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

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: INQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ON
COASTAL COMMUNITIES**

The Central Coastal Board (CCB) is a strategic coastal advisory body responsible to the State Minister for Environment and Climate Change, with a main focus to advise the Minister and facilitate the implementation in the region of the Victorian Coastal Strategy, Coastal Action Plans and approved coastal guidelines.

The CCB has a strong interest in the matters specified in the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry, through its role involving a:

- strategic level of operation - the Board works at a "big picture" level to try and identify and shape trends in coastal planning and management for long term sustainability;
- regional perspective - the Board has a regional view that covers many different jurisdictions and geographic areas, thus giving it the capability to coordinate strategic coastal planning at a regional scale; and
- agency coordination - because of its diverse membership (State and local Government, community and the private sector) the Board has the ability to work across administrative boundaries and provide independent advice to Government, as well as assisting with the coordination of the many agencies, interests and users on the coast.

It is also worthy to note that the Board covers a coastline of some 500 kilometres from Breamlea to Inverloch which is backed by hinterland catchments of approximately 1.6 million ha. This includes the entire metropolitan area of Melbourne and Geelong, some four million people who make over 1 million visits to beaches of Port Phillip and Western Port every year.

Climate change in this region will cause significant physical environmental effects in the coastal zone including:

- sea level rise, storm surge and inundation; and
- increased temperature, altered rainfall patterns and increased frequency of extreme weather events.

The likely consequences of these changes will affect economic activity, land use and development, recreational uses and have societal implications that are not likely to be equitably distributed.

This submission focuses on these impacts and stresses the need for a whole-of-government approach to address them. The Terms of Reference of this Inquiry are addressed below.

1. Existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum

Various Commonwealth and State legislation applies to the coast and provides a framework for coastal planning and management decisions in Victoria.

For example, all applications for use and development of coastal Crown land in Victoria are considered under the legislative framework of the *Coastal Management Act 1995*. Under the Act, the Minister in deciding whether or not to consent to use or development must have regard to the Victorian Coastal Strategy (VCS), any Coastal Action Plan applying to the land, any recommendation of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council and the purposes for which the land was reserved.

Importantly decisions relating to the use and development of private land proximate to or affecting coastal processes are a significant challenge and important to the successful implementation of the VCS.

The current draft VCS will be critical in establishing climate change as a key issue requiring immediate action and a precautionary approach to planning on the coast.

The CCB has been encouraging municipal councils to extend their planning scheme boundaries seaward 600 m and to consider and apply the VCS in the development and application of planning schemes.

While the coast is largely a public asset, both municipal planning schemes and catchment management strategies and programs provide a mechanism to deal with private landholder interests. The Regional Catchment Strategies and sub programs, for example, in the Port Phillip and Western Port Regional Catchment Investment Plan (RCIP) are identifying and addressing issues of the catchment-coast-ocean continuum.

Existing programs such as Coast Action/Coast Care are also working closely with community groups, councils and Catchment Management Authorities to deliver joint Australian and State Government integrated Coastal Zone Management outcomes, particularly in areas of national significance such as Ramsar areas.

In terms of programs, the Victorian Government is undertaking a major project, *Future Coasts*, to develop comprehensive vulnerability assessments for the whole Victorian coastline for use by land managers and councils and to inform government policy. A consistent national approach with regard to managing risk and consistent standards or decision guidelines about land subject to inundation or erosions would be of great benefit.

2. The environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources

By the year 2020 Melbourne will be home to an extra one million people. This will place additional pressure on the coastal zone for development and recreation and on the health of marine ecosystems. State and local government will need to work collaboratively to address the issues raised and pressures associated with coastal population growth. This should include enhanced sustainability in the design, development and management of projects and infrastructure to serve these increased populations. There will be increasing pressure to use and enjoy the coast, which may require more explicit coastal policy to provide enforceable guidelines to manage and protect so as to meet community expectations.

It is noted that substantial research into the probable impacts of climate change in the coastal zone is currently being conducted by Australian and State Government agencies. It would be of significant benefit to all levels of government if the details and results of this research could be shared on an ongoing basis.

In particular, there needs to be more research and monitoring of marine and estuarine ecosystems to clearly identify and protect their values from increased urbanisation and the intensification of agriculture and commercial development within the coastal hinterland. Western Port provides an example of the need for such a study as a priority due to its rapid urbanisation and productive role.

3. The impact of climate change on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise

The specific impacts of sea level rise on coastal reserves are a major concern. These reserves provide a community recreational resource, a conservation zone, and a protective buffer for adjacent infrastructure. In many cases they are under severe pressure and much effort has been expended on stabilising coastal dune and wetland systems and other reserve areas and managing access. If these areas are lost by impending sea level rise, their values can not be easily replaced particularly if most land would then be privately owned.

Much of the public environmentally-related infrastructure located in the coastal zone will also be at risk of direct or indirect damage due to sea level rise and the increased frequency of extreme weather events. Increased local government capability, tools and resources are required for the planning and design of new and more enduring public infrastructure.

Federal Government financial support and policy and engineering options will be required for dealing with major retreat and protect options on the coast that are envisaged for some regional areas such as settlements in Western Port and East Gippsland.

The essential starting point for effective climate change adaptation in the coastal zone is the development of detailed accurate estimates of projected sea level rise over time, extent of inundation and frequency of storm events. This information must guide future planning and development decisions regarding the coastal zone as part of a precautionary approach to planning on the coast.

4. Mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities

Environmentally, economically and socially sustainable coastal communities should be encouraged, promoted and supported by detailed national, state, regional and local government planning. While there are current frameworks in place to achieve this process all need to be reassessed in the light of climate change.

The Federal Government should continue to support the application of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in decision making. It should lead in the development of solutions to the climate change challenge across coastal planning and natural resource management, establish monitoring and reporting tools to assist in understanding the impacts of settlements on the environment and support emergency management planning within coastal communities.

Government should also help engage local communities through awareness and capacity building programs such as Coast Action/Coast Care and encourage a sense of stewardship with industries and communities utilising the marine and coastal environment. How people access and use the coast, how previously single use facilities can play a broader community role, how public access, use and enjoyment can be assured are challenges to be considered.

5. Governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone

Generally, existing legislative and policy frameworks will need to be 'updated' and 'made explicit and easier to implement and apply to provide an effective response to environmental impacts due to climate change in the coastal zone. There is also a need for greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of government particularly in the light of liability and duty of care.

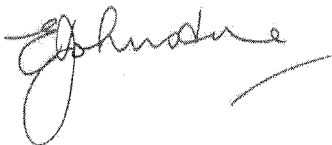
The Federal Government has a key role in the facilitation of relationships across jurisdictions, funding, research and monitoring and providing benchmarks and consistency across the country when required. Assisting in meeting the challenge of high cost and aging infrastructure on the coast is vital. It should facilitate the sharing of information on climate change. It should also be forging close relationships with the insurance industry, to ensure policy and the development of products that limit cover for landholders in risk zones are consistent.

The States and local government have a key role to factor climate change into their decision making on coastal use and development and planning systems. In particular, local government will require significant additional capability and resources to address the impacts to the coastal reserve, amenities and service infrastructure.

It is anticipated that climate change impacts will increase significantly over time which may require altered governance and institutional arrangements in the long-term.

I would like to thank the Inquiry process for the opportunity to make these comments on the many important considerations related to climate change impacts on coastal communities. Such a process can only assist in stimulating discussion and awareness of climate change issues.

Yours sincerely,



Liz Johnstone
Chairperson
Central Coastal Board