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Submission No:	35
Date Received:	30-5-08
Secretary:	<i>[Signature]</i>

26<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Secretary  
House Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021,  
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

To whom it may concern,

**Inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities**

The Great Ocean Road Coast Committee is pleased to provide this submission to the above enquiry.

Five issues of concern are raised in relation to the terms of reference:

- 1 Catchment impacts on the coast are insufficiently managed
- 2 There is a clear link between population growth and (potential) environmental impact
- 3 Climate change impacts on the coast are still largely unknown – but we need to know now
- 4 Climate change provides a strong basis to promote sustainable communities
- 5 More needs to be done about governance of the coastal zone – but resourcing is the key

Attached is an overview of these issues, along with an introduction to the work of the Great Ocean Road Coast Committee.

As the coastal manager for 37 kilometres (540 ha) of coastal Crown land between Torquay and Lorne along the internationally iconic Great Ocean Road, we believe we have important insights into this matter.

We look forward to hearing the results of the inquiry, and to the subsequent actions.

If you require further information, please contact me on 03 5220 5055.

David Clarke  
Executive Officer

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**INQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS  
ON COASTAL COMMUNITIES  
A SUBMISSION FROM THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD COAST COMMITTEE.**

**Introduction**

The coast is what motivates and inspires the Great Ocean Road Coast Committee. We are appointed by the Victorian Government as Committee of Management for 37 kilometres (540 ha) of coastal Crown land between Torquay and Lorne along the internationally iconic Great Ocean Road.

Our work is overseen by a skills-based Committee of nine volunteer members, supported by paid management and operational staff. Committee members have skills in business, environmental management and conservation, legal, project management, engineering, local government, community development, consultation and mediation. All members live, work or have strong connections with the coast.

Our responsibilities are driven by the Crown Land Reserves Act and Coastal Management Act, along with the Victorian Coastal Strategy.

*Our vision is a coast which is loved, enjoyed and protected by all.*

The Committee manages major coastal caravan parks in Torquay and Lorne, and all the assets and facilities located along the 37 kilometres of coast it is responsible for. The caravan parks generate 80% of the Committee's annual revenue of \$4 million, which is used to fund all its coastal management responsibilities (supported by various State and Federal Government grants for specific projects and initiatives).

GORCC is focused on ensuring that environmental, economic and social benefits are maximised, whilst sustainably managing the coast and caravan parks on behalf of the community.

### **Issue 1 - Catchment Impacts on the Coast Are Insufficiently Managed**

Whilst there has been considerable improvement in recent years, catchment management and coastal management still operate to a large extent as “ships sailing by in the night”. Both areas are delivering good outcomes and building capacity and understanding in their respective field, but there remain considerable gaps between the two. Management of marine and ocean resources is further removed.

Consideration should be given to strengthening the requirement of catchment managers to consider and address the impacts of catchments on estuaries (and the coast in general). Catchment – coast funding opportunities to drive integrated outcomes are required.

Examples include:

- Estuary management – estuaries are by definition on the coast, yet the impacts are catchment driven to a large degree. Issues such as weeds, erosion, water quality and quantity, and the impacts of upstream development and activity have significant impacts on estuaries.
- Stormwater management – all drains lead to the ocean. Apart from the chronic waste of a vital and increasingly pressured natural resource – ie water – the impacts of stormwater on the coast are significant. Apart from bringing litter, nutrients and pollutants, the sheer volumes of water and poor designing of discharge points mean stormwater causes considerable coastal erosion during storm events.

The majority of efforts to manage these issues are catchment driven, with the estuary and coast poorly considered.

These issues will be exacerbated with future population growth in coastal and regional areas. Additionally, due to climate change the coast and estuaries are likely to be “hot spots” of impacts and change.

### **Issue 2 - There is a Clear Link Between Population Growth and (Potential) Environmental Impact**

The ongoing focus of the Great Ocean Road region as a major state, national and international tourism destination which is visited by millions each year will continue to place pressure on the provision of services and management of the coast which is the focal point for the majority of visitors.

The Great Ocean Road region is a focus of Victoria's sea change phenomenon and crucial to tourism in Victoria. Surf Coast Shire has a significant and growing resident population of approximately 25,000 people.

Torquay and Jan Juc are identified as major growth nodes and are set to double their total population (to 20,000) within the next 10 years. Growth in residential areas at Armstrong Creek and the new Geelong Ring Road will also bring additional people to the coastal areas managed by GORCC. Expectations and pressures around management of the coast are expected to increase.

Planning for new facilities to manage increased numbers of beach and foreshore users, whilst protecting sensitive areas, is of critical importance. Increases in operating costs and capital expenditure requirements are directly associated with servicing increasing residential and visitor numbers, and it is likely that new facilities, for example public toilets, may be required.

Additional fund will be required to maintain and upgrade existing coastal infrastructure and facilities, which are used for a range of community, recreation and tourism purposes.

Every additional user to the coast (whether resident or visitor) means more rubbish, more dogs, more cars, more wear and tear on infrastructure and more potential impact on the environment.

GORCC and local communities are investing considerable and increasing resources to address the priorities of its Environment and Land Management Plan, which aims to:

- Goal 1: Protect and conserve natural values
- Goal 2: Protect and conserve cultural values
- Goal 3: Ensure recreation and development minimises impacts on landscape and associated natural values
- Goal 4: Ensure coordinated and sustainable management of public land
- Goal 5: Increase community involvement and appreciation

Managing the coast to balance these environmental priorities is already a challenge, but one which will continue to increase in the future as people pressures on the coast increase. Planning needs to commence now to assess the nature and extent of the likely impacts, and as with climate change, commence adaptation mechanisms.

### **Issue 3 - Climate Change Impacts on the Coast are Still Largely Unknown – But We Need to Know Now**

Climate change represents a largely unknown risk to community, tourism and environmental values to coastal areas along the Great Ocean Road, though clearly coastal areas are at risk from climate change and associated sea level rises and associated severe weather events. Climate change will impact on beaches, facilities and infrastructure managed by GORCC. It will impact on natural values of the coast. Climate change may also impact on visitation levels due to temperature and related changes. Costs associated with this are unknown. Early and timely planning and actions to assess and mitigate risks will be essential.

Whilst State and Federal Governments will play a key role in providing technical, policy and resourcing support and responses to this issue, it is important that awareness and understanding of the issue, and practical adaptive responses translate into onground management and planning outcomes.

Whilst other, larger studies are underway at State and National scales, it is appropriate and necessary to undertake an assessment of the vulnerability of coastal areas along the Great Ocean Road. By doing so at a regional scale, it will provide a better understanding of the likely climate change risk profile for this nationally important community, tourism and environmental region and to commence work on adaptation strategies.

A Great Ocean Road Coast Committee project (with Federal Government funding) aims to undertake an assessment of the risks of climate change to coastal reserves and infrastructure between Torquay and Lorne, and identify adaptation strategies.

### **Issue 4 - Climate Change Provides a Strong Basis to Promote Sustainable Communities**

Environmental awareness in the community is high, however progress with sustainable communities is relatively low – notwithstanding many positive initiatives and intentions.

Climate change provides a strong basis to promote sustainable communities as it provides a clear and quantifiable link between behaviour (via greenhouse gas production), impact (via sea level rise etc) and response (via energy efficiency, renewables etc).

Clever, holistic, targeted and ongoing programs are required to extend these matters throughout the community. It will not be enough to have separate initiatives focusing on understanding the issue and addressing the impacts, these must be integrated.

In a coastal context, it is considered that the significance of climate change as an issue can and should be used to engage the community in sustainability – not just of the coast, but of the community itself.

**Issue 5 – More Needs to be Done About Governance of the Coastal Zone – But Resourcing is the Key**

A critical issue affecting the coast which must be tackled is policy alignment. Whilst there is a reasonable policy framework for coastal management at State and National levels, management of the coast is significantly influenced by other policies, including tourism, environment, climate change, roads, industry and, importantly, planning.

The real challenge for coastal management is that there are too many levers being pulled by too many organizations, and coastal management is undervalued and poorly integrated into most.

Governance solutions are needed which enable integrated, substantial, large scale outcomes to be achieved.

Inherent in this is proper resourcing. There is considerable Government funding available to support coastal management – but there is insufficient funding to drive sustainable coasts and communities. As long as this remains, we will continue to support the status quo, and struggle to achieve the breakthroughs which the coast requires now, and which climate change requires even more of.