to know about conservation.

SECONDLY – we could do this best by expanding our reading... There is no easy road to a background to wildlife conservation. It demands mobility – mobility to think afresh, to get about, to see for oneself....

THIRDLY – we must start talking – get people talking and thinking and when you hear them say “I hadn’t thought of wildlife that way”, you can begin to rejoice, for you have started something. Yes, you have started to expand public opinion and if you are ‘fair dinkum’ in your intention to do a good job for wildlife conservation, then the pressure of public opinion is your aim. This pressure can move mountains, and my oh my, there are

some mountains to move in the years left of our time! MOUNTAINS OF OPPOSITION.
9

Although Ken had moved away from Phillip Island by the mid 1970s he had still made a dramatic impact on the local scene. The current groundswell of public opinion against inappropriate development, and the work of tree-planting groups over the last forty years now showing clearly on the landscape and providing wonderful habitat for wildlife, are a great delight to Ken. The continuous active existence of PICS over forty years is testimony to the work of many hundreds of members, and also of the sound foundations Ken gave the organisation in 1968.

MARGARET HANCOCK

That PICS is a highly respected organisation amongst much of the public and many planning and environment bureaucrats has a lot to do with PICS's President of twenty-six years, Margaret Hancock. Of course, Margaret would not say so, as she is a 'team player' and firmly believes that she has been fortunate to work with a series of excellent committee and general PICS members throughout her forty year association with PICS, for she was a foundation member, joining on that first cold night in May, 1968.

In that forty years with PICS, Margaret has served as Committee member, Vice President and President; ably chaired many volatile public meetings; spoken on behalf of PICS at local and regional forums and frequently to the media at all hours of day and night; made many presentations to people in authority; appeared for PICS at VCAT on numerous occasions; participated in panel hearings and mediation sessions between developers and objectors; and was a member of the group representing the local community in developing the San Remo and Phillip Island Design Framework. Following Bob Dennis's retirement after ten years' service for the Penguin Reserve and Nature Park, Margaret became PICS's representative on the Phillip Island Nature Park board from 1998-2002. Margaret is also full of ideas and many projects and events undertaken by PICS have been initiated by her.

Coming from a horticultural family (her father was a produce merchant who worked until he died at 91); Margaret has always been perfectly happy planting trees and grubbing out weeds. She retired from primary school teaching to take up full-time residence in 1971, in what had been a holiday house in Cowes, and quickly became involved in the Tree and Garden Association. There she met Freda Davey, who familiarised Margaret with the Island's flora. Concerned about foreshore degradation, Margaret became a member of the Cowes Foreshore Committee, which advised Council on what was needed, but which terminated with the resignation of all members following months of disregard by Council. They thought Council would renege and ask them back, but they did not, so Margaret then learnt a valuable lesson – never resign in a huff!

Margaret was proprietor of the Tamba Garden Centre in Cowes for sixteen years, over which time the nursery became a distribution centre for conservation information as well as a sales outlet for Red Cross products – another of Margaret's several passions. Upon retirement from the nursery Margaret ran unsuccessfully for Council, but always had many other ways of contributing to her community, including the Anglican Church; Friends of Phillip Island Library; Friends of the Koalas; Phillip Island Arts and Cultural Committee; and Rural Australians for Refugees.

When asked about her conservation work in an interview for *The Penguin*, Margaret considered her major achievement in terms of wildlife and habitat on Phillip Island to be “my work with Scott Campbell (ranger) on Cape Woolamai; weed removal and tree planting. Cape Woolamai is a very special place”.¹⁰ In terms of planning it was in “trying to translate the Phillip Island Planning Scheme into the Bass Coast Planning Scheme. In many ways, Phillip Island was ahead of its time in planning. Planning is the basis for everything. If you don’t get your planning right, your land and water management right, you’re wasting your time...I also feel that much of what was done in terms of conservation on Phillip Island was ahead of its time. The Phillip Island Koala Reserves Committee of Management was an excellent example”.¹¹

The citation for Margaret’s Life Membership reads:

Margaret’s dedication to the cause of conservation on Phillip Island has extended from the practical “hands on” work, to being an articulate spokeswoman for PICS on innumerable occasions, and a wonderful leader. This Life Membership is indicative of the esteem in which Margaret is held by all PICS members

Phillip Island and PICS is much the richer for Margaret Hancock’s dedication.

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Patsy Hunt: Kookaburra

Chapter 18 SOME PICS COUNCILLORS

PICS has been most fortunate to have a number of Councillors who have been PICS members during their term on Council and have brought matters of environmental concern to the attention of fellow Councillors and Council officers. It is true to say that they all managed to achieve a great deal in their own ways both for the Island community and environment while on Council, and in the case of Cr Peter Paul, these achievements are continuing with the current Council. The work of seven PICS Councillors is described here.



*A group of former PICS Councillors at the Cowes Primary School Sanctuary, February 2008. L-r: Bill Hopkins, Graeme Burgan, Anne Davie, Hilton Chadwick
Photo: Christine Grayden*

BILL HOPKINS, 1969-75

Bill's brother Don was the resident doctor on Phillip Island for many years, and Don's wife Nan was later a foundation PICS committee member. Bill would visit them and be always struck by the natural beauty of the island. When Bill moved to Phillip Island fifty years ago he became even more impressed with the island's natural appeal and was determined to defend it. He joined PICS and was Treasurer from 1969-72, and Vice President from 1973-76. He served two terms on Council, from 1969-75, and was Shire President from 1971-73. When he stood for Council in 1969, his election brochure stated:

- Full protection of our wildlife. This priceless heritage must never be jeopardised.
- An urgent beautification program. A positive approach with large-scale tree planting and landscaping¹

Again in 1972, Bill's campaign insisted:

These are worth fighting for....

*CONSERVATION

Phillip Island, with its great variety of wildlife and scenic beauty, must be preserved. I will strongly oppose any development which would detract in any way from the environment. The Island is under threat from industrial pollution from the mainland and, on the local scene, from ill-considered development and unrestrained tourism.

Through our Regional Authority delegates and by direct representations to the Government, the Council must constantly use its influence to prevent industrial pollution. It also has a heavy responsibility to combat the damage that uncontrolled tourism can do.

Phillip Island is currently enjoying a steady rate of development. One of the main functions of Council is to ensure that this is **not** achieved at the expense of the environment.²

Early on in Bill's first term in Council he was confronted by an extremely controversial issue. The Liberal Government of the time wanted to introduce a 'Phillip Island Advisory Committee Bill' to parliament which would have allowed, amongst other things, for a toll to be placed on the bridge to assist in payment for tourist infrastructure. Bill supported this idea, pointing out to Council that "The toll would reap \$80,000 annually from tourist traffic at 40 cents a car", and "the Island would be assured of cash to preserve the Island's unique wildlife, and develop its foreshore reserves".³ Cr Ken Pound seconded the motion supporting the bill and the motion was carried 5-4. However, sections of the island community were strongly affronted by the idea of what they regarded as yet another tax by stealth, calling it "Nazism all over again!"⁴ and collected many thousands of signatures on a petition opposing the idea. The Government made twenty one amendments to the bill and returned it as the "Phillip Island Conservation Bill", but the concept was just too soured, despite the Phillip Island Promotion Association supporting the bill because "it would bring very big benefits to all landholders and business people on The Island and improve facilities for overseas tourists and day visitors, which must also increase property values".⁵

Another controversy arose when Len Lukey (then owner of the race track) was caught 'red handed' removing tons of rock from the foreshore below the race track to use in landscaping his Japanese Garden, and also to make way for the establishment of a private beach. Initially he received a small fine, then in a "lengthy affair as it dealt with matters extending over a period of 2 ½ years, inaccurate statements by mines department regarding stone available and the failure of the Director to inform the Authority of proceedings"⁶ Lukey was ordered to pay all legal costs and make a \$5000 donation to Council for conservation and restoration work and projects on Phillip Island foreshores. Taking smaller quantities of sand and rocks by private individuals was rife in the 1970s, but this outcome slowed the practice down somewhat.

The Councils on which Bill served were characterised by a great deal of animated and heated debate with strong personalities on opposing sides, often representing a clash between the old and the new. One thing he was able to get them all to agree on, however, was the purchase by the government of Churchill Island – an opportunity that arose during Bill's term as President. Of course PICS and other individual members were also working towards this goal.

Meanwhile, part-time resident Gretta Hall, frequently accompanied by her husband Geoffrey, was an almost unfailing gallery member in those years and also a most enthusiastic writer of letters-to-the-editor regarding poor Council performance. When the Halls were absent one day, the gallery was deserted, and some Councillors took the opportunity to criticise her. Bill, however, was quick to defend her, pointing out that every Council needs a gallery to keep it “on its toes”, a belief he still holds strongly.

In fact even now in his nineties Bill has extremely strong opinions about the role of local government in relation to the environment. As a Councillor, Bill had introduced the Shire regulation that no indigenous tree on the Island could be removed without the permission of the Shire engineer delegated by Town and Country Planning Board. He is greatly relieved that PICS and other environmental organisations were recently able to uphold the Vegetation Protection Overlay for Phillip Island at VCAT (see ch.11).

A strong community leader for the ‘Phillip Island – Stand Alone’ campaign, Bill believes an Island Council would have better control over the local environment, and also over what he sees as highly undesirable development such as high density housing that has gone ahead under the Bass Coast Shire Council. In fact, Bill has a loud and clear message for all Councillors and potential Councillors:

Councillors face the responsibility of giving precedence to the environment over the temptation of additional rate income. There has been some undesirable development on the island and that must be strenuously resisted. Areas close to the shoreline should remain sacrosanct; particularly farm areas should not be subdivided, especially when close to the foreshores.⁷

VERN JOHNSON, 1971-74

When Vern and Nora Johnson commenced Kingston Gardens Zoo and Picnic Park (now the Phillip Island Wildlife Park) in 1967, quite a few people wondered about their sanity. After all, the public went to a zoo to see elephants and tigers, not kangaroos and wombats, and zoological gardens contained magnificent specimens of trees and flowers from other continents, not gum trees and wattles.

In order to get the public to come to Kingston Gardens, Vern and Nora put in the miles for Phillip Island’s tourism, especially in setting up promotions in Melbourne’s growing number of large shopping centres, and offering prizes of package deal holidays – another innovation at the time. Vern died at his home in Beaconsfield of complications from mesothelioma on 15 September 2005, but he leaves a legacy on Phillip Island that the Phillip Island Conservation Society (PICS) wishes to acknowledge....

When PICS was formed on 11 May 1968 Vern Johnson was amongst the Committee members. Vern became President in 1971 for two years. This was a tumultuous period in the history of the conservation movement, both locally and nationally.

In common with most parts of Australia, Phillip Island was at that time quite primitive in regard to conservation, with many locals openly hostile to conservationists. The PICS committee faced many hurdles, even after The Nits development proposal was knocked on the head. During Vern’s presidency there were many common practices which would be heartily condemned

today, such as unauthorized shooting in reserves, unlimited and destructive access to foreshores and wildlife habitat, removal of rocks from the beach and removal of ‘unsightly scrub’ from roadsides and foreshores. There were also frequent fires at the Shire Tip, which PICS asked to be moved away from the coast as a matter of priority. At one stage Vern had a showdown with Council and the then extremely powerful Crawford Productions team when they placed a film set on top of penguin burrows at Cat Bay!



Former President Vern Johnson and current President Margaret Hancock cut the cake at the thirtieth birthday celebrations. Photo courtesy Anne Oswin

Vern was active in PICS when the Victorian Conservation Council (now Environment Victoria) was established, and extended the PICS network through the support of the many regional conservation bodies that sprang up at the time. As a Phillip Island councillor from 1971-74 he brought the state of Phillip Island’s foreshores, and especially Red Rocks, to the attention of the council. He was Chairman of the Penguin Reserve Committee at the time that Roy Grounds was employed to design major improvements. Vern also sought roadside wildlife warning signs, voiced PICS’s horror at the mass shooting of Silver Gulls at the Shire Tip and raised the issue of foxes and feral cats killing wildlife, calling for measures “with a view to exterminating foxes on Crown Lands in the Shire of Phillip Island”. These were all revolutionary concepts at the time.

Vern was also a prime mover for the establishment of a Phillip Island Information Centre, and instigated car rallies and annual Easter festivals to encourage Victorians to visit Phillip Island. He also represented PICS on the committee formed at the time to try to buy Churchill Island for the general public.

Through all of his life he remained a gentleman, with a ready smile, a dedication to his community, and a great love of his family and nature. Phillip Island is richer for the years Vern spent here.⁸

MURRAY HILGENDORF, 1973-76

Murray Hilgendorf , who with his wife Myra had an unobtrusive timber house nestled into Kitty Miller Bay's western headland, was PICS's President from 1973-81. He was a Phillip Island Shire Councillor from 1973-76, during which time he covered a very wide range of interests. He served on Council committees for Health; Municipal buildings; Cowes Foreshore Advisory Committee; the Grants Commission; Phillip Island Koala Reserves Committee of Management; and was the Deputy Chairman of the Penguin Reserve of which a quorum of five councillors constituted the Committee of Management at that time. He also represented Phillip Island Council on the Westernport Regional Organisation of Councils, a not altogether comfortable alliance of Cities and Shires throughout the Mornington Peninsula and Western Port coastline's local governments. Murray was also the Shire's representative on the Conservation Committee of the Westernport Regional Planning Authority's Conservation Committee at the time of the Southern Mornington Peninsula's Conservation Plan, and when the Authority was undertaking much landscape assessment.

As a conservationist Murray's special interest was in landscape and the preservation of rural land, together with wildlife management. During his time on the Koala Reserve's Committee, hundreds of koalas (which were eating themselves out of a home) were relocated to various parts of Victoria from Phillip Island, even though about a thousand were left. Aware of the shortcomings of the Penguin Parade, he moved that council spend \$2,000 to soundproof the walkway to lessen the disturbance to penguins. He pushed for the fencing of foreshores to prevent annexation by adjacent property owners, and for the protection of existing vegetation. PICS was at that time requesting foreshore works, and Murray was able to take the Society's concerns to the council table.

Also at the council table Murray supported early attempts by service groups at recycling of bottles, paper and cardboard. He also proposed the recycling of water from the sewerage treatment plant rather than its discharge to Pyramid Rock, but at that time such a plan was considered to be prohibitively expensive. Murray was an engineer (one of the team to design Tullamarine Airport), and brought an engineer's perspective to many of Phillip Island's problems. He moved at council that the Country Roads Board be asked to reclassify Back Beach Road to be main roads standard, which would take Penguin Parade traffic away from the sensitive Five Ways koala area, and relieve the council of considerable expense.⁹

Together with Ailsa Swan (see Life Members ch.17) Murray objected to a series of pro-development decisions by the council during the 1970s and 1980s. Murray was a committee member and then publicity officer for the Phillip Island League, an organisation very active in the mid to late 1970s in the areas of social, environmental and local government reform. In a 1978 Phillip Island League *Information Bulletin* Murray wrote:

One of the joys of Phillip Island is the open rolling farmland associated still in many parts with unspoilt coastal scenery. In the late 1950s the subdivision of the Island was proceeding apace with the Shire Council's approval and in 1959 the Government became very concerned. The expansion of residential subdivision was so rapid that it asked the Town and Country Planning Board for a report. The result was that the Minister for Local Government directed the Board to place an Interim Development Order on Phillip Island to regulate, restrict, restrain and prohibit the use or development of land and the erection,

construction or carrying out of any buildings or works except in accordance with a permit issued by the Board.

The first Interim Development Order (I.D.O.) was placed on the Island on 7.2.1961 and administered by the Board until 17.12.1974 when the Phillip Island Planning Scheme was approved. Since that date the Planning Scheme has been administered by the Shire council designated in the Scheme as the ‘responsible authority’.

It was thought that the Planning Scheme would protect the rural landscape from further subdivision. Indeed, the first sub-clause in the Ordinance of the Planning Scheme dealing with land in the rural zone says that such land shall not be subdivided into allotments smaller than 32 hectares. Another clause restricts the building of houses on rural land unless ‘all contiguous land held in the same ownership’ ...complies with certain specifications. Another sub-clause stops subdivisions abutting a main road.

But there are exceptions in the Planning Scheme and there are ways around it....The Shire Council again seems to be set on a course of development at any cost.¹⁰

Thirty years on and Murray’s words still resonate with many Phillip Islanders.

Fortunately there are now many more individuals and organisations prepared to stand up for Phillip Island’s precious landscapes and rural land, but Murray, as councillor, PICS President, Phillip Island League member and foresighted individual, led the way.



Murray Hilgendorf and helper at a working bee, 1980s. Photo: Christine Grayden

HILTON CHADWICK, 1981-87; 1988-91

Hilton was PICS’s first Treasurer and a member during his terms on Phillip Island Council. Always prepared to ‘put the cat among the pigeons’ and bring to the Council table issues that people put to him, Hilton was, and is, outspoken on environmental issues. He supported Chief Executive Officer, Barry Hayes’ suggestion of a community ‘Forward Needs Plan’, which later led to the Strategy Plan process.

The Council chamber was at times characterised by discord, giving rise to ratepayer dissatisfaction with the operation of the Council. One day Hilton was chairing a committee meeting when he asked each Councillor and officer present to say what each wanted for Phillip Island's present and future. Barry Hayes suggested a retreat with a trained convenor in order to achieve a new, more coherent and amicable working basis for the Council. The retreat did take place and was highly successful, resulting in an excellent Mission Statement for the Shire (see Anne Davie, later this chapter). Hilton also believed in transparency in government, and in doing everything 'by the book'.

During his years in Council, Hilton was responsible for suggesting the light industrial estate, the purchase of 56 Church Street for the childcare centre, and off-street parking for Cowes. He was also involved in the initial suggestion for the purchase of CA79, opposite the Catholic Church. Unfortunately Town Planner Aroon Joshi never had the opportunity to rezone the land for municipal purposes, and the Commissioners sold it to pay debts at the time of Council amalgamations. Such a large parcel of land would now be invaluable to Phillip Island.

One major environmental issue with which Hilton dealt was the vexed and ongoing issue of noise from the race track (see ch.13). Hilton's campaign, joined by another PICS Councillor, Anne Davie, and Cr Phil Wright, drew a letter of congratulations to Hilton from social commentator Brian Dawe.

At the time of the Saltwater Creek proposal Hilton met with Shire Engineer, Jock McKechnie and developer, John Delaney. The subject of access along the beach was discussed, as the development required a high-walled canal from the lower reaches of the creek to 130 m into Western Port Bay. Delaney claimed a tunnel under the beach would be feasible, but Hilton argued that there were safety issues there, and that a bridge over the canal would cause access problems for families with small children, the elderly and the disabled. This was a major issue for the public and contributed to the demise of the proposal.

Another impractical proposal during Hilton's term was the 'Thomas the Tank Engine' huge theme park proposed for Newhaven, where the developer, Logan, wanted to bring tourists in by the jumbo jet load and land them at the Newhaven airfield. Some councillors were initially blinded by the amount of investment dollars on offer, but eventually rejected the plan. In Hilton's view this was another example of investors offering developers money to develop any sort of business in order to receive tax benefits.

Even so, Hilton was taken aback when one day a local builder stopped him in the street and demanded that Council borrow millions of dollars and lend it back at low interest to developers. Hilton had to explain to him that Council could not operate as a lending institution!

In dealings with his fellow-Councillors, Hilton spoke publicly in support of Cr Phil Wright who, although thought to be radical by some people, had some fresh ideas for the Council including the suggestion of coastal walks. Hilton also moved that Anne Davie be made Deputy Shire President, but unfortunately she did not have sufficient support to become Shire President when the time came.

These days Hilton does not believe Phillip Island should have any further major events. Hilton also believes that the buy-back of Summerlands and Scenic Island Estates should be

completed as soon as possible, and that motorbike use of Scenic Island should be strictly controlled. In addition, the Phillip Island Nature Park Board needs to operate independently of outside interests, and flora and fauna must always come before commerce.

In the past Hilton and his wife Suzanne dedicated much time to the Cowes Primary School Sanctuary, one of the remaining important pieces of remnant vegetation in Cowes. Unfortunately the status of the Sanctuary is not guaranteed, as demonstrated by the encroachment into the vegetation on the northern boundary for the provision of tennis courts for the school in 2007. In Hilton's opinion the flora, fauna, the beaches and coastal reserves are what bring people to Phillip Island, and that "The protection of flora and fauna should be everyone's primary concern and focus."¹¹

GRAEME BURGAN, 1988-94

Graeme spent many holidays as a youngster in the mountains near Orbost and on the beaches at Kilcunda and at Marlo where he spent many happy hours poking around the rock platforms. Attending university for an electrical engineering degree he studied solar power and became interested in alternatives. In 1977, he studied outdoor recreation, where the emphasis was on how to do things in the landscape without impact, and there he was influenced by Ian McHarg, whose 1969 book *Design With Nature* was the first to espouse ecological planning, landscape architecture and land-use planning, and is still widely respected today. During 1995-96, Graeme also did an interpretations course, seeing the need to help people, such as Phillip Island's tourists, more fully understand and appreciate the environment they were visiting and using.

During his studies Graeme had done research on dune rehabilitation and outdoor recreation and camping opportunities at Kilcunda. He worked for some time for the Shire of Phillip Island managing the recreation centre and there came into contact with Charles Nancarrow, Wildlife Management Officer, and Peter Dann, a biologist then employed by the Shire as Committee of Management for the Penguin Parade. He joined PICS in 1978, and in the early 1980s worked with Keith Grayden (Lead Hand for ten years on the Cape Woolamai restoration project) who encouraged him to join the PICS Committee. Graeme was Treasurer from 1984-87 and on the committee from 1988-2002. His background and membership of PICS, and his deep interest in sea-based recreation, led him to become extremely active in environmental issues, including the Phillip Island Foreshore Advisory Committee. This Committee eventually produced a highly-regarded report, but its recommendations were being implemented too slowly by Council for Graeme's liking. That and the possibility of the koala enclosure being built in the Oswin Roberts Reserve – a totally inappropriate location for many reasons – led Graeme to run on a joint ticket with fellow-PICS member Anne Davie, and Smiths Beach activist Phil Wright. All three were elected and immediately set about planning what they wanted to achieve.

They saw the need to set up five task teams to achieve the most pressing environmental aims. The first was to develop a Foreshore Management Plan. Graeme chaired this task team, and PICS member John Eddy ably supported him. The resulting document has been much consulted by foreshore agencies. Secondly, a bicycle path strategy was also important – Graeme chaired that meeting and was enthusiastically supported by Paul Smith, currently Environment Manager for the Bass Coast Shire and still maintaining that enthusiasm. Thirdly, a Roadside Management Plan was required. Graeme also chaired this task team, which included PICS member John

Jansson. Unfortunately a long way ahead of its time, a Landscape Strategy was also developed to draft stage. That task team was chaired by Anne Davie and included Graeme. Anne also chaired the team that helped Jenny Saulwick produce a ten-year Art and Design Plan, and she and Graeme worked together to celebrate the natural environment through art. Immediately after the dropping of the oil port proposal (see ch.16), a significant community art event was staged on the Cowes foreshore as a celebration of the importance of protecting the Bay.

Graeme was the Council's representative on the Western Port Regional Planning and Co-ordinating Committee, which was a planning referral authority for regional issues. While there he pushed for members to understand integrated coastal management – that anything that affects the catchment affects the Bay and that affects everyone who lives in the Bay's communities. When the Kennett government disbanded the Committee the last chairman kept members in touch with each other and they eventually re-formed under the umbrella of the Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment and Land Protection Board as the Western Port Catchment Committee. While this latter Committee had no 'teeth' they did have in-depth and informed discussions and could ask the Board to consult the Minister on relevant issues. The Committee operated for many years and was only disbanded in 2007. Graeme maintained his membership for the whole time.

Around 1990 John Fisher was employed by the Department of Conservation and Environment to "prepare a wildlife strategy plan for Phillip Island, 'to guide future tourism development, and wildlife management and interpretation'".¹² Naturally this was appealing to Graeme and he attended many meetings and information sessions with John as he developed his 'Fauna Island' plan. This contained the basis for what later became the Phillip Island Nature Park, but the actual work on the ground was not funded then, and Graeme disagreed with its recommendation to make Oswin Roberts Reserve the Koala Conservation Centre. He took the Councillors for a walk through the Reserve, telling them the history he knew so well from his many hours spent conversing with Jack Oswin. Eventually, he was able to convince them that the best course of action was to purchase the treed farmland owned by Peter Forrest adjacent to the David Forrest Reserve, and that became the Koala Conservation Centre.

In the same area, Graeme was the prime mover on Council to have Harbison Road closed to heavy traffic, backing the efforts of PICS and the Friends of the Koalas, and thereby putting a stop to the abuses of the area by bus drivers and their tourist passengers – cracking stockwhips to waken koalas, banging branches and dropping cigarette butts into the long grass.

The most frustrating part of Graeme's Council experience was that he felt the three 'green' Councillors had finally got Phillip Island to a stage where it could go ahead with good planning policies in place when amalgamation came along. This set the process back. The years of delay in implementing the Design Framework is indicative of how slow the process has been. Meanwhile, Kennett's desire to have rural residential densities the same as Melbourne density was eagerly taken up by Bass Coast Shire Council and has resulted in much inappropriate high density development.

Nowadays Graeme is not convinced that there is a need for State Governments, which often tend to override good Federal Government environmental legislation. His travels through remote parts of Australia managed by indigenous people on the basis of traditional geophysical boundaries have led him to see solutions to our planning dilemmas in their model, and now he

would rather see large local government areas based on catchments which integrate land and coastal management, working directly with the Federal Government.¹³

ANNE DAVIE, 1989-92

Being a member of Phillip Island Shire Council during the early 1990s was a rocky ride for Anne Davie. She was the only ‘green’ female councillor, and although she had the support of Graeme Burgan, Phil Wright and Hilton Chadwick for much that she tried to achieve, the atmosphere of the council chamber could sometimes be quite aggressive, which is the antithesis of Anne’s nature. However, in 1990 the councillors and officers developed a Mission Statement for the shire which was in tune with Anne’s thinking:

Strengthen the sense of community, and in particular, the promotion of family values and caring attitudes. Preservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Development of integrated, balanced growth.¹⁴

Anne, always community-minded, initiated the Phillip Island Community Days, which saw a multitude of Phillip Island organisations come together to demonstrate their activities. She was also active in the Phillip Island Concerned Citizens Association, formed in response to the reactivation of the Grand Prix Circuit (see ch. 13). Living very close to the race track, Anne knows first-hand the effects of the constant noise of testing and has worked hard, both as a councillor and individual, to win appropriate controls over this industrial activity in a rural area. At the time she felt that the reactivation of the race track would distract Phillip Island from the emphasis on ‘the natural attraction’ theme, which saw the development of early eco-tourism attractions including the Koala Conservation Centre, opened in June 1992, and was central to the ‘Fauna Island’ concept.

Landcare commenced during Anne’s term in council, and she was active from the start, especially on the salinity subcommittee and in gaining funding. Anne and her husband Bob have maintained their dedication to the Landcare movement as demonstrated by their own farm, which in 2004 won a Regional Landcare Award –‘Primary Producer Caring For Land’. Among Anne’s many other community activities she was also President of Friends of Churchill Island and the Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre during her time as a councillor.

Also at this time, consultant Jenny Saulwick was employed by the Shire to prepare a *10 Year Art and Design Plan*¹⁵ which was supported by Anne and many in the community. Unfortunately it met with resistance and was never implemented. This was also the fate of the draft *Landscape Strategy Plan*¹⁶ of June 1992, for which Anne was Chairperson. PICS Councillor Graeme Burgan was Secretary, and PICS member, Bob Baird, was one of three community representatives. Produced by staff from the Department of Conservation and Environment Landscape and Architectural Services Section after an enormous amount of work by the eight committee members, including Farming Representative Harry Harris, the report was thorough and concluded with specific recommendations.

However, it also included a section on ‘Planning Controls and Guidelines’ which not only covered the built environment but also “Coastal Areas, Farmland Areas, Woodland Areas...Natural Inland Areas and Natural Coastline Areas”. Some of these areas were owned by landholders who believed they had the right to do whatever they wished on their land without being told by other people. Anne’s statement in her Foreword that “It is the responsibility of this

generation to care for and respect the landscape for those who follow" was very threatening to these people. Again, PICS members' support of landscape and rural land were apparently before their time and the plan was stymied. Now Anne takes heart in Planning Minister Justin Madden's support of the Coastal Spaces Strategy, which aims to preserve coastal landscapes by limiting growth to within township boundaries.

Similar issues regarding just who should control rural land emerged with Amendment L9 to the Phillip Island Planning Scheme while Anne was a Councillor. The main issue was subdivision of and excision from rural land, and farmers were very much against control of these processes by the planning scheme. As both a farmer and councillor, Anne was in a difficult position although she supported Amendment L9. In the end the 'land rights' farmers won and the Amendment was dropped by an Independent Panel.

Throughout her period as a councillor, and really throughout her life, Anne has sought to strengthen the community, to put in place good planning policy, protect and enhance the environment and foster the arts. Her efforts were acknowledged in 2003 when she was a Centenary Medal recipient, and in 2004 when she received an Order of Australia medal for services to the environment, culture and social welfare.¹⁷

PETER PAUL, 2005 -

Peter's interest in and activism for the environment commenced when he first began teaching in 1965. As a District Representative for the Gould League, he always used the environment as part of his classroom studies. He planted trees at each of the schools where he taught. As a principal he worked with Geoff Spring, Secretary of Education, to establish the Environmental Education Committee, encouraging other principals and teachers to make the environment a main part of their school's curriculum. As a result of his work for the environment, a sponsor of the Principals Association created the 'Peter Paul Science and Environment Award' in 1996. This award goes annually to a school that has undertaken environmental projects of significance.

When Peter arrived at Cowes Primary School in 1984, what is now the School Community Sanctuary was earmarked to be excised from the school grounds. Peter had the planned pool moved to the north-west corner of the grounds and created the Sanctuary, by fencing the area, and naming it a School Community Sanctuary. Peter initiated a program to plant hundreds of trees and shrubs at Cowes Primary. The Sanctuary is now a community asset. Peter is currently working in Council to ensure that the foreshores and other areas of significance are protected from illegal acts, by increasing penalties and creating a community awareness of such activities. "It has to go beyond the monetary argument, because people will pay the fine to get the view. Some people seem to have no understanding of the interdependence of the vegetation."

Phillip Island currently has many issues from Peter's perspective. He has made clear his opposition to the Linfox development at Pyramid Rock from the start and firmly believes every development must be looked at "closely and clearly" to assess its environmental impact. Likewise housing density is a major issue. "I've got news for you," says Peter. "Wherever you put a slab you don't have a tree." Dual and triple occupancy puts even more emphasis on landscaping. And infrastructure. He believes that before Council considers any development the

proponent must provide upfront an infrastructure statement to say their development can be supported. He continues:

The enormous growth we are seeing in Melbourne's south-eastern corridor will lead to more people from there visiting Phillip Island on a weekly basis, and the environment is what they will treasure, so while there will be more development on the island it must be sensitive to the environment. This is difficult because the environment is not 'populist', in that it is based on long-term decisions, which have long term consequences.

Ironically, given Bill Hopkins' experience on Council, Peter believes the island needs an environmental tax, such as a toll on the bridge. With the amount of people already coming here, and more in the future, there needs to be enormous resourcing for the environment just to sustain and retain what we have. Also in common with Bill, Peter believes the island would be much better off with its own shire.

According to Peter, population pressure will also see more demand for having Western Port as a major shipping port, and this is a huge issue for the island. He believes another large-scale independent environmental study of the bay is essential before anything else happens.

In terms of planning, Peter is confident that the planning framework and structure plans now in the pipeline will be signed off by the Minister and be incorporated within the Planning Scheme by mid- 2008. This will make a huge difference to Council's ability to control inappropriate development. Even so, he admits that "Bass Coast Council is the solution but also part of the problem. There's a need for better communication, and it is up to Council to take community concerns on board. Consultation doesn't need to mean agreement, but at least everyone should have a hearing, so that everyone's point of view goes into the big picture".

From this point of view Peter is unimpressed with the Nature Park's proposal for a 'Sustainability Centre' at the Koala Conservation Centre. He says:

The Nature Park has lived off the fat of the land with voluntary labour, but won't properly consult these voluntary groups on this issue. Instead the Board are negating the history of how they came to that land through land purchase and gifts for the koalas. It is a very big development, and there must be appropriate consultation with developments of that size.

Likewise he shakes his head when he hears of anyone wanting more development on the scale of the Eco Resort, which he says has brought a lot of condemnation and criticism to the island. The zoning of the land allowed for the development. Cowes and Silverleaves are in Peter's ward, and he has strong ideas on how to improve the poor behaviour of a small minority of visitors which unfortunately has major consequences for the community. Peter would like to see a concerted Council and community push to make Cowes a 'Tidy Town' so that anti-social behaviour such as dropping cigarette butts (which end up in the Bay), breaking glass bottles and snapping off young trees is clearly signalled as being unacceptable.

In conclusion, Peter also has misgivings about major events being held on the island: Big events are a huge issue. We really need to reassess our marketing strategy and the economic impact. Let's not give in to economics on this. We need fewer big events, not more. The environment itself should be the event. Every family that comes here takes

their children to the beach, and the kids remember that experience. But every adult coming here needs to set the example: leave it as they see it, and respect the environment. Yes there are issues. But issues are a catalyst for us to ask ourselves: What do we really want? People really don't want to lose what we have here and are now thinking about what they're going to do to preserve it.¹⁸

POSTSCRIPT

As this chapter shows, PICS Councillors have been (and still are) outspoken, deep thinking, dedicated and innovative. They have all made a huge contribution to the dialogue about conservation and environment on Phillip Island and their contribution has been and still is essential to the never-ending work of protecting the island's fragile environment – an island worth conserving.

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APPENDIX 1

COGS & WHEELS

PICS EXECUTIVE & COMMITTEE MEMBERS 1968-2008

PRESIDENTS

1968-70	Brook Morgan-Paylor – farmer. Land management & general conservation & C/ee 1972-74
1971-72	Vern Johnson – with wife Nora ran Kingston Gardens wildlife park. Tourism. Phillip Island Shire Councillor 1971-74 & C/ee 1968-70
1973-81	Murray Hilgendorf – engineer. Planning; Western Port concerns. Phillip Island League. Phillip Island Shire Councillor 1973-76
1982-2008	Margaret Hancock – teacher and garden centre proprietor. Phillip Island Nature Park Board 1997-2002 & C/ee 1974-81. See Life Members.

VICE-PRESIDENTS

1971	Brook Morgan-Paylor
1972	Murray Hilgendorf
1973-76	Bill Hopkins – accountant. Broad interest in conservation. Phillip Island Shire Councillor 1969-75
1973	Doug Dodd – farmer. Interest in farming history and land use & C/ee 1972, 1974-75
1972, 1974-85	Jack Oswin – farmer. On Koala Reserves Committee of Management; wildlife; habitat; Western Port; Churchill Island.
1977-85	Keith Grayden – fisherman. See Life Members. & C/ee 1968-76
1986, 91, 96	Greg Johnson – teacher. Planning, local government issues. Red Rocks Coast Action Co-ordinator. PICS representative on Ventnor common/Saltwater Creek Public Land c/ee & PICS C/ee 1987-2008
1988-92	Madeline Vegter – farmer. Varied interests and roles & C/ee 1982-87
1988-92, 2005-07	John Jansson – engineer, boat builder. Western Port; seagrass; koalas; Landcare salinity. Planning Scheme Registrar for PICS.
1993, 2000-02	Sandy Shively – librarian. Publicity; meetings; newsletter; hands-on activities; planning. <i>The Penguin</i> editor & C/ee 1994-99
1994-95	Patty Hosking – planning matters
1994-99, 2004	Bruce Howe – teacher. Habitat restoration; Coast Action; <i>The Penguin</i> editor. See also Secretaries. & C/ee 1986-94
1997-2003	Rose Thomas – educator. Habitat restoration; Coast Action; hands-on activities
2005-08	Penny Manning – teacher. Walking tracks and bike paths; planning. & C/ee 1994-2004

SECRETARIES

- 1968-71 Ken Pound – Housemaster, St Paul's Boys' Home, Newhaven. See Life Members.
- 1972-79 Coral Oswin-Wood – see Life Members. & C/ee 1968-70
- 1972-73 Ailsa Swan, Assistant Secretary. See Life Members
- 1979-97 Christine Grayden – teacher. Hands-on; *The Penguin* editor; walks; Children's Environment Mornings; PICS History; PICS rep on Penguin Reserve Committee 1984-89. & C/ee 1977-79. See Treasurers.
- 1988-2008 Margaret Johnson – community centre co-ordinator. Correspondence & general issues; planning interests; VCAT; hands-on activities; *The Penguin* editor



- 1995-2005 Bruce Howe: Minutes Secretary
2005-08 Gaye Cleeland – Librarian: Minutes Secretary

Five PICS Secretaries at 30th birthday celebrations. L-r Margaret Johnson, Bruce Howe, Christine Grayden, Coral Oswin-Wood and Ken Pound. Photo courtesy Anne Oswin

TREASURERS

- 1968 Hilton Chadwick. Phillip Island Shire Councillor 1981-91
- 1969 Coral Oswin-Wood
- 1970-72 Bill Hopkins
- 1973-75 John Jansson
- 1976-81 Molly Siddal – bursar
- 1982-83 Max Simpson – businessman. Bird observer & C/ee 1980
- 1984-87 Graeme Burgan – environmental educator. Planning issues; Western Port & oil; hands-on activities; Phillip Island Shire Councillor 1988-94; Secretary Phillip Island Foreshore Advisory Committee. & C/ee 1988-2002
- 1988-91 Sandy Shively

1992-97	Barb Martin – private secretary. Churchill Island; indigenous plants; koalas; hands-on activities. Barb Martin Bush Bank named after her. & C/ee 1989
1998-2002	Tim Patkin – cabinetmaker, sailor. Hands-on activities; Coast Action
2002-05	Gillian Collins – artist. Red Rocks Coast Action co-ordinator; Ventnor Common/Saltwater Creek public land c/ee; Port of Hastings c/ee & c/ee 2008
2006-08	Christine Grayden

CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF VICTORIA/ ENVIRONMENT VICTORIA REPRESENTATIVES

1971-74	Beth Emsley
1974-86	Ailsa Swan
1987-98	Greg Johnson
1999	Narelle Chambers

PENGUIN RESERVE COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT/ PHILLIP ISLAND NATURE PARK BOARD REPRESENTATIVES

1982-84	John Jansson
1984-89	Christine Grayden
1990-95/96-97	Bob Dennis – export officer, farmer. Bird observer; koalas; hands-on activities; general conservation interests. See commemorative plaque at Koala Conservation Centre
1998-2002	Margaret Hancock

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1968-70	Nan Hopkins	1983, 2000-03	Julie Box
1968	Reg Orr	1984-85	Trisha Sertori
1968-79	Jim Cook	1986-87	John Eddy
1969	Neil Hamilton	1986	Bruce Ridgeway
1970-82	Hank Vegter	1987	Kevin Wilson
1970-72	Bob Steane	1989	Lyn Chandler
1973-74	Jean Jamieson	1991-96/1999-2000	Mike Cleeland
1973-76	Gary Barnes	1992-93, 1998	Christine Fensham
1977-80	Wyndham Richardson	1992-93	Shirley Lancaster
1981	Anna Landon	1997	Jan Fleming
1981	Ken Wright	2001-08	Anne Davie
1982	Alan Temby	2005-08	Pauline Taylor
1983	Digby Hannah	1998-99/2000-07	Moragh Mackay
1983-85	Peter Dann	Landcare rep, Membership officer	Diane Baird, website manager
1983-84	David Landon	2001-08	

APPENDIX 2

HABITAT PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN BY PICS

1. SWAN LAKE

1969-1980s: PICS project. Clearing of large areas of gorse and boxthorn. Ground preparation. Planting of hundreds of native plants.

2. CAPE WOOLAMAI

1970s-1990s: PICS and community projects. Planting of Banksia and Sheoak plantation both sides of middle track. Dune plantings. Weed removal.

3. CHURCHILL ISLAND

1970s, 1980s: both PICS and community projects. Treeplanting and weed removal.

4. VENTNOR COMMON & VENTNOR RECREATION RESERVE

1970s, 1980s: with the community and Phillip Island Pony Club. Treeplanting and weed removal

5. 1988 BICENTENNIAL PLANTINGS

Joint project with Shire of Phillip Island. Growing of 3,000 indigenous trees grown from locally collected seed. PICS co-ordinated the community planting days at five Phillip Island locations.

6. RED ROCKS

1970s with Shire of Phillip Island. 1990s – present time with Coast Action/Bass Coast Shire Council. Weed removal, planting, fencing, rubbish collection, laying of brush matting. Gaining funding for access steps and ramps.

7. ROWELL'S SWAMP

1991: Planting of commemorative plantation in memory of Jack Oswin. Plaque now on view at Koala Conservation Centre.

8. SALTWATER CREEK

1995: Combined with Landcare and community to plant out substantial areas of Saltwater Creek Reserve.

9. SEAWEED:

1990s: Combined with community to remove the invasive seaweed, *Codium*

10. FIVE WAYS INTERSECTION

1996- present time: PICS project. Restoration of area following road works. Ground preparation, planting, weed removal, rubbish collection.

11. OSWIN-ROBERTS RESERVE

1970s, 1980s – work continuing under Friends of Koalas umbrella with some members joining in on regular *Habitat Days*, held monthly. Planting of cleared coups, weed removal.

12. BARB MARTIN BUSH BANK

1998 – present time. PICS helped establish the Bush Bank and members volunteer time to collect seed and propagate indigenous plants.

13. WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

1990s – present time: PICS members combine with Friends of Koalas and Landcare on public planting days.

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Motor racing circuit	Nobbies/Seal Rocks Australia
Oil/Western Port development	Phillip Island Nature Park
Planning, general: A-C, D-R, S-V, W-Z	Race Track Hotel
Ramsar	Roadsides
Saltwater Creek	Tip/Transfer Station
Western Port	“Wintersun”
Wildlife	Wildlife Corridor

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Patsy Hunt: Powerful Owl

