

To: **The Secretary,**
Walkerville Foreshore Committee,
(Walkerville Erosion Study)
PO Box 99, FOSTER 3960.

29 March 2006

Dear WFSC,

Re: Walkerville Coastal Erosion Study

My family have been regular visitors to Walkerville for nearly fifty years.

During this time we have enjoyed recreation on the beach and bay and in the bush and heath land; walking, swimming, fishing (from rocks and small boats) sailing, rowing and surfing. Mine is only one of many families who have loved Walkerville for 3, 4 or 5 generations and are committed to its protection for all the larger community of present and future generations who may be lucky enough to enjoy it. Some of these families are represented on the WFSC and we all appreciate the enormous voluntary effort that WFSC members make.

For a number of years in the early 1990s, I lived at Walkerville and joined other dedicated locals and visitors in extensive voluntary weed eradication and revegetation works. WFSC supported Friends of Walkerville in organising this and other conservation work that has led to a real improvement of the foreshore environment and an effective insurance against coastal erosion. Particular effort was put into revegetating the primary dune at North Walkerville and the success of this effort is now evident in the flourishing undergrowth and the stands of shea-oak and coastal banksias that have self seeded from the remnant and replanted stock.

Having been involved in the consultation process for the Walkerville Foreshore management plan and having read the original study and recommendations, I was surprised to hear that the WFSC had commissioned another study. It was with considerable interest that I read the long awaited document and I am very concerned by some of the astounding proposals that have emerged within it.

The community of care for Walkerville

Long before Alison Lester's books touched the hearts of the generation who are children and young adults now, the Magic Beach was appreciated. Published local histories available from the Walkerville kiosk (eg Mabel Sharrock's Recollections of Waratah and the Ten Mile) show that this tradition of respect and care for the natural environment by visitors and settlers of European origin is at least one century old. The presence of archeologically significant middens attests to human use and care of the country we know of as Walkerville for thousands of years.

The community of people who care for the natural values of Walkerville today is large and active but generally prefers not to draw attention to itself. Some have been day visitors, others have camped on the WFSC camping grounds, some stay in holiday houses as guests, tenants or owners and some are permanent local residents. Many are elderly. Regardless of our social background, or our historical and physical relationship to this land and water, we are bound by a strong spiritual connection to it and by an awareness of the unique natural beauty of Walkerville and of the fragility of that beauty. An enormous fund of knowledge - of the bay, the fisheries, the flora and fauna and the recent unwritten human history of Walkerville - continues to be passed down through the generations and between families. This community of care has always felt the responsibility to protect those natural values - for future generations and for all.

Consultation

The study appears to have been authored without community consultation and seems to be aimed at examining the development of a range of constructions that are profoundly at odds with all the relevant guidelines including the Walkerville Management Plan and Victorian Coastal Management plans. Furthermore these grandiose 'options' are

completely out of character to this small, fragile coastal parkland area where many beach goers and boating people enjoy the tranquility and natural beauty of a largely unspoilt beach. These are amongst the main attractions for many boaters and boating fishing people who enjoy launching and retrieving their small boats from the natural beach launching facility.

Options 1, 2, 4 & 5

Preservation of Natural values or gambling with the future?

The study incidentally documents the damage human activities and constructions have done in the past and the enormous improvements that have been made to the foreshore through revegetation work, largely carried out by volunteers over the past two decades. The car park proposed in Option 3a and all the other 'Options' fly in the face of this effort and concern for natural values that is shared by most of people who live at or visit Walkerville.

Whilst the study includes some extensive historical documentation and some theory about the effect of the proposals upon coastal erosion, it does not constitute an environmental impact statement. Whilst such would be required, any entertainment of proposals 1,2,4&5 would be based upon educated speculation - a gamble. Coastal erosion study is not an exact science and with global warming it is even less so. The potential destruction of Walkerville's foreshore through erosion caused by unsuccessful calculations of impact could be disastrous and irreversible. The ultimate result could be an expensive white elephant on a foreshore entirely closed to vehicular traffic.

Unnecessary duplication of facilities

Options 1,2,4&5 unnecessarily replicate under-utilised large boat launching facilities at Port Welshpool and Toora. The Gippsland Boating Coastal Action Plan directs boat traffic to these ports.

Social effects: these options are exclusivist and threaten access and amenity to many users

The study lacks an evaluation of the demographic impact of the various options: ie; who uses Walkerville, for what, and how will they be effected? It is also based on a false assumption about boat-users at Walkerville and their needs.

Options 1,2,4&5 are anti-small-boating.

Many of us derive great pleasure from launching small craft directly from the beach and have done for decades. That this is a challenge, at times, is part of that pleasure. Since the current study was released I have spoken to many people who fish from boats regularly at Walkerville who are opposed to any structural expansion of parking and launching facilities there. A few points from the perspective of a small boat user -

- cost of these options would make tolling for cost-recovery inevitable
- even if capital funding were found at the outset, user-pays would ultimately apply
- tolls costs will reduce access to, or entirely exclude, some small boat users
- even the massive land reclamations proposed will not meet the parking demand such a development will generate
- the level of large boat activity and the attendant parking congestion could turn many local small boat users away at peak times
- by making launching so easy, inexperienced small boat users are likely to enter the bay in conditions that place them in peril

These options will lead to closure of South Walkerville ramp

Options 1,2,4 and 5 will lead to congestion and closure of South Walkerville boat ramp because:

- tolls at North will cause more launching at South Walkerville
- it would not be viable to apply tolls at both beaches

- Swimmers and other beach users will also be effectively forced from North to South Walkerville at peak times
- even without congestion at South, it would need to be closed in order to maximise cost-recovery for the boating facility at North

Must everyone who uses a boat be condemned to negotiating concrete structures, gates and tolls every where and every time they go to sea?

If the same logic were applied to the camping and caravan park, the WFSC would be expected to consider replacing that facility with motel or hotel style accommodation to the exclusion of campers.

Other users of the foreshore effected

Camping, caravanning and beach-launching of boats are integral, inexpensive recreational activities that Walkerville continues to do an excellent job at providing opportunities for.

Walking is one of the main and most popular activities at Walkerville. Proposals 1,2,4&5 all brutally destroy a section of beach, forcing walkers onto roadways or other urban constructions in order to make their way North to South - all for the convenience of some boaters.

Other groups of users of the North Walkerville beach include the guests at Gairs' modest and secluded motel. All of these options would have a detrimental effect on their enjoyment and some of the proposals have the potential to destroy it altogether.

Walkerville has no problem reaching its peak-time capacity to cater for visitors who are happy to use the place as it is. Many, if not most of these people would consider options 1,2,4 & 5 a disaster for the area.

The WFC and other authorities need to understand that a vociferous group who wish to launch large boats with ease in all weather conditions do not represent the view of all who fish and boat at Walkerville, let alone those who enjoy walking and playing on this wonderful beach. To my knowledge, no promise has been made to these people that North Walkerville was to become a marina, on the contrary it is clearly part of a natural heritage area and a highly valued, much enjoyed, coastal park.

Re the WFSC's preferred Option 3a:

The ramp in 3a

The ramp in 3a - with minimum engineering on the beach - is an acceptable option, provided it involves no paving beyond the existing ramp structure area.

Provision for expanded parking in Option 3a

The proposed expanded parking area in 3a is not acceptable because it would:

- necessitate further dumping of rock on the beach & dune
- impinge on the beach
- force walkers onto the road even at moderate tides
- impinge dramatically the entire coastal landscape of Walkerville and the bay.
- increase the traffic pressure on the beach and boat ramp

Any new or upgraded parking facility at North Walkerville would need to be taken off the dune and screened with a proper re-vegetation plan. This may not be possible without damage and potential erosion problems on the inland side of the road.

There is simply a lack of space for any further built development at Walkerville. The study acknowledges this implicitly by exploring - in all its options - drastic land-reclamation. The lesson is that there will never be 'enough' parking. Any work beyond a minor upgrade of facilities will quickly lead to more demand and a worsening of the problem. Peak demand does need to be managed however.

The fruits of neglect

For years now, there has been an urgent need for proper signage, regulation and supervision of vehicles use on the beach at Walkerville. This is an important safety issue that the WFSC committed to attend to but have neglected, despite the matter having been raised and acknowledged as a matter of urgency for at least 10 years.

Many years ago there were parking officers or rangers on patrol at peak times. It is of great discredit to the authorities concerned that, in recent years, vehicle traffic on the beach has gone unchecked - even at peak times. The responsible authorities should count themselves lucky that this hasn't lead to a fatality - yet. In this regard, it is unlikely that any other beach in Victoria is treated with greater neglect.

Such official neglect must surely have contributed to the division and decline in morale of the Walkerville community. People are confused. Confused by a lack of clarity or commitment from the WFSC about what is acceptable and what is unacceptable behaviour. Confused about what it is reasonable to expect. Whilst improvements have been made elsewhere at Walkerville this neglected area looks like a construction site - so it's no wonder construction plans have begun to be laid. It is no wonder there are arguments. People who use a neglected area feel neglected. Some boaters, rightly, feel neglected. Some beach goers - especially those with small children who stay at or near the motel also, rightly, feel neglected. Drivers who see no regulating signage and observe other cars taking the short-cut to South feel neglected if they don't proceed and neglected when they are abused by parents on the beach. It is no wonder that people clash and begin not to care or only to care with anger.

Safety & Management: Urgent regulation, signage and supervision issues

- 1- Signage that clearly states the regulations regarding vehicle use on the beach is urgently required. The dangers of bad weather launching and those posed by erosion of the bluff from above (something the authors of the study/options paper seem to be unaware of) should also be mentioned on signage. Signs need to be unavoidable and clear but discrete. The Gippsland Boating Coastal Action Plan and the Victorian Coastal Strategy 2000 called for this, years ago. This is an urgent priority for the WFSC.
- 2- Enforcement Once signs are in place enforcement needs to begin promptly. A few random checks with fines issued will let people know quickly that the beach at Walkerville is no longer neglected, nor is it to continue to be treated as a public highway and car park.
- 3- Supervision At peak times a safety-officer/parking warden needs to be present to supervise North & South beaches, with power to issue fines and refuse inappropriate access or close the ramp in bad weather.
- 4- Consideration may also need to be given to a limit on the size of boats that can be launched at Walkerville North.
- 5- Any boat ramp work needs to be planned in accord with the forthcoming Marine Safety Vic Walkerville Boating Safety Study.

Management strategies such as these, together with the physical limitations of the small site that is Walkerville are the only limits and the inevitable limits that will effectively contain the demand on access to the bay at Walkerville.

Re-establishing respect for Walkerville's foreshore

Some of the proposals in the study demonstrate an outright disregard for the natural values of the precious and fragile Walkerville foreshore. This has caused enormous stress and worry, especially among the many elderly people in our community who have dedicated countless hours and much consideration over decades to the care of this area. For some of these people, the idea that options 1,2,4 &5 even made it onto paper must feel like a slap in the

face. Each of those options would do more irreversible harm to Walkerville than any infestation of cape ivy or natural erosion of the primary dune that we've dealt with in the past.

For sometime, some members of the community have expressed concern about the unsightliness of the boat ramp and parking area at Walkerville North. I've taken the position in the past that the damage was done long ago with the road and dumping of rock and that there are more pressing matters than beautification. I now understand, however, that this part of the foreshore has been effectively neglected and that this neglect has led to an attitude of contempt towards the Walkerville foreshore that has made it possible for consideration to be given to options such as 1,2,4&5.

It is now incumbent on the WFSC and other authorities, to reinstate some dignity and respect to this part of the coast. There are two aspects to this.

1. Care.

At the very least, the safety issues listed above need to be addressed.

This will include a tidy-up with clear, neat signage and the presence of staff at peak times. These inexpensive signs of care will lift the moral of all concerned immediately.

2. Rectification of North Walkerville dune

Some sensitive rectification plans are required to maintain erosion protection, revegetate and improve the appearance of the boat ramp-hall area.

One option would be to close the boat ramp altogether.

I think that would be a great shame, since so many of us continue to enjoy quietly launching boats of this beautiful beach and happily embrace both the limitations and the benefits of having that privilege.

I trust that the Committee will make an informed decision on this important matter and am happy to assist in any way I can.

Yours Sincerely,

John Cumming.