



Leanne Khan
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Department of Sustainability and Environment
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Dear Leanne,

RE: MANGROVES IN WESTERNPORT DISCUSSION PAPER –DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

The Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) would like to thank the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Public Land Services, for the opportunity to comment on the *Mangroves in Westernport Discussion Paper*.

Overall we found the discussion paper to be a good descriptive overview of mangroves in Westernport, including a detailed outline of the ecosystem services that they provide. We congratulate DSE and the report authors, Chris Harty Planning and Environmental Management, for compiling a science-based discussion paper that will help increase community awareness about mangroves in Westernport and inform a future strategic planning approach.

For your information, every three to four years the VNPA commissions a Nature Conservation Review of either terrestrial or marine areas. The latest review was independently compiled by Australian Marine Ecology and has recommendations for marine conservation priorities and issues for Victoria. These recommendations include suggestions for further protection of mangroves in the Westernport region. This will be included in the comments below. A copy of the summary report and the full review can be accessed from <http://vnpa.org.au/page/nature-conservation/marine-and-coastal/protecting-our-seas-and-shores>.

The following points are VNPA's suggestions for the discussion paper:

- ❖ The paper could include an executive summary at the front end that summarises the main ecosystem services that mangroves provide. These services, as stated throughout the discussion paper, include (but are not limited to) coastal defence/protection services to climate change effects of storm surges and sea level; foraging, breeding and roosting habitat for a range of bird species; foraging and nursery habitat for marine estuarine fauna; filtration of urban runoff; acting as a carbon sink, etc.
- ❖ Include the recent up-to-date sea level rise scenario mapping released by the Federal Government in Chapter 5.ⁱ
- ❖ Further protection of mangroves in the Westernport region. As stated in the VNPA Nature Conservation review (p.140) the current objectives and values of the French

Island Marine National Park are not well covered in the present boundaries and level of protection. The option of extending the southern boundary to encompass the entire mangrove habitat and, if possible, saltmarsh habitat, is recommended.

- ❖ Where ecologically appropriate, plant and rehabilitate mangrove habitat in the urban residential precincts at Grantville (p.100 8.2) and elsewhere. Residential concerns about property views should not outweigh the need to strengthen habitat and natural coastal defence services. As stated in the discussion paper (p.105) 'Planting of mangroves along Grantville shoreline is merely replacing what used to historically exist.'

The VNPA supports a number of the findings outlined in the discussion paper. These include:

- ❖ The summary assessment of the environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of mangroves compared to engineered options for shoreline protection (Table 5 p.92). We agree that the re-establishment and rehabilitation of mangroves (and the protection of existing mangroves) is a wiser investment and more appropriate long-term solution to erosion control and associated impacts of climate change.
- ❖ The statement relating to 'coastal squeeze' (p.85) and the need to ensure that mangroves have adjacent landward areas to migrate. We agree that this can be achieved by identifying and preserving existing suitable lands, or by establishing sufficiently large buffer zones to accommodate migration.
- ❖ The listing of coastal saltmarsh as an ecological community under the EPBC Act 1999 (p.104) and further planning to undertake protective works.

Future options & strategic planning

The VNPA endorses a strategic planning approach to Westernport as discussed in the discussion paper (p. 103 -105) and suggests a comprehensive review of all the values (including mangroves), critical habitats and threats as an appropriate way forward. This review could include:

- ❖ Conducting, as a stand-alone process for Westernport or as part of a broader state-wide review, a comprehensive, independent, Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) led science-based assessment. The review would update information on the ecological values of Westernport, the threats to these values and the way in which these values can be protected and the bay and its catchment used in an ecologically sustainable way.
- ❖ Including in this assessment comprehensive modelling of oil spill risk and dispersal following and extending on earlier studies.

As discussed in Chapter 5 of the discussion paper, climate change is one of the major threats to the future ecological health of Westernport. Another is the proposed expansion of the Port of Hastings. This would endanger Westernport's values and reduce the resilience of the bay to the ongoing impacts of climate change.

The current port expansion plans include significant dredging of the channel, clearing of large areas of mangroves and substantial land reclamation.ⁱⁱ Port expansion plans would

significantly increase the risk of oil spills. The extent of exposed mudflats at low tide makes Westernport particularly vulnerable to the ecological impacts of oil spills

The VNPA, along with fourteen other environmental and community organisations, recently released a joint statement that addressed concerns about the unacceptable risks the expansion of Port of Hastings would pose to the environmental, health and recreational values of Westernport – including existing mangrove habitat.ⁱⁱⁱ

Mangroves play an intergral role in the ecosystem health of Westernport, and the VNPA supports DSE's initiative of raising community awareness about these values. The protection of existing mangrove habitat, mangrove rehabilitation works and establishment of movement buffer zones will be critical in mitigating the future impacts of climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity for the VNPA to comment on the Mangroves in Westernport Discussion Paper, which gives a good descriptive overview of mangroves and how they influence their environment within Westernport.

Yours sincerely,



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ⁱ OzCoasts Australian Online Coastal Information (2010) *The science of climate change and the coast: Sea level rise maps – Melbourne Region*, Australian Government Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, sourced from http://www.ozcoasts.org.au/climate/Map_images/Melbourne/mapLevel2.jsp, 16 December, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Port of Hastings Corporation (2009) Port of Hastings Land Use & Transport Strategy, sourced from [http://www.transport.vic.gov.au/DOI/DOIElect.nsf/\\$UNIDS+for+Web+Display/AC2341887EF73617CA25761F007F73DC/\\$FILE/PortofHastingsLandUseTransportStrategy.pdf](http://www.transport.vic.gov.au/DOI/DOIElect.nsf/$UNIDS+for+Web+Display/AC2341887EF73617CA25761F007F73DC/$FILE/PortofHastingsLandUseTransportStrategy.pdf)

ⁱⁱⁱ Joint Environment and Community Group Statement (2010) *Westernport Bay and the planned expansion of the Port of Hastings*, sourced from <http://vnpa.org.au/page/nature-conservation/media-releases/groups-call-for-a-halt-to-port-of-hastings-expansion-plans>.