

Statement Release

4 December 2017 MELBOURNE

Victoria's coastline calls for leadership and a visionary approach

Victoria made waves last week with a landmark Forum connecting **key coastal agencies**. Hosted by the Central Coastal Board (CCB) *Connecting Coastal Champions* brought **180** leading decision makers from **marine and coastal organisations** together in Melbourne for collective discussions covering coastal and marine science, policy, governance, and on-ground management

Victoria's coast and marine environments are highly valued by the community. However, our coastlines are facing increasing pressures from significant rises in population growth and coastal erosion compounded by climate change. The forum invigorated the conversation that long-term visionary management is required to address Victoria's impending legislative reform and related transition program.

Experts examined current leading examples and future alternatives to pressing concerns regarding Victoria's coastal environments. Representatives from **43 different management agencies around Victoria's Central coast**, including councils, government agencies and Catchment Management Authorities strongly championed for need for coastal reform, and more visionary leadership in Victoria.

Respected scientist **Professor Bruce Thom, AM, Member of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists and former Chair of the Australian State of the Environment Committee** highlighted how Victoria isn't fully considering coastal impacts, recommending that science must inform policy, and that coastal leaders should become more vocal.

"To reduce the risk now and in the future, we need the power to audit coastal marine work by Councils and State and report this to Parliament," said Professor Thom.

Critical to discussions were community concerns surrounding sea level increases, and scientific data demonstrating how storm surges and climate change impact on coastal areas. Senior **Cardno Oceanographer, David Provis presented that the latest research suggests Victoria's current projects are too low**

He urged coastal and waterways managers to "incorporate variability in sea level rise planning, beyond the 0.2 – 0.8m sea level rise", and to reassess long term environmental impacts and risks against short term costs of protecting and remediating community and private coastal assets.

Coastal land use planning and policy were at the forefront of discussion, with **Bass Coast Shire's Strategic Planner Jodie Kennedy** presenting the Bass Coast flood overlay challenges and how they pioneered local changes to Victoria's coastal planning scheme that should have had state wide leadership.

Rob Gell, coastal geomorphologist and Member of the Victorian Coastal Council spoke on recognising Ports and Fisheries roles through an integrated marine and coastal management, while **Chris Chesterfield, Chair of the Yarra River Taskforce** advocated for more visionary governance, rather than the current admin-efficiency and risk minimisation model.

Victoria would do well to take note of the case study of long term planning for the impact of coastal erosion on private property and how crisis management informs a council's future policy, which was delivered **by Craig Morrison, Senior Environment Officer Northern Beaches Council NSW.**

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Key Victorian coastal and marine issues raised at the conference:

- frustrations that the Victorian Coastal Strategy and Regional Coastal Plans are not adequately resourced or implemented
- data and scientific information should underpin policy and government should re-assemble the in-house scientific capacity rather than relying on short term consultant based approaches
- Victoria must look beyond our own coastline and adopt learnings from interstate counterparts in NSW, Qld and USA's New York Highline. Benchmarking of NSW challenges, in particular the June 2016 Narabeen coastal crisis and community expectations that the government will sort out issues
- revision of the current Parks and Waterways charges to work towards a sustainable coastal fund
- adaptive coastal management approaches to recognise increasing pressures of population growth and social expectations and erosion management

Rob Gell moderated a Utopia-esque hypothetical panel, contributed to by **Chris Smyth, Marine and Coastal Project Manager Victorian National Parks Association, Associate Professor Dr Geoff Wescott, Deakin University, Jan MacDonald, professor of Environmental Law University of Tasmania, John Ginivan, Former Exec Director DWELP and Liz Johnstone, Associate Director of Sustainability, AECOM**

The *"Making Waves"* hypothetical debate addressed the challenge of climate change adaption for the coast, with State Minister for Coast and the Chair of the National Marine and Coastal Authority embarking on a mock leadership battle. In future visioning **VNPA's Chris Smyth** outlined how a hypothetical 2027 Marine and Coastal Authority had received international recognition for its work in protecting Australia's iconic coast which unexpectedly brought about economic savings in infrastructure investment. The forum pushed boundaries and stretched participant's thinking surrounding a hypothetical policy of acquisition of private coastal properties, e-fences to separate domestic animals from hooded plovers and tracking apps to debit coastal entry fees from visitor's accounts.

Hypothetical aside, **Ross Kilborn**, Chair of the Central Coastal Board said the forum underscored the need for a collaborative commitment towards future-proofing Victoria's coastline, with dedicated funding and forward-looking strategies.

"While we have an insightful and science based Victorian Coastal Strategy and 3 regional coastal plans, there's no substantial commitment, financial or otherwise towards them on the ground. It's important for Victoria to maintain its leadership, and it's time to take a more focussed approach."

Mr Kilborn acknowledged that there is a Victorian Marine and Coastal Act due to be implemented in July 2018. Experts and coastal and waterway managers look forward to considering how the transition plan will impact on management outcomes. In thanking participants for the success of the forum, Mr Kilborn committed the CCB to progressing it to become an annual event.

Geomorphologist, Victorian Coastal Council member and former weather presenter, **Rob Gell AM** agreed that the discussions represent the opportunity to strengthen coastal resilience through a united approach by government and agencies.

"We need reshape how we look at the coastline and our coastal environment with more sustainable management practices. We have documented recognition of the issues Victoria is facing into the future. More Victorian's should be adding their voice to this conversation."

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A summary forum has been published on the CCB website <http://ccb.vic.gov.au/>

The event was supported by Department of Environment, Land, Water and planning (DWELP) and Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria.

Editorial information:

Selection of images attached or photo opps at Martha Cove, Blackrock or Elwood Canal

Interviews with spokespersons available – Rob Gell, Ross Kilborn

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About Central Coastal Board

The CCB is one of three regional coastal planning advisory bodies – the other two are the Western Coastal Board and the Gippsland Coastal Board. The Central Coastal Board (CCB) was formed under the *Coastal Management Act 1995* and reports to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

Its focus is **co-ordination, planning and management of the coast and marine environment for long term sustainability in Victoria's central coastal region.**

The Victorian Coastal Council (VCC) is the state-wide umbrella organisation for integrated coastal management in Victoria and is responsible for developing the Victorian Coastal Strategy every five years.

About Victoria's coastline

Victoria's mainland and island coastline totals 2,512 kilometres in length. The Victorian coast is a naturally dynamic environment that is constantly changing and evolving.

Victoria has over 12,000 recognised marine plants and animals, with many of the species found in Victoria's coastline found nowhere else on earth