

# SOUTHERN BELLARINE COASTAL FORUM

21 JUNE 2019

**DRAFT** REPORT

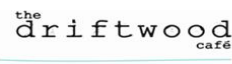


Ocean Grove Community Association Inc.

Reg. No. A0044603T

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**Our Forum Partners**



**Document History**

| Date        | Version No. | Description of Version; Reason for Distribution, Summary of Change |
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## **2 Introduction**

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### **2.1 Purpose of the Forum**

Ocean Grove Community Association organised a public forum for 21 June 2019, to hear from experts, stakeholders, members of the community, and decision-makers on the future developments in the “green wedge” between the townships of Point Lonsdale and Ocean Grove.

### **2.2 Forum Objective**

The primary objective of the Southern Bellarine Coastal Forum was to produce a draft Vision Statement for the future of this area and an understanding of the concerns, opportunities and risks of a Southern Bellarine Coastal Trail.

A further objective was to consider the potential for bringing all environmental and cultural heritage assets in the area under the jurisdiction of one state and/or local government authority tasked to control future use, public access in order to provide education and recreation opportunities. This has become even more relevant as the Victorian Government considers legislation in respect to “distinctive areas and landscapes”.

### **2.3 Background**

The south-east coast of the Bellarine Peninsula in the City of Greater Geelong between the townships of Point Lonsdale and Ocean Grove and much of the privately-owned hinterland back to Shell Road is zoned as Rural Conservation (RCZ). There are also four Public Conservation and Recreation (PCRZ) zones within the area including Lake Victoria and two smaller lakes plus the long narrow sand dune area known as Buckley Park Coastal Reserve.

Lake Victoria, the surrounding marshland and abandoned shell grit mining wetlands are adjacent to and important for Australia’s commitment to the international Ramsar Wetlands Treaty. Parks Victoria has responsibility for the lakes themselves.

Adjacent to the Lake Victoria reserve is the long narrow sand dune barrier known as Buckley Park Coastal Reserve. Most of this reserve is managed by City of Greater Geelong. Borough of Queenscliffe manages the dune section from Fellowes Road to the Lighthouse Reserve.

The coastal reserve has a volunteer friends group supports its conservation and helps to manage weeds and feral animals. Bellarine Catchment Network, Ocean Grove Coastcare volunteers and the “Green Army” have done some restoration work at the western end of the reserve. An “adventure trail” linking the coastal towns of Queenscliff, Point Lonsdale, Ocean Grove, and Barwon Heads has been on the agenda of G21 and previous departments of State Development

for a considerable time but there is a missing link between the townships of Point Lonsdale and Ocean Grove/Collendina.

Several informal walking/cycle tracks have been forged across some of the private land by walkers and mountain bikers, but public access from the land side has been discouraged since the military withdrew at the end of WWII.

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### 3 Forum Conduct

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#### 3.1 General

At the forum, the issues, challenges and opportunities ahead were identified and discussed by approximately 130 members of the local and broader community. Attendees included representatives of the Wadawurrung people, community groups, landowners, environmental groups, local and state governments and interested citizens.



**Peter Haffenden from Friends of Buckley Parks speaking to forum participants**

Ten sessions were held where speakers presented facts and opinions on the opportunities and risks that are relevant to further developments along the coastal strip and adjacent private land.

Questions were taken from the audience via smartphones and ranked by the facilitation software for priority of answers. Subsequently speakers had the opportunity to address all of the questions logged and these are published on the OGCA website.

#### 3.2 Program of Presenters

The program of presenters is shown in in the following table.

| Southern Bellarine Coastal Forum - Friday 21 June 2019 |   |  |           |
|--|---|--|-----------|
| Shell Road Pavilion - Shell Road Ocean Grove.          |   |  |           |
| Time   | Topic   | Speaker  | Duration  |
| 9:30 AM  | <b>Registration and Morning Tea -</b>   |  | <b>30</b> |
| 10:00 AM   | Welcome to Country and Introductions  | OGCA Chair and Facilitator   | 10        |
| 10:10 AM   | A Reflection on the Coast of the Southern Bellarine                             | Noel Emselle and John Wynn   | 30        |
| 10:40 AM   | The Significance of the Southern Bellarine to First Nation Culture              | Corrina Eccles, Cultural Education Coordinator, Wadawurrung Aboriginal Corporation                                 | 15        |
| 10:55 AM   | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 11:10 AM   | Settlement Strategy October 2018 – Significance to Bellarine Coastal Properties | Jessica Hurse, Acting Manager, Planning Strategy and Urban Growth, City of Greater Geelong                         | 15        |
| 11:25 AM   | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 11:40 AM   | Environmental Assets in the Buckley Park and Lake Victoria Reserves             | Peter Haffenden, Friends of Buckley Park   | 15        |
| 11:55 AM   | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 12:10 AM   | <b>LUNCH</b>  |  | <b>30</b> |
| 12:40 PM   | Beach and Sand Dune Geology and Vulnerability                                   | Assoc. Prof. David Kennedy, Melbourne University   | 15        |
| 12:55 PM   | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 1:10 PM  | Volunteer Environmental Projects of the South East Bellarine                    | Matt Crawley, Program Manager, Bellarine Catchment Network   | 15        |
| 1:25 PM  | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 1:40 PM  | Trust for Nature and Environment Protection of Private Property                 | Chris Lindorff, Regional Manager, Trust for Nature   | 15        |
| 1:55 PM  | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 2:10 PM  | Recreation and Ecotourism Benefits of Nature Reserves and Shared Trails         | Brett Ince, CEO Geelong and Bellarine Tourism Board (formally Director Tourism and Visitor Experience, Parks Vic.) | 15        |
| 2:25 PM  | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 2:40 PM  | <b>AFTERNOON TEA</b>  |  | <b>15</b> |
| 2:55 PM  | Cycling Safety on the Bellarine   | Bob Jordan, President, Bike Safe Geelong / Surfcoast   | 15        |
| 3:10 PM  | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 3:25 PM  | Return Tourists - Birds that Visit the Bellarine Peninsula Each Year            | Barry Lingham, Geelong Field Naturalists   | 15        |
| 3:40 PM  | <i>Audience Q &amp; A &amp; facilitated session</i>                             | <i>Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator</i>   | 15        |
| 3:55 PM  | Group Participation Workshop  | Martin De Los Rios, Facilitator  | 30        |
| 4:25 PM  | Closing Summary and "Where to from here?"                                       | Phil Edwards, Ocean Grove Community Association  | 5         |
| 4:30 PM  | <b>CLOSE</b>  |  |           |



### **3.3 Presenters Key Points**

The following is a summary of the key points from across all the forum speakers.

- ▶ The traditional owners of the land should be consulted about future developments and there is a need for a comprehensive assessment of the cultural assets and special places on both public and private land.
- ▶ The City of Greater Geelong Planning and Environment departments are well aware of the environmental values and issues pertaining to the private land adjacent to the reserves and have conservation overlays in place.
- ▶ Natural vegetation and sand dune stability in the Buckley Park Coastal Reserve has been preserved by its isolation so making it more accessible to the public carries serious risk of losing its rural character and impacting on native flora and fauna.
- ▶ Trust for Nature have already identified some parts of the private land as candidates for potential purchase.
- ▶ Lake Victoria forms an important habitat for many of these species. Along with Swan Bay and Mud Islands, the lake provides a critical feeding zone that is used to boost the birds' weight prior to their annual migration north.
- ▶ Safety of cyclists is greatly improved by using off-road trails or tracks.
- ▶ The sand dune system is dynamic and sand tends to move in and out from shoreline as well as along the coast to the east with prevailing weather and ocean swells.
- ▶ There are a wide range and large number of active community and "friends of" groups across the Bellarine many of which work cooperatively with the Bellarine Catchment Network on a range of projects.

### **3.4 Facilitated Sessions**

Participants were invited to make short written comments on Post-it Note slips noting any immediate thoughts about perceived opportunities and risks and post them on the notice boards provided. Almost 200 comments were recorded.

Following each speaker's presentation, the speaker was asked to answer the top three questions recorded by forum participants using their smartphones/portable devices and the "polleverywhere" software. Any other questions captured in the polleverywhere software were sent to the respective speakers after the forum by the Ocean Grove Community Association with

questions responses progressively posted under the Documents tab on the Ocean Grove Community Association website.

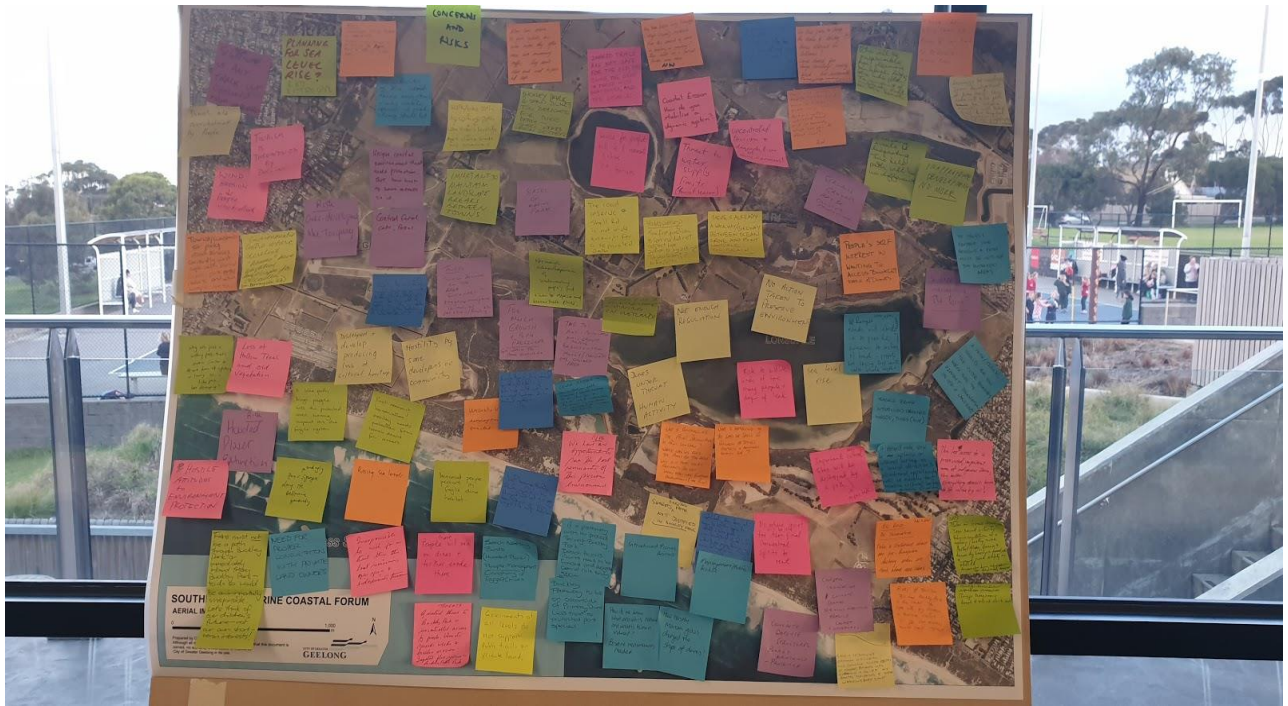
[http://www.ogca.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=160&Itemid=540&jsmallfib=1&dir=JSROOT/Southern+Bellarine+Coastal+Forum+-+Presenters+Answers](http://www.ogca.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=160&Itemid=540&jsmallfib=1&dir=JSROOT/Southern+Bellarine+Coastal+Forum+-+Presenters+Answers)

After each speaker's presentation and the top three questions the Forum Facilitators encouraged the forum participants in their table groups to discuss for about 15 minutes the subject of the presentation, in the context of paths and trails, and to collectively identify what they believed were the opportunities and risks. Forum participants were asked to record their opportunities and risks on Post-it notes and place them on the A1 map boards provided on each side of the room.

The process was repeated following each of the ten speakers.



**The post it notes begin to grow as the day progresses**



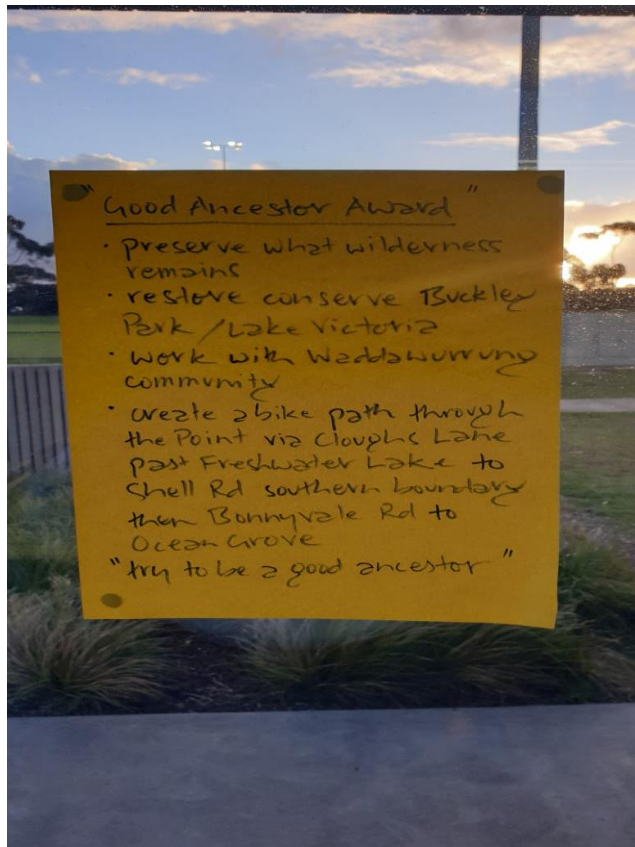
**Post it notes in full flow**

### **3.5 Participants View of the Future**

During a final 30-minute session participants were asked to think of a future news article announcing the award received for the area being considered in the forum. They were asked to name the award and write the key points of the short newspaper article and then post that on the back windows of the venue for all participants to peruse. A sample of some are shown in the following images and all are included in an attachment to this paper. Typed copies of all the articles can be found on the Ocean Grove Community Association website using the following link.

[http://www.ogca.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=160&Itemid=540&jsmallfib=1&dir=JSROOT/Southern+Bellarine+Coastal+Forum+-+Participants%27+Articles](http://www.ogca.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=160&Itemid=540&jsmallfib=1&dir=JSROOT/Southern+Bellarine+Coastal+Forum+-+Participants%27+Articles)

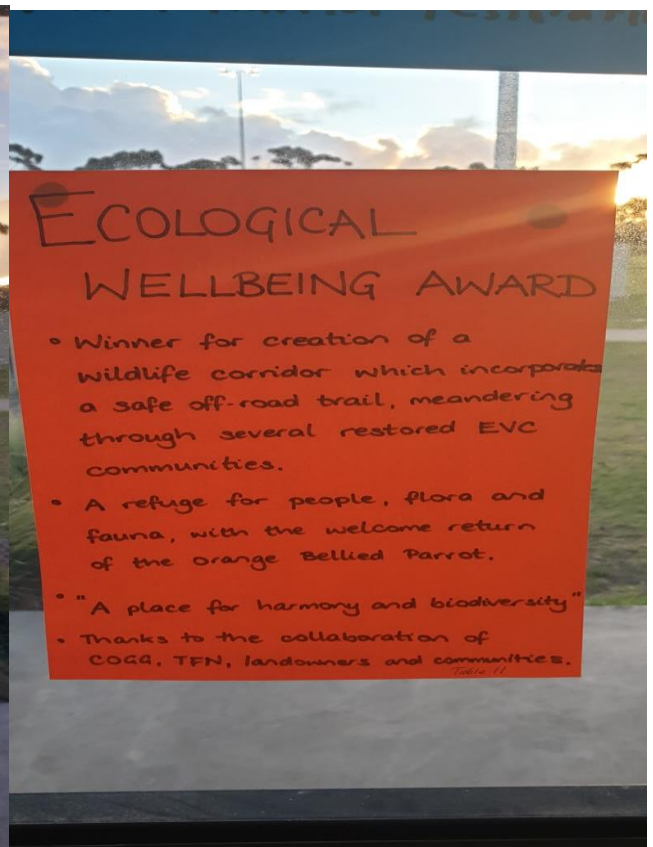




"Good Ancestor Award"

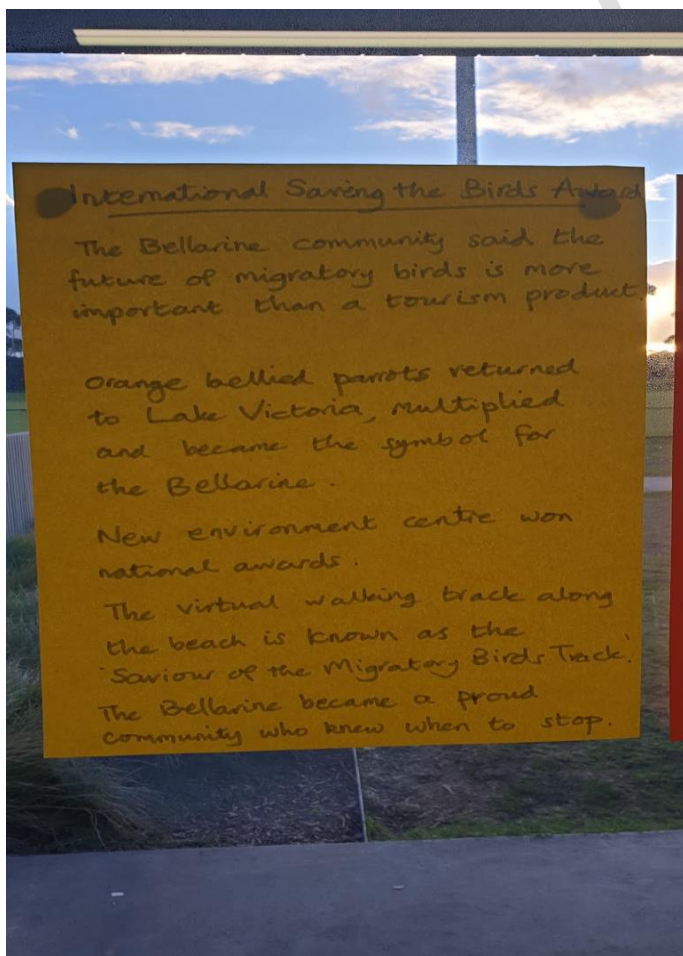
- Preserve what wilderness remains
- restore conserve Buckley Park / Lake Victoria
- Work with Wadjaburnung community
- create a bike path through the Point via Cloughs Lane past Freshwater Lake to Shell Rd southern boundary then Bonnyvale Rd to Ocean Grove

"try to be a good ancestor"



ECOLOGICAL WELLBEING AWARD

- Winner for creation of a wildlife corridor which incorporates a safe off-road trail, meandering through several restored EVC communities.
- A refuge for people, flora and fauna, with the welcome return of the orange bellied parrot.
- "A place for harmony and biodiversity"
- Thanks to the collaboration of COGA, TFN, landowners and communities.



International Saving the Birds Award

The Bellarine community said the future of migratory birds is more important than a tourism product.

orange bellied parrots returned to Lake Victoria, multiplied and became the symbol for the Bellarine.

New environment centre won national awards.

The virtual walking track along the beach is known as the 'Saviour of the Migratory Birds Track'.

The Bellarine became a proud community who knew when to stop.

at least we have some surviving indigenous station + wildlife preserved. What a relief name it. There is also a peaceful quiet peopled resting place for the ancestral its of the indigenous people. What a serious thing we did not to over-crowd over develop at least the refuge. What a great job we didn't revegetating this area.

No Go Zone Success

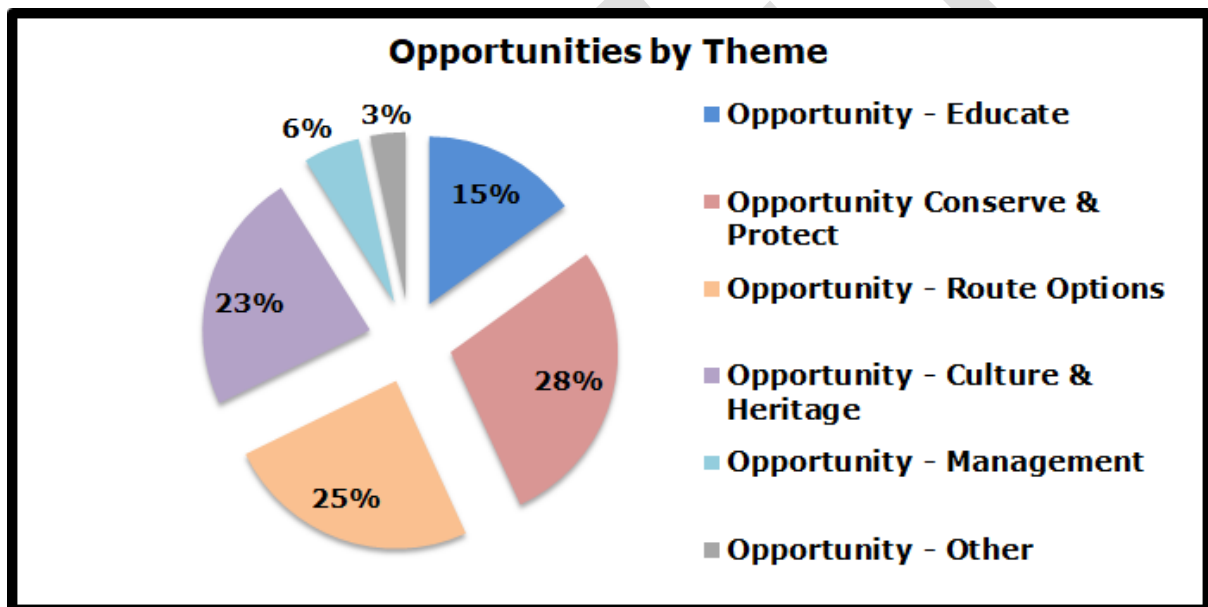
The internal award for encouraging tourists & visitors to not tread on what they love has gone to the Sailer Bellarine Coast's shared bike track / education centre that sits outside the protective zone.

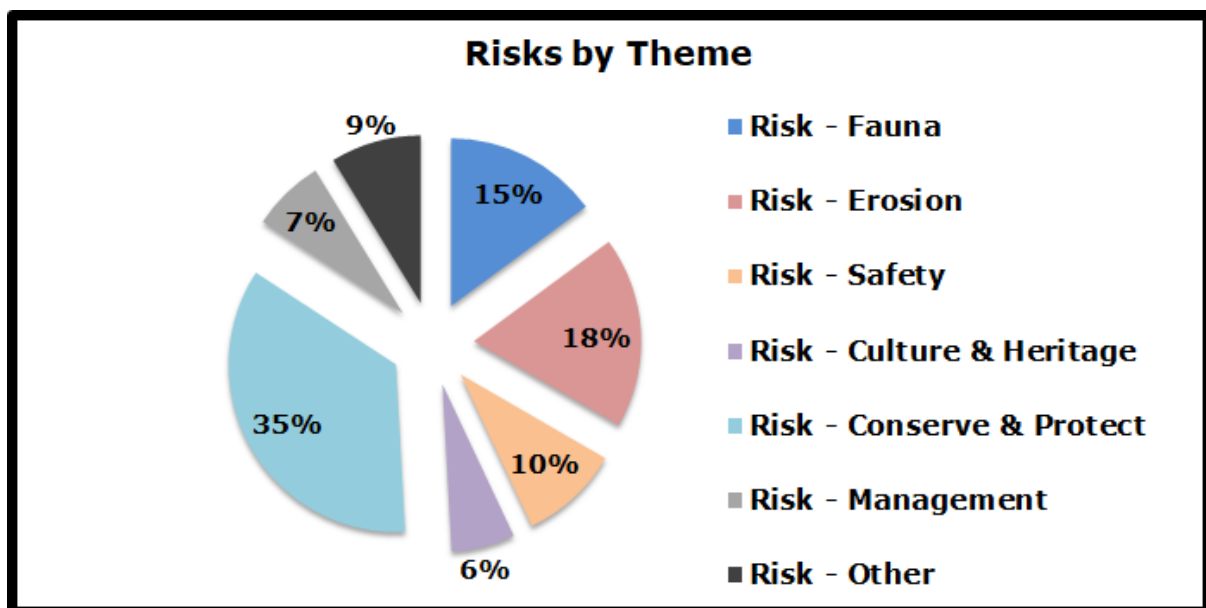
## 4 Forum Analysis

### 4.1 Identifying Themes

After the forum each one of the 196 Post-it notes was allocated a number and recorded into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets of Opportunities and Risks. Common themes were identified and each Post-it note was then allocated to a main theme and where appropriate a secondary or third theme. Where the Post-it note was not related to the forum subject for example, “Protect the Bellarine – bomb the bridge” or .... “There are many empty homes used once or twice a year only in Portarlinton and Indented Heads and St Leonards. What can you do about that?” the Post-it note was allocated to OTHER.

The themes and the relative distribution of Post-it notes to the themes is shown below.





## 4.2 Macro Observation

Interestingly at the macro level numerically the key opportunity theme and key risk theme were both “Conserve & Protect” and the major difference numerically between Opportunities and Risks themes was in the theme “Culture and Heritage” with Opportunities being numerically greater than Risks.

## 4.3 Theme Summaries – Opportunities

- ▶ **Opportunity - Conserve & Protect (28%).** The comments ranged from no access at all to achieve protection and conservation, through to limited, defined and controlled access and no dogs. There was a recurring preference for Buckley Park and the dunes segment of the overall area to be protected and preserved at all costs.
- ▶ **Opportunity - Route Options (25%).** Route options comments were generally in favour of separating bikes from pedestrians. Utilising the south side of Shell Road for bikes to connect Ocean Grove to Point Lonsdale and concurrently to the Bellarine rail trail was a frequent comment. Pedestrian trails comments were more about walking through the area not around with clearly defined, marked and signposted routes.
- ▶ **Opportunity - Culture & Heritage (23%).** Common comments strongly reflected the opportunity to engage with the Wadawurrung people in developing whatever a solution or solutions might be; to rename using Wadawurrung place names, to avoid and protect sensitive cultural areas and to incorporate appropriate educational signage.



- ▶ **Opportunity – Educate (15%).** Comments were supportive of some form educational aspect to be included with a strong education focus in indigenous heritage and environmental conservation/protection education. Comments ranged from a Cultural & Heritage (Education) Centre to interpretive signage.
- ▶ **Opportunity – Management (6%).** Comments reflected an opportunity for Trust for Nature to procure an appropriate part of the land area (probably broadly defined as the areas already designated conservation zones but which are currently vacant private land) and consolidate management under a better management model.
- ▶ **Opportunity – Other (3%).** One of the comments indicated the opportunity to involve local youth in tourism. Overall the other comments were not related to the subject of the day.

#### 4.4 Theme Summaries – Risks

- ▶ **Risks – Conserve & Protect (35%).** The key focus in the Risk Theme – Conserve and Protect was around the risks to the dunes, Buckley Park and the remnant vegetation caused by people and increased people access that would be generated by paths. Where alternatives routes were mentioned they included using Shell Road and/or any internal path to be outside of Buckley Park and the designated conservation areas and fenced to prevent access to Buckley Park and the dunes.
- ▶ **Risks – Erosion (18%).** Overall the comments focused on the risk of increased dune erosion that would be caused by people in addition to the impact of natural erosion.
- ▶ **Risks – Fauna (15%).** People and their dogs were identified at the key risk to the fauna with the hooded plover called out by many comments. However, some comments were more broadly focused on risks to all fauna, permanent and migratory. Some mentioned feral animals that are already a problem for native species (especially indigenous and migratory birds) in this area.
- ▶ **Risks – Safety (10%).** Risks identified under the safety theme were the risk to pedestrians from bikes on shared trails and the lack of safe space currently on Shell Road to support some form of shared trail.
- ▶ **Risks – Other (9%).** Comments where broad and in most cases not directly linked to the subject of the forum. For example; the number of holiday homes across the Bellarine, marine parks, the control of the Pt Lonsdale development and sewerage management at the same.

**Risks - Management (7%).** Comments generally focused on overall management, control and enforcement, maintenance and rubbish collection, and the need to engage local landowners.

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## 5 Potential Trail and Path Routes

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### 5.1 Overview

There was a consensus that pedestrian and cycling links between the coastal townships of Ocean Grove, Point Lonsdale and the Bellarine Rail Trail represent an opportunity on the fronts of, Recreation, Tourism and Education, provided that Culture and Heritage and the Conservation and Protection of the flora and fauna can be managed satisfactorily.

With these thoughts in mind we have produced an overlay to the Planning Map provided by CoGG to show potential trail routes so that these can be analysed from the standpoint of the perceived opportunities and risks. The map is at **Attachment 1** to this report.

The assumption is made that cycling should be excluded from any trail that passes through marshland, woodland, or near aquatic bird habitat. However, there is a good case for a coastal nature trail for pedestrian use only if we can find a route that allows for environmental education and appreciation of the culture of the first nation people.

We also envisage that the property known as 322 Shell Road (or at least the part zoned as Rural Conservation - Schedule 11), will become a wildlife reserve or state park, and a Cultural & Heritage Interpretive Centre will be established on Shell Road (as marked at Point L).

### 5.2 Coastal “Nature Trail” Routes

Point A at the left of the map is reached by footpaths on Ocean Throughway from the coastal shared trail link from the surf beaches and beyond to Barwon Heads. Parking is available for pedestrians at the 7W and 6W dune crossing paths near Point B.

To reach point M, we offer two options for consideration. The simplest is to follow the fence line from Point B, past the caravan park which would necessitate a security fence and perhaps CCTV to assure the caravan owners of their safety and privacy.

Alternatively, we show a dotted line for a raised walkway behind the ridge of the sand dunes. Such a feature could be built by the “top-down” method with little disturbance to habitat or erosion risk. Clearly there are areas within the private land of 322 Shell Road (or some of the denuded dune areas) that could be reinstated as off-set for any vegetation removal or damage to habitat.

From Point M to N a trail could follow routes already blazed by trespassing mountain bike riders avoiding areas of significant heritage or cultural values and offering access to address weeds and feral predators.

From Point N to Point O (where we link to Ocean Road, Point Lonsdale) we need to negotiate with the landowner about any concerns in using tracks that are already in place. Alternatively, we could follow the boundary of the Rural Conservation zone to the end of Gill Road which then links to Fellows Road, Point Lonsdale at Point P.

### **5.3 Inland “Nature Trail” Routes**

We show an existing route from Point M, through the scrubland and past the wetlands in 322 Shell Road to a hypothetical Interpretive Centre on Shell Road at Point L.

We also suggest for further investigation with the landowners, a trail around the northern bank of Lake Victoria from Point L via Points Q, R, S to T at Emily Street Point Lonsdale where Parks Victoria have a gate and signage. A path from Point S leads around the southern bank of the Lake Victoria, which is unsuitable for off-road cycles, but that does not stop them. It travels quite close to migratory bird feeding grounds and has little shady cover so if the less popular (with birds) northern bank is available it would be prudent to close the southern Parks Victoria track.

### **5.4 Shared Cycle/Pedestrian Routes**

Noting the opportunity for family cycling and school age riders, as well as cycling tourism, there was some support for providing recreational cyclists with a safer route than Shell Road.

A cycle route from Point A, B and C along Bonnyvale Road to D Banks Road/Shell Road corner (at the top of a hill) involves a 60 km/h sealed road so a solution might be a wider cycle lane or a speed reduction to 40km/h.

We have shown an alternative route from Point C to Point L by using the Public Use Zone easement (which we think is controlled by Barwon Water). From there we follow the boundaries or existing farm tracks to the Cultural and Heritage centre at Point L. This is a bit more scenic, eliminates the big hill and a busy intersection.

The verge on Shell Road is almost wide enough to make a path along the fence-line of the properties on the southern side. Noting that that would interfere with significant “biodiversity Conservation Zone” signage, we suggest acquisition of a 5-metre wide strip from each of the landowners in the 80 km/h zone and introduction of appropriate vegetation.

From Point L, Shell Road will take riders to the outskirts of The Point development area which will have trails linking to the Bellarine Rail Trail at Murray Road.

A suggested alternative raised at the forum involves the use of little-used Clowes Lane and Creswell Road shown as Points E to F and G. Again, we link to The Point development and Lakers Siding on the Bellarine Rail Trail for the ride to Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale.

## **5.5 Sensitive Construction of Paths**

Construction of any path in a sensitive area must include analysis of the how to achieve no or at least minimum impact to the environment while providing safe, enjoyable and educational experience. Path construction impact minimalisation must also be an integral part of any planning. There are many occurrences where this has been successfully achieved nationally and internationally. Some examples are shown at Attachment 2.

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## 6 Conclusions

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### 6.1 Key Outcomes

Overall the key outcomes from the forum and the analysis are:

- ▶ **Outcome 1:** Whatever plan or plans do eventuate there is a genuine desire and need to protect and conserve the heritage, culture and environment, particularly in the dunes, Buckley Park and the existing designated conservation zones.
- ▶ **Outcome 2:** The need to not only have the Wadawurrung people directly involved in the planning but to also take the opportunity to invite the Wadawurrung people to be part of the management of the area, to incorporate Wadawurrung people place names and provide a learning experience for visitors.
- ▶ **Outcome 3:** The purchase of selected parcels of currently private land by Trust for Nature to ensure the protection and provide space for a future Cultural, Heritage and Environment Education Centre. Purchase of these parcels of land will also increase the flexibility in planning of possible bike and pedestrian trail routes.
- ▶ **Outcome 4:** Bikes and Pedestrians should be separated where possible.
- ▶ **Outcome 5:** The route of any bike trail should be outside the sensitive areas with a strong preference for a bike trail to be along the southern side of Shell Road with connections to Point Lonsdale and The Bellarine Rail Trail.
- ▶ **Outcome 6:** Any pedestrian walking trail(s) within the area should designed and built to have minimum impact and should be clearly marked, signed and appropriately fenced to ensure protection of the environmental, cultural and heritage aspects of the area while still achieving a good user experience. Dogs should not be allowed in the area.
- ▶ **Outcome 7:** Tourism needs to be carefully managed and controlled to prevent overuse but still contribute to the positive education experience of the environment and the cultural and heritage aspects of the area.
- ▶ **Outcome 8:** A draft Vision Statement



Part of the Forum objective was to develop a draft Vision Statement. The following draft was developed from the analysis of the forum.

**“The Southern Bellarine Coastal Project will deliver a sustainable conservation and heritage driven protected environmental area that provides community education and is supported by sensitively placed and well managed walking paths and bike trails that connect Ocean Grove and Point Lonsdale.”**

## **8 Next Steps**

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### **8.1 Circulating a Draft Forum Report**

The Ocean Grove Community Association will send this draft document as a working draft to the various stakeholders for comment and feedback.

### **8.2 Feedback & Comment Timeframe**

Comments and Feedback will be open until **22 Sep 2019**.

### **8.3 Distribution**

Distribution of the Draft Forum Report will include:

- ▶ All Forum Presenters.
- ▶ All Forum attendees who provided a valid email address through the Forum *eventbrite* registration process.
- ▶ All Forum sponsor groups.
- ▶ Bellarine Ward Councilors.
- ▶ Lisa Neville's office.
- ▶ CoGG Shared Trails Master Plan development team.
- ▶ DEWLP - The Bellarine Distinctive Area and Landscapes project team.
- ▶ All Ocean Grove Community Association members.

### **8.4 Final Report**

Ocean Grove Community Association will seek to produce and distribute a final report by no later than **22 October 2019** to all stakeholders and attendees and concurrently identify "a where to from here" plan.

### **8.5 How to Provide Comments and Feedback on the Draft Report.**

Stakeholders are asked to provide feedback or comments in writing and wherever possible reference the paragraph number(s) in this report that they are referring to or making comment on to assist the report authors in understanding.

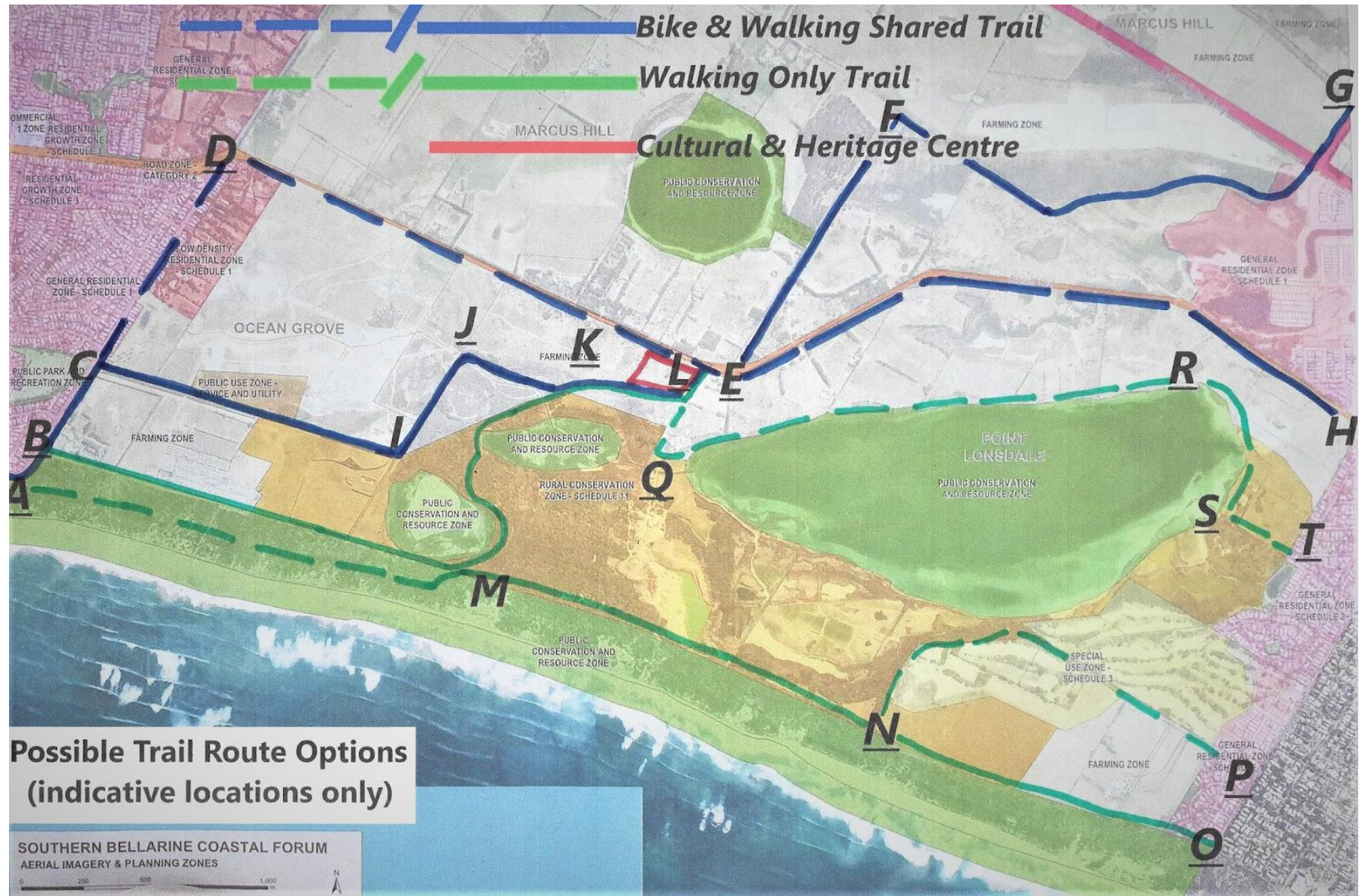
Feedback and comments should be by email to: [ogcommunityassn@gmail.com](mailto:ogcommunityassn@gmail.com) by no later than **22 September 2019**.

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Map of Potential Trail and Path Options
2. Examples of pedestrian path constructions in sensitive areas

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Map of Potential Trail and Path Options





Examples of pedestrian path constructions in sensitive areas







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