



ASSOCIATION OF BAYSIDE MUNICIPALITIES

ABM Submission to the Department of Sustainability and Environment Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change: Consultation Paper

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Bayside Municipalities (ABM) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the State Government's Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change: Consultation Paper.

The Association of Bayside Municipalities (ABM) is an association which represents the ten councils that have frontage to Port Phillip Bay and also represents a population of greater than one million. The Association is committed to enhancing local government's effectiveness in the sustainable management of the Port Phillip Bay environment.

The ABM is generally supportive of the principles and directions outlined in the Consultation Paper. Key issues for the Association involve the promotion and preservation of urban biodiversity, management of remnant vegetation at coastal edges, climate change mitigation and adaptation responses, streamlining governance of institutional agencies and recognition and regional management of the flow on effects of inland practices on marine environments.

KEY POLICY QUESTION – WHAT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC VALUES PROVIDED BY HEALTHY LAND AND BIODIVERSITY?

Member councils of the ABM are Committees of Management for a substantial proportion of the foreshore around Port Phillip Bay including custodians of public infrastructure associated with the foreshore and as such carry relevant responsibilities and public accountabilities for the amenity, recreational and natural values of the Bay.

The environmental, social and economic values a healthy bay provides to surrounding communities are invaluable and therefore of great importance to the 10 councils which represent these communities. With increasing pressure on estuarine and marine environments due to population increases and development in coastal areas, the ongoing health of the bay is an issue the ABM continues to address to ensure the bay is a diverse environment which in turn supports a thriving community.

KEY POLICY QUESTION – WHAT IMPACTS WILL CLIMATE CHANGE HAVE ON THESE VALUES?

Climate change is predicted to have a great deal of impact on the environmental, social and economic values which Port Phillip Bay provides, with research indicating many of the impacts of climate change will primarily affect coastal areas. Predicted impacts of sea level rise and storm surges will have adverse effects on coastal settlements and infrastructure, the functioning of wetlands and the fragmentation of coastal habitats, whilst ocean warming and increasing water salinity due to evaporation will affect the distribution and abundance of many marine species. The ABM envisages

issues arising from climate change principally affecting foreshore management for member councils. Issues for member councils resulting from the effects of climate change may include managing foredune creation and cliff retreat, beach preservation, coastal habitat fragmentation and storm water increases into the bay.

The ABM is keen to explore adaptation measures to the predicted impacts of climate change on coastal environments and communities. The ABM calls on the State Government to provide support to councils to identify potential climate based impacts at the local scale and options for adaptation and risk planning, particularly localised to the Port Phillip Bay region.

KEY POLICY QUESTION – WHAT ARE THE OTHER THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES?

A large proportion of Melbourne's remnant vegetation is found on the coastal edges of Port Phillip Bay and the ABM believes this vegetation plays a very important role in sustaining biodiversity within the urban environment, particularly in the context of urban population growth and infill development pressures.

The protection of the foreshore vegetation along the Victorian coastline and particularly surrounding Port Phillip Bay is a major issue for councils. This ecologically and aesthetically significant vegetation has been the subject of repeated vandalism in recent years. Vandalism can be subtle, such as the removal of branches, or highly destructive, e.g. the poisoning or felling of trees.

Councils have taken various approaches to the issue including signage in areas where the vandalism has occurred and the offer of rewards for information leading to a prosecution. To date these strategies have had little success. DSE acknowledges that vegetation vandalism is a problem; however, limited work has been done on a region by region basis to address the issue. In recent times the issue has received coverage in the local and metropolitan media.

Councils are keen to communicate more effectively with the community, particularly residents who live close to the foreshore, to raise awareness of the value and role of the vegetation. The ABM believes the intrinsic value of such biodiversity in the urban landscape can be used as an educational resource to help communities understand the important role that biodiversity plays in ecosystem functioning and land health. Furthermore, coastal vegetation is not only vulnerable due to vandalism, but also because of increased urban settlement to the coast. In order to protect a representative range of Ecological Vegetation Classes across Victoria, coastal vegetation must be protected.

The ABM understands the health of the bay is influenced by the quality of water which flows into the bay and that biodiversity upstream plays a vital role in sustaining healthy waterways. The ABM seeks that the State Government identify within the White Paper a whole-of-catchment approach and integrated strategies to address the issue of poor water quality input into the bay.

Marine pests are significantly affecting the biodiversity of native marine species and fisheries within the bay. It is alarming to know that the fish population within the bay has reduced by 40% over the past five years due to the presence of the Northern Pacific Seastar. The ABM seeks that the Whitepaper addresses marine pest management as a threat to marine biodiversity and associated values of the bay and Victoria's broader marine environment.

KEY POLICY QUESTION – WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT AND HOW CAN WE MAXIMISE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR JOINT EFFORT?

Regional Catchment Strategies (RCS) set by Catchment Management Authorities (CMA) play an important role in setting the priorities for natural resource management at a local scale. However, the ABM asks that a more coordinated approach to gaining information from municipal councils be involved in the development of RCS's, as councils are the responsible body for implementing and governing a range of natural resource management programs and policies and should be consulted on such issues. Additionally, the ABM recognises natural resource management for member councils is further complicated by the existence of various water authorities and CMA's interfacing with councils, for instance Melbourne Water and the Port Phillip/Western Port CMA.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ABM is broadly supportive of the aims and directions outlined in the Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change: Consultation Paper. The Association is keen to work closely with the State Government in the development of the White Paper for improved land and marine health in Victoria.

While this submission highlights a number of common issues for ABM members, the Association acknowledges the intended White Paper will affect each member council differently, and that individual members will pursue their local issues independently.

Should you require further information on any issues raised in the submission please contact Simone, ABM Coordinator, phone 9667 5582, sstuckey@mav.asn.au.