

PHILLIP ISLAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC



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23 September 2020

Legislative Assembly
Environment and Planning Committee
Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Dear Sir/Madam

PICS acknowledges and pays respect to the region's first people, the Bunurong and Boon Wurrung, part of the Kulin Nation, who are the traditional custodians of these lands and waters.

Introduction

Phillip Island Conservation Society (PICS) was formed in 1968—one of the first grass-roots conservation societies in the nation—with the mantra “save wildlife today for tomorrow”. A PICS guiding principle is to recognise that Phillip Island’s unique environment is part of Western Port, a UNESCO biosphere reserve encompassing a Ramsar wetland of international significance.

Since that time we recognise that our state and our region have come a long way in nature conservation. Indeed Phillip Island conservationists have helped to create the iconic and world-class Penguin Parade and PICS has continued to be a voice for the preservation and enhancement of Phillip Island’s and Western Port’s natural assets. This has occurred at the community level, with government agencies, and at planning and environment hearings.

Today the Phillip Island and San Remo region is the second-most tourism-dependent economy in Australia, and much of this economy is reliant on the health of Western Port. The *Phillip Island and San Remo Visitor Economy Strategy 2035 (The Strategy)* recognises the interdependence of the community, the natural environment, and the economy.

Phillip Island offers a special package of the combination of extensive natural attractions alongside farming activities and a number of small settlements. Unfortunately its popularity comes with a cost. The threats to this world class environment are many.

Increasing urbanisation of the island and increasing visitor numbers pose, if unregulated, a significant threat to the fragile ecosystems and natural attractions that exist on the island. Superimposed on these threats is the looming spectre of climate change. Careful management is required to preserve all that is so wonderful about the island, that so many treasure, for future generations.

The natural attractions are numerous and include the world famous Penguin Parade, Seal rocks, the Koala Sanctuary, the annual shearwater migration and Whale watching. Piers and breakwaters are used for fishing and boating activities. The beaches which are both bay and ocean are fringed by distinctive coastal vegetation and facilitate a large range of aquatic activities.

The environment is the economy

The key to its delivery is acknowledging that **the environment is the economy** of Phillip Island. One of the *The strategy's* guiding principles is that Phillip Island's and Western Port's natural environment must not only be preserved, but enhanced, through sustainable development and management practices.

Climate change

There is now overwhelming scientific evidence supporting the proposition that the world's climate is changing quickly. This is already presenting many challenges to the world's human population and other living things. It is likely that more resources will be needed to mitigate the environmental effects of climate change if we wish to retain the natural places that we enjoy on the island. Certainly coastal erosion has been more notable in recent years.

The protection of Phillip Island's fragile ecosystems will need no less support from government and all those who cherish the island.

The Post Covid World

Once freedom of movement has returned people will feel the need more than ever before to escape the austerity that cities have come to represent. People will need to reconnect with the experience of freedom and the sensations that the natural world brings.

Situated less than 2 hours by road from Melbourne this island provides easy access for a great holiday for everyone, especially for children. Phillip Island offers many family friendly attractions at either minimal or no cost particularly those related to its beaches. Similarly accommodation comes in all types from the luxurious to many other very affordable options from camping, caravanning or B&B options. It is likely that once COVID 19 restrictions are lifted on movement, there will be a boom in domestic tourism on Phillip Island.

Significant threats to the island include

- Increasing traffic volumes with increasing congestion, motor vehicle accidents and injured wildlife;
- Increased urbanisation with subsequent pressure on environmental infrastructure and public amenity;
- Climate change with associated sea level rise and more severe weather events with subsequent foreshore erosion leading to habitat loss and beach access problems;
- Development of a car ferry terminal and all required infrastructure on the Cowes coast;
- Loss of indigenous vegetation especially along the foreshore; and
- Industrialisation of Westernport with adverse effects on marine ecosystems.

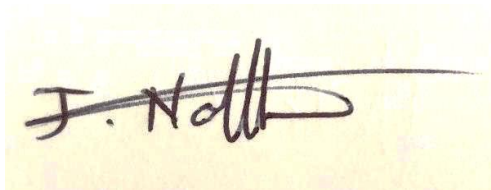
Recommendations

1. Further consultation with the traditional owners of the Bass Coast region, the Bunurong and Boon Wurrung, including studies into areas of cultural and heritage significance;
2. Further consultation with the traditional owners seeking their knowledge and aspirations for conservation and rehabilitation of the natural environment;
3. Funding for more sympathetically designed foreshore access infrastructure including access to beaches as identified by the Bass Coast Council's Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee;
4. Further support for Landcare and Coastcare financially and with administrative support to continue their work involving volunteers, staff and contractors in large-scale planting, weeding, etc.;
5. Infrastructure to improve transport management including- "Park and Ride" services in peak times e.g. bus to Nobbies and Penguin Parade;
6. Infrastructure funding to landowners to maintain or restore heritage buildings such as chicory kilns in order to provide diverse visitor experiences;
7. Infrastructure investment into walking/cycling paths and recreation facilities on Phillip Island and the San Remo coastal circuit;

8. Infrastructure investment in public transport infrastructure to and from the island and within the island including providing comfortable bus shelters;
9. Investment in foreshore environmental infrastructure by re-establishing and enhancing original indigenous vegetation consistent with the Bass Coast Distinctive Areas and Landscapes Program;
10. Infrastructure funding for a feasibility study to establish a special purpose environment fund on Phillip Island for the purpose of facilitating land purchase for wildlife corridors, beach stabilisation, grants to local landowners to assist with environmental infrastructure projects;
11. Investment in infrastructure for better management of domestic animals eg dog parks to provide alternatives for dogs away from beaches; and
12. Funding for school programs designed to engage school children with environmental infrastructure projects and sense of ownership in those projects.

Yours faithfully

Jeff Nottle

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'J. Nottle' with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

President