

Somers Residents Association Incorporated (“SRA”) is an incorporated, not-for-profit, voluntary organisation, consisting of approximately 350 households and growing, as our area becomes increasingly attractive to those moving from more urban areas.

Located on Westernport Bay, Somers is off the main road and enjoys a quiet set of beaches, incredible marine life and precious coastal foreshore reserves.

The purposes of the SRA as set out in our Rules are “to preserve the character and amenity of the coastal village of Somers and to support proposals to enhance that character. To investigate concerns of residents about matters which may affect their safety, well-being or lifestyles. To support proposals toward preservation of the natural environment. To examine actions of Authorities, organisations or companies affecting residents. To investigate proposals by Local, State or Federal Governments affecting Somers. To represent all Somers residents in community matters.”

Many of our members and others in our community are dedicated to foreshore management, and to preserving and enhancing our marine and coastal environment.

We have reviewed the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning’s (*DELWP*) **Draft Marine and Coastal Strategy**, and welcome in particular the actions around integration and co-ordination with communities, as well as building the skills and capability of communities, managers and governments.

The following paragraphs contain our key observations from our first review of the draft Strategy, however we welcome the opportunity to be involved in all aspects more generally where there is any effect on our environment and community.

Dedicated Strategy and Funding for Westernport Bay

Somers Foreshore is one of the land/sea interfaces of Westernport Bay, recognised internationally for its importance to migratory birds as a Ramsar-listed wetland and for its global ecological significance as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Whilst the draft Strategy proposes the development of a Port Phillip Bay Fund grant program to fund priority actions of the Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan 2017-2027, no such environmental management plan or implementation funding is proposed for Westernport Bay.

We propose the Strategy should include the development of an environmental management plan, building on existing literature such as DELWP’s existing Westernport Ramsar Site Management Plan 2017, to implement priority conservation and management actions.

Somers Foreshore Reserve

The Somers Foreshore Reserve and adjacent areas are presently managed by a patchwork quilt of responsible authorities, including DELWP, Parks Victoria and the Mornington Peninsula Shire. Various volunteer community groups are also involved as they carry out authorised works on the Reserve.

All organisations are under-resourced to control invasive species in the Foreshore Reserve, which for decades has been overtaken by weeds, including several Weeds of National Significance. Weed control was identified as one of the aims of the Somers Foreshore Reserve Coastal Management Plan, published by DELWP in 2014, and remains a significant concern today.

We propose that management of the Somers Foreshore Reserve be properly funded through Parks Victoria or DELWP to enable urgent conservation activities, including weed control. We encourage coordination of such activities with all stakeholders, including volunteer community groups - many of which are auspiced under our organisation, the SRA.

Port of Hastings

As the crow flies, Somers is situated just 5km from the Port of Hastings.

The future use of the Port of Hastings, including shipping movements and associated dredging and construction will have a significant impact on Westernport Bay, including neighbouring Somers Beach.

As part of the Victorian Ports Strategy due to be finalised next year, we request an identification of the future use of the Port of Hastings to inform the community of proposed activities in the coming decades.

Conclusion

We would be delighted to be involved in the further development of DELWP's Draft Marine and Coastal Strategy, to ensure a healthy and resilient marine and coastal environment for our community.

Please keep us informed of the Strategy's development, and contact us for feedback on any initiatives affecting our area.

Thank you.