

PHILLIP ISLAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC



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To. Cr Michael Whelan

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cc. Cr David Rooks

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Dear Cr Whelan

Re: Cowes to Ventnor track

The location of the proposed Cowes to Ventnor 2.4-metre-wide shared path covers a diverse range of habitat and vegetation. PICS does not support the proposed shared track and its impacts on very sensitive flora, fauna, and dunes. PICS does support improvements in Cowes to Ventnor paths and tracks improving community and nature connections, addressing weed infestations, informal tracks, erosion and encroachment as outlined in this submission.

Narrow tracks including boardwalks have previously been considered between Cowes to Ventnor and assessments of impact on vegetation have previously been commissioned by PICS in 2014/15. As part of this current shared path concept PICS representatives recently walked key sections of the proposed track with Cr Rooks and other interested parties.

The coast along this area is hidden in most part by sand dunes and native vegetation which in some cases is rare or threatened and mostly degraded. Many informal tracks have been made by human activity creating pockets of erosion and there are areas of encroachment by adjacent landholders creating an eyesore and weed infestation.

The foreshore reserve vegetation provides an essential and finite corridor for wildlife to move safely along the coast as they cannot go inland due to houses, roads and other infrastructure or go onto the beach of course. PICS considers that the habitat needs protection. Some of the money that would have been spent on a shared track could be used to remove weeds, replant and revegetate degraded areas of the foreshore, reclaim patches where encroachment has occurred, and block illegal tracks to the beach.

In some areas near the caravan park, Anderson St boat ramp to Justice Rd. an access track could be installed with minimal disturbance of existing indigenous vegetation where those access tracks are aligned close to freehold boundaries. Indeed an access track in these areas would effectively mark the vicinity of the boundary of private land and foreshore and provide access for foreshore management of indigenous vegetation.

PICS believes that additional tracks or trails between Cowes and Ventnor should focus on local connectivity and connections to nature that use mainly streets and perhaps simply link to some spots with seats or a picnic table in large, already cleared “lookout” areas some of which have been degraded by encroachment. These feature areas should also be revegetated. It would not be appropriate to just focus on the track or trail aspect without addressing the surroundings at the “lookout” areas. This would give people, controlled access, and spots for enjoyment of the environment, without making the whole foreshore a thoroughfare.

We must consider the worst and hope for the best when planning for any human activity. It seems that whilst generally most people can appreciate the need to behave in a responsible manner not everyone does. Opening the foreshore up to people would mean that dogs would be a major problem as any shared use track would mean that dog owners would allow them to run through the foreshore reserve off-lead, chasing and killing wildlife, leaving their scent and faeces behind. The problem caused by lack of compliance by dog walkers on the on-lead only beaches that already occurs means that this activity would just occur in this area too.

As part of our recent discussions with cyclists in the area we have been advised that some do not agree that cyclists need this proposed track. We understand cyclists have the right of way on the road, not on a path and most prefer to ride on the road but they do need a good well maintained seamless shoulder on the road or a cycle lane on local roads.

Reports commissioned by PICS over the years consider the coastal sand dunes “too fragile” in particular, the section towards Ventnor from the end of Settlement Rd.

“The fragile coastal dune system consists of deep aeolian sands on steep dunes that are easily eroded by human activity such as pedestrian traffic. There are already a number of informal walking tracks to the beach over the steep dunes and in some cases significant erosion has occurred as shown in the above photograph. A widening of tracks in these areas would result in further erosion and vegetation degradation, even with a proposed boardwalk which would need to be wider than the existing track.”¹

The Saltwater Creek reserve area is “extremely sensitive” and therefore, PICS advocates for a route around the reserve via the existing shared path along Anchorage Rd and Ventnor Rd (existing bridge over Saltwater Creek) and Red Rocks Rd (a new shared path). We highlight the general need not to disturb remnant vegetation or faunal refuges, or risk introducing rubbish or more weeds. We also advocate for closure of informal beach tracks, systematic foreshore weeding, and revegetation in degraded areas.

In relation to encroachment at the Golf Course we have attached an aerial photo showing the clearing.

¹ Oates, Alison (2014), Vegetation Survey of Saltwater Creek to Penguin Rocks Foreshore page 17

PICS would be pleased to be part of any further Council considerations or planning relating to the Cowes to Ventnor foreshore.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Nottle", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeff Nottle

President

Enc. A Oates Final Vegetation report of Saltwater Creek to Penguin Rocks Foreshore 2014

Appendix 1