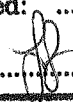


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Gippsland Coastal Board

Chairperson: Duncan Malcolm
Executive Officer: Natasha Vasey-Ellis
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Gippsland Lakes Project Officer: Chris Barry

May 30, 2008

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

Dear Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on coastal communities

The Gippsland Coastal Board appreciates the opportunity to respond to this important inquiry into the impacts of climate change on coastal communities. Our interests and work on this critical subject extend back several years and we are eager to work with federal and state authorities to prepare our coastal communities for any adverse climate change effects.

Along with our two associated Regional Coastal Boards and the Victorian Coastal Council, we are part of a unique management framework for coastal stakeholders in the state of Victoria. The Board maintains working relationships with four local councils, two catchment management authorities, various departments of the state government, water authorities, regional development groups, academic institutions, recreational associations, and numerous other community organisations around Gippsland.

Also in response to your inquiry about *governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone*, we would like to draw your attention to the Coastal Management Act 1995 and the Victorian Coastal Strategy which detail the existing policies and programs under which we operate. These documents provide a framework for and advocate for the widely-recognised principles of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Victoria.

Responding to a key Term of Reference for this inquiry, we would like to discuss *the impact of climate change on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise*. Our main points are as follows:

Options for dealing with sea level rise are particularly relevant for our part of the coast in Victoria since it is classified as highly erodible. Further, we do not have much 'freeboard' between many of our coastal structures and the sea, let alone with a sea level rise of even a modest half a metre. Towns like Lakes Entrance, Loch Sport and Seaspray which already experience the adverse impacts of flooding on a regular basis (e.g. June 2007), are likely to be inundated more often, with more devastating effects.

How do we know this? The Gippsland Coastal Board, with funding assistance from the National Heritage Trust, commissioned the CSIRO to undertake three reports on the effects of climate change on weather patterns, storm surges, and extreme sea levels in Gippsland, Victoria, between 2005-6. This study is assisting communities and coastal managers in understanding and preparing for more extreme storm events which are likely to occur along our coastline in years to come. Such studies are critically important for our future; research and information access, we argue, increases the adaptive capacity of coastal communities.

Similarly, the final report of a study entitled *Climate Change, Sea Level Rise and Coastal Subsidence along the Gippsland Coast: Implications for geomorphological features, natural values and physical assets* has recently been completed by consultants commissioned by the Board. This report tells us a great deal about particularly vulnerable coastal communities: who will be 'hit' hardest, what valuable assets (e.g. gas supply lines, caravan parks. . .) are most likely to be impacted, how primary dunes are likely to respond to storm surges, etc.

A consistent message from our regional stakeholders is that they want high-level leadership on climate change and sea-level rise, particularly with regard to planning. A climate change development control which is not discretionary for local governments to enforce may be the answer. We Gippslanders may also need to start thinking seriously about retreating, or 'moving up the hill' in some areas. Local governments will need high-level assistance and advice for dealing with some of these options. Federal authorities will have a strong leadership role to play in this uncharted territory.

The Board recently applied for a Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) review of decisions by South Gippsland Shire to grant several permits for residential housing in a farm-zoned coastal floodplain protected by a seawall. A mandatory coastal climate change overlay on that land, for instance, may have prevented the Shire from going against their own planners' recommendations not to develop that area. If a recent decision by a court in South Australia (*Walker v Minister for Planning* [2007] NSWLEC 741) is any indication, governments are going to be held to task for not accepting the adverse impacts of climate change as a threat to ecologically sustainable development. However, it is in all of our interests to build the capacity in governments for them to control development in inappropriate coastal zones.

Fear of a political backlash may prevent governments from instituting unpopular planning controls. Community understanding can therefore be a critical driver in planning and management. The Board is discussing a partnership with the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to fund several visual models of low-lying Gippsland coastal towns. Monash University researchers have already developed such a model for Lakes Entrance using photogrammetric methods to produce a highly accurate, *user-friendly*, visual tool of flood impacts. These tools, if presented effectively, can be used to educate and inform communities about potential flood risks. They may even create the political will for governments to prepare for threats to assets, health and well-being.

Such tools for the Gippsland coast would complement the digital elevation work currently being undertaken by the Future Coasts government group in Victoria and will add to our understanding of coastal vulnerabilities, not just in coastal settlements but also in biodiverse coastal ecosystems. These unpopulated coastal environments are also at risk and must not be forgotten; we in Gippsland value our pristine coastal, estuarine and marine environments which may be threatened by climate change.

We are looking forward to engaging a range of coastal stakeholders (e.g. regional coastal managers, emergency management personnel, local government practitioners and councillors) in coastal climate change adaptation issues in an interactive forum on September 11-12, 2008, in Lakes Entrance, Victoria. One of our key messages will be that we are all in this together.

We are also inviting representatives from the federal government to join us in this day and a half of key presentations and discussions—and even a scenario exercise—so that all levels of government can build a cooperative understanding of these complex issues. We would like to take this opportunity to extend an invitation to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts to attend our forum. Members and staff of the Committee are also more than welcome to attend. A formal invitation to the forum will be mailed to the Committee two months prior to the event.

As our Business Plan states, the Gippsland Coastal Board values our independence and our objectivity in providing advice to the Minister for the Environment. We have a proven ability to leverage a modest resource base to work towards improving the environmental quality of areas such as the Ramsar-listed Gippsland Lakes. We know there is still a great deal to be done in our region with respect to protection of our coastal values and we look forward to working with the federal and state governments towards this aim.

It is our sincerest hope that we will be able to equip our coastal communities with the knowledge and tools they need to plan for adverse climate change effects. However, there is a critical need to continue strategic partnerships with agencies and organisations that can help to understand those effects and work together in responding to coastal hazards.

Please contact Ms. Natasha Vasey-Ellis, Executive Officer of the Gippsland Coastal Board, with any questions or comments on our submission to this inquiry. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Duncan Malcolm', written in a cursive style.

Mr. Duncan Malcolm
Chair

