



# Belfast Coastal Reserve Draft Management Plan

Engagement Summary Report

MAY 2018

**ah!** Andrew  
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**KISMET  
FORWARD**  
FACILITATING BETTER DECISIONS

## Privacy

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For the purpose of program delivery, and on behalf of our clients, we collect personal information from individuals, such as e-mail address, contact details, demographic data and project feedback to enable us to facilitate participation.

We follow a strict procedure for the collection, use, disclosure, storage and destruction of personal information. Any information we collect is stored securely for the duration of the consultation and reporting stages of a project. Any information we collect is only stored for the duration of the project and only disclosed to our client or the project team.

## Definitions

### Community

A very broad term used to define groups of people. A community may be a geographic location, a community of similar interests such as an industry or sporting club, or identity such as culture or generation.

### Stakeholders

'Stakeholder' refers to key organisations or individuals or organisations who have an interest in the project. Examples include MPs, government departments, industry, peak lobby and interest groups.

### Engagement

'Engagement' refers to a planned process involving two-way dialogue with the specific purpose of working with communities and stakeholders to encourage discussion or active involvement to inform a project decision.

### Participant

'Participant' refers to any community member, stakeholder or organisation that participated in the engagement process by providing feedback through any of the engagement tools and techniques provided.

## Before reading this report

Several factors influenced the engagement process and analysis of the findings. They are highlighted below and should be considered in reading this report.

- The information in this report is based on qualitative research and so does not necessarily reflect the views of a statistically representative sample of community.
- The information and views presented within this report are a summary of the opinions, perceptions and feedback we heard across all engagement activities. As such, some information included in this report may be factually inaccurate or unfeasible.
- This report summarises large volumes of information. While every effort is made to include the full breadth of views and advice provided, this report does not preclude the project team from considering the original submissions and feedback in the revision of the plan.
- Due to the variety of formats and events undertaken, not all participant demographic details were captured at all events or through all channels.
- A number of engagement, communication and promotional activities were undertaken by local community groups and organisations outside of the formal engagement processes for this project. These included online petitions, groups, and campaigning. For equity, accuracy and consistency, the focus of this report is to summarise feedback gathered through the formal engagement approach.

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# 1. Introduction

## Report purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide an independent summary of the activities and findings of the community and stakeholder engagement process undertaken to help Parks Victoria finalise the Management Plan for the Belfast Coastal Reserve.**

**This report explores the views, values, ideas and aspirations as provided by community members and stakeholders throughout the process. In some cases, paraphrased comments or quotes are used to illustrate sentiment commonly expressed.**

## Project background

The Belfast Coastal Reserve (the reserve) is a fragile strip of land including beach, wetland and lough environments.

Escalation of commercial horse training activity along the reserve has led to concerns about public safety, impacts on cultural heritage, ecosystems, and native plants and animals.

This unique piece of land represents one of a small handful of parks and reserves in the local area and is highly valued by many community members, groups and users.

Conflicting uses and strong cultural and environmental values of the land have led to the development of a draft management plan (the draft plan) – to articulate and protect the values of the reserve for locals and visitors both now, and into the future.

Building on previous engagement with internal and external stakeholders and the general community, Parks Victoria developed a draft plan and engaged **Kismet Forward** and **Andrew Howard Consulting** to assist the project team in the delivery of, and reporting on, community consultation and the finalisation of the draft plan.

## Project team

The project team comprised members of both Parks Victoria's local and Melbourne-based staff, staff from the local and regional offices of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), and independent consultants from Andrew Howard Consulting, Kismet Forward and Intrinsic Scope.

This team was guided by a Project Steering Committee comprising representatives of Moyne Shire Council, Warrnambool City Council, the Office of Racing, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.



# Process and participant summary

## 2. Overview of methodology

### Engagement approach

This fourth and final phase of engagement built on previous consultation with key stakeholder groups and community. Running between January and March 2018, the purpose of the engagement process was to connect with community members, groups and stakeholders to share the draft plan, to seek feedback and identify levels of support. The phases of engagement are shown in the table below.

Phase	Description
1. Jan – Feb 2017	<b>Informing the engagement process</b> Parks Victoria and DELWP conducted a range of interviews with key stakeholders, to better understand some of the key issues and opportunities for engagement with the broader community.
2. Mar – Jun 2017	<b>Hearing all the voices</b> Using a mix of online engagement, meetings, and public events, Parks Victoria and DELWP listened to community and stakeholders to capture a wide range of perspectives.
3. Sep 2017	<b>Understanding the issues</b> Further engagement with stakeholder groups to unpack complex issues and reach agreements, understanding and identify acceptable compromises.
4. Jan – Mar 2018	<b>Reaching solutions</b> Online and public community and stakeholder engagement to identify levels of support for the draft management plan and its proposed approach.

This phase of engagement sought to reengage with both participants from previous phase of engagement, as well as those new to the project. Detail on the tools and timings used to achieve this are included on the following page.

### Analysis and reporting approach

Feedback on the draft plan was received through a variety of channels – in person, handwritten notes, emails, letters, online surveys, handwritten surveys, electronic submissions, and online quick poll results.

This feedback was collected in a central database for analysis, where the type of feedback, channel, demographic data (gender, age, postcode, use of the reserve) was consolidated.

Comments and feedback were categorised for qualitative analysis, based on levels of support (either stated or implied) and common themes.

Reporting on community feedback for this project includes:

- Overall levels of support amongst participants for the topic areas within the plan,
- The total number of comments and short narrative about the key types of responses, and
- A summary table highlighting the broad range of suggestions on particular issues within that topic area.

### Engagement objectives

For this final phase of engagement, the following objectives were sought by the project team:

#### Strengthening Relationships

- Building trust between stakeholder groups and the project team.
- Community and stakeholder groups feeling part of the process and that their views have been heard.

#### Building Capacity

- Generating better community and stakeholder understanding of the management planning process and scope.
- Building better understanding of the diversity of views and opinions present in the community.

#### Informing Decisions

- Collecting community and stakeholder group feedback to inform the final plan.

## Engagement tools and timings

The following table describes the tools used between 17 January 2018 (when the draft plan was released) and 16 March 2018 (when the consultation period closed) together with dates and times for community events, and participation numbers where relevant.

Tool description	Participation			
<p><b>Project website (17 Jan – 16 Mar 2018)</b></p> <p>A 'Belfast Coastal Reserve Draft Management Plan' website was developed through <a href="http://www.engage.vic.gov.au">www.engage.vic.gov.au</a> – a purpose-built online engagement platform for Victorian Government departments and agencies. The website included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project information, contact information, engagement times and locations</li> <li>• Accessible copies of the draft plan, summary document and submission template</li> <li>• A quick poll, online survey and submission upload tool</li> </ul>	5,113 page visits 280 Quick Poll votes 401 Online surveys 226 file uploads			
<p><b>Media, promotions and advertising (17 Jan – 16 Mar 2018)</b></p> <p>Media releases and advertising to local news were staggered across the 9-week engagement period, to try to prevent reporting only at the beginning and end of the process. Engagement locations and times were also advertised in local media. Promotional information was placed on the Parks Victoria website, and Facebook page. Stakeholder groups, local Councils and project team organisations were also encouraged to promote the opportunity through their digital channels.</p>	N/A			
<p><b>Postcards and printed plans (17 Jan – 16 Mar 2018)</b></p> <p>Postcards and printed plans were provided to local councils and local project team offices for distribution, to ensure that community members and groups could find information about the plan without having to access the project website. Postcards, printed plans and plan summaries were also available at all Listening Post, Open House and stakeholder briefing events.</p>	1,000 postcards			
<p><b>Plan Summary document (17 Jan – 16 Mar 2018)</b></p> <p>In order to make it easier for community and stakeholders to learn about the draft management plan, a short summary document was prepared to outline the vision, key management strategies, proposed activities and uses, and a map of the proposed zones for the reserve. This document was available online, and at all community events undertaken throughout the engagement period.</p>	300 summaries			
<p><b>Submission template (17 Jan – 16 Mar 2018)</b></p> <p>To help make the submission process easy for community and stakeholders, an explanatory template was provided for download via the project website. The template included directions on how to write an effective submission, information on the process, important dates, and a structure for responding to each chapter.</p> <p><i>NB. Analysis of the community feedback shows that community members used a number of other proforma phrases, forms and templates throughout the process to complete their surveys or submissions. These seem to have been supplied by a variety of local groups, state-wide bodies, and national organisations.</i></p>	N/A			
<p><b>Listening Posts</b></p> <p>Listening Posts were conducted over three Saturdays in Killarney, Warrnambool and Port Fairy. These informal 'pop up' events sought to engage people who might otherwise be unaware of the project, provide information, promote the upcoming Open Houses, and to collect community feedback. Participants were invited to take project information with them, to have a brief discussion with staff at the Listening Post, or complete a survey. Each Listening Post was attended by a Parks Victoria staff member and an independent consultant.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><b>27/01/18</b> (10am-1pm) Killarney Beach</td> <td><b>03/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Port Fairy</td> <td><b>10/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Warrnambool</td> </tr> </table>	<b>27/01/18</b> (10am-1pm) Killarney Beach	<b>03/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Port Fairy	<b>10/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Warrnambool	85 participants 12 written surveys
<b>27/01/18</b> (10am-1pm) Killarney Beach	<b>03/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Port Fairy	<b>10/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Warrnambool		

Tool description	Participation			
<p><b>Open Houses</b></p> <p>Three Open House events were conducted in the major population areas surrounding the reserve, to allow community members and stakeholders to sit down with staff from the project team (Parks Victoria, DELWP, and local council) to discuss particular aspects of the plan. The Open Houses also provided an opportunity for participants to hear a range of different views from each other on the desired outcomes of the plan. Participants were encouraged to discuss their submission, complete a survey and to take project information. Each Open House was independently facilitated by Kismet Forward and supported by Andrew Howard Consulting.</p> <table border="0" data-bbox="204 488 853 566"> <tr> <td data-bbox="204 488 331 566"><b>17/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Warrnambool</td> <td data-bbox="475 488 603 566"><b>22/02/18</b> (4.30-7.30pm) Port Fairy</td> <td data-bbox="746 488 853 566"><b>24/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Koroit</td> </tr> </table>	<b>17/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Warrnambool	<b>22/02/18</b> (4.30-7.30pm) Port Fairy	<b>24/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Koroit	123 participants 31 written surveys
<b>17/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Warrnambool	<b>22/02/18</b> (4.30-7.30pm) Port Fairy	<b>24/02/18</b> (10am-1pm) Koroit		
<p><b>Stakeholder briefings</b></p> <p>Meetings with community groups, stakeholders and councils were conducted to brief them on the key directions of the draft plan, collect some initial feedback and encourage stakeholders and community groups to provide submissions. Meetings and phone discussions were held with stakeholders between <b>18 Jan 2018</b> and <b>19 Feb 2018</b>. Briefing were undertaken with the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministers and Local Members of Parliament</li> <li>• Moyne Shire Council and Warrnambool City Council</li> <li>• Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA)</li> <li>• Birdlife Australia</li> <li>• Friends of the Hooded Plover</li> <li>• Belfast Reserve Coastal Actions Group (BCRAG)</li> <li>• Killarney Coastcare Group</li> <li>• Racing Victoria and Country Racing Victoria</li> <li>• South West Owners Trainers and Riders Association (SWOTRA)</li> <li>• Warrnambool Racing Club</li> <li>• Rundell’s Mahogany Trail Rides</li> <li>• Warrnambool Trail Horse Riders Club</li> <li>• Warrnambool Field Naturalists Club (WFNC)</li> <li>• Western Coastal Board</li> <li>• Victorian Coastal Council</li> <li>• Some community residents</li> </ul>	18 meetings			
<p><b>Submissions</b></p> <p>Submissions were invited by Parks Victoria in response to the draft management plan. These could be made as an individual or representing a group or organisation, and provided in any number of formats, by uploading them to the <a href="http://engage.vic.gov.au">engage.vic.gov.au</a> website, emailing directly to the team, or providing a hard copy through post to the Parks Victoria office.</p> <p>Submissions on behalf of organisations came from a variety of local and state-wide bodies, including government, environmental groups, recreational groups, and commercial groups.</p>	439 total submissions (41 organisations) (398 individuals)			
<p><b>Methods outside of the formal process</b></p>				
<p>It should be acknowledged that, while this report focuses only on the formal engagement process undertaken by Parks Victoria and the project team, a number of other initiatives by community and organisations were undertaken in parallel to the formal engagement process and will be considered by the project team. These included online and in-print petitions, letters to the minister and other political members, commentary through social media groups, letterbox drops, email blasts and other campaigning.</p> <p>Many of these efforts should be commended for encouraging interested Victorians to participate in the formal process by engaging online, providing a submission, or attending a community event.</p>				

### 3. Overview of participant demographics



#### Feedback by channel

25 emails  
41 handwritten surveys  
401 online surveys  
439 submissions

A total of 906 participants provided feedback on the draft management plan through the formal engagement process. Channels were identified in the following manner:

- Feedback included in the body of the email was counted as an email, emails with attached submissions were counted as submissions.
- Handwritten surveys were collected from community events.
- Online surveys were collected via the engage.vic.gov.au platform.
- Submissions were either uploaded via the engage.vic.gov.au platform, emailed to the project team, or provided as a letter to the team.



#### Locations

8 emails  
386 online surveys  
325 submissions  
39 handwritten surveys

Location information (postcodes) was provided by 758 participants across most channels, with the largest responses from online surveys and submissions. Postcode data was well distributed across the south-west region (map included at Appendix A). More than half (54 percent) of these participants came from the top 5 postcodes - the local areas surrounding the Belfast Coastal Reserve, including:

- 3280 (Warrnambool)
- 3283 (Killarney)
- 3284 (Port Fairy)
- 3282 (Illowa)
- 3281 (Winslow)



#### Age range

2 emails  
384 online surveys  
81 submissions  
38 handwritten surveys

Age information (age ranges) was provided by 505 participants across most channels, with the largest responses from online surveys and submissions. Age range was well represented from ages 10 to 85+, with the highest numbers of participants aged between 55 and 59 years.

This result broadly reflects the age profiles of both Moyne Shire and Warrnambool City Councils (as per 2016 ABS data).



#### Use of the reserve

15 emails  
371 online surveys  
311 submissions  
35 handwritten surveys

Use of the reserve was understood through two questions relating to frequency of use and types of activities. Participants could choose as many activities as appropriate in the activities question. While some indicated as many as 9 activities, the average number of activities per participant was 2. Responses to these questions were provided or implied by 648 participants.

Participants most frequently indicated that they use the reserve weekly (31 percent), or a couple of times a year (23 percent).

The most common activities undertaken on the reserve included walking (45 percent of participants), swimming or surfing (39 percent), birdwatching (31 percent) and dog walking (29 percent).



#### Interest in the plan

19 emails  
388 online surveys  
376 submissions  
40 handwritten surveys

Information about interest areas in the plan (by category) was provided by 823 participants. Participants were able to select multiple areas of interest, with the highest being 5 areas, and the average of between 1 and 2 areas.

Overall, participants most frequently indicated that their interest in the plan from an 'environmental' perspective (48 percent of participants), and/or 'recreational' perspective (44 percent).

Amongst irregular users of the reserve (couple of times a year, rarely or never) interest was most commonly from an environmental perspective. In more frequent users of the reserve (monthly, weekly or daily) interests were often focused on recreation and use.

## Belfast Coastal Reserve, 15 years from now...

Belfast Coastal Reserve is an important cultural landscape on Victoria's south-west coastline, recognised for its scenic beauty, environmental attributes and cultural significance. Effective, coordinated management of the reserve has been achieved within a framework of strong partnerships across agencies, local Traditional Owner groups, neighbouring land owners, volunteers and community groups.

Locals and visitors coming to the reserve continue to enjoy walking, bird-watching, fishing, swimming, dog-walking, picnicking and nature study. The location, timing and intensity of activities such as horse riding has been managed to avoid conflicts between users, and to reduce the risk of damage to the environment and cultural sites. Locals and tourists appreciate the 'wild feel' of Belfast Coastal Reserve, which is easily accessed from the busier areas of Warmanbood and Port Fairy.

The natural values of the coastal landscape have been enhanced. The impacts of pest plants and animals have been reduced through coordinated programs with agencies and landholders. Native plants and animals are flourishing and threatened species are recovering. The abundance of migratory birds that breed and feed here is assisting to moderate the impacts of climate change.

Eastern Maar and Gundjini are working with the Victorian Government to ensure the unique connection between the land and people is secure and practised.



## 4. Summary of feedback

## About the ‘Vision for Belfast Coastal Reserve’



**463 Participants**  
**342 Comments**

1 Email  
385 Online surveys  
62 Submissions  
15 Handwritten surveys

**More than 463 participants indicated their level of support for the 15-year vision for the Belfast Coastal Reserve. Of these, 46 percent support or strongly support the vision. Another 40 percent were opposed or strongly opposed to the proposed vision.**

Some participants were supportive but felt they must oppose the current vision, unless the role of commercial racehorse training was explained more clearly or removed completely.

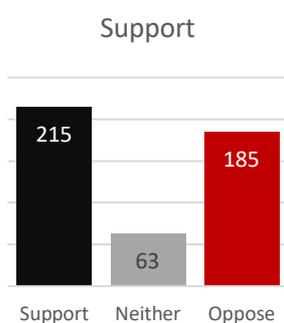
*‘Remove racehorse training from the reserve and I would be supportive...’*

Some comments indicated that the vision was inaccessible, impractical, irrelevant or misleading.

*‘The vision needs to be a little more practical.’*

*‘The vision is clearly aimed to be all encompassing and widely positive or likeable. This is hardly critical, realistic, or useful. Sure, it sounds good, but with such a lack of substance it’s hardly even worth having, let alone talking about.’*

*‘The softer term of horse riding deflects from the extreme risk and existing damage to wildlife, culture and passive recreation from commercial racehorse training in the reserve.’*



There was a total of 342 comments from participants on the 15-year vision for Belfast Coastal Reserve.

These comments focused primarily on support for the broad vision statement.

*‘I strongly support the goals and strategies to maintain and enhance habitats, reduce the impact of pest species and visitors, better manage marine, lake and swamp habitats, and to build resilience to climate change.’*

The following table outlines summarised feedback as suggestions against the main themes of this chapter, together with indication of how consistent this message was from community feedback. A tick (✓) in the ‘Agreement’ column indicates when a majority of comments about the chapter provided similar suggestions. A tilde (~) indicates a suggestion that was part of mixed or conflicting suggestions made across the feedback.

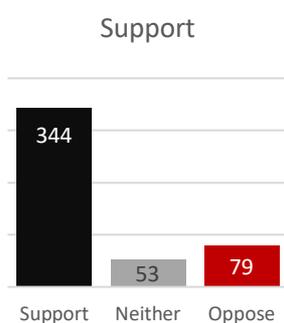
Theme	Key suggestions from community and stakeholders	Agreement
<b>‘Horse riding’ in vision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove commercial horse training (termed horse riding) from the Vision</li> <li>Use clearer wording to differentiate between commercial and recreational activities</li> </ul>	✓ ✓
<b>Protecting the environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep wording about the protection of the reserve’s natural values, native plants and animals</li> </ul>	✓
<b>Phrasing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide some practical measures within the vision, such as key metrics or direct actions</li> </ul>	✓

## About ‘Cultural landscape and living heritage’



**476 Participants**  
**258 Comments**

1 Email  
377 Online surveys  
74 Submissions  
24 Handwritten surveys



**More than 470 participants indicated their level of support for the chapter on ‘Cultural landscape and living heritage’. Of these, 72 percent support or strongly support the directions of this topic. Another 17 percent were opposed or strongly opposed the proposed directions.**

There was a total of 258 comments from participants on this chapter.

Nearly half of these comments were supportive of further protection for cultural sites and environments surrounding them.

*‘I strongly support goals and strategies including maintenance of geological features, recognising Traditional Owner and community connections to it, ensuring cultural landscape values are protected in heritage management, and establishing partnerships with Traditional*

*Owners to protect and conserve heritage features.’*

Comments highlighted perceived conflicts within the draft plan that may affect cultural values.

*‘...there is a glaring contradiction. Levys beach is identified as a really important area but then the plan plans to introduce 250 horses a day in there. The idea that the artefacts can be collected is completely ludicrous.’*

Some participants expressed concern that a focus on cultural protection might impact unfairly on use of the reserve by other segments of the local community – and emphasised the idea of working together, acknowledging multiple histories, and providing space for everyone.

*‘Once access to what the community considers is a public resource is restricted then community tensions will rise. Better to educate, discover and protect specific items of actual heritage than to lazily block/ban/control areas of potential heritage.’*

The following table outlines summarised feedback as suggestions against the main themes of this chapter, together with indication of how consistent this message was from community feedback. A tick (✓) in the ‘Agreement’ column indicates when a majority of comments about the chapter provided similar suggestions. A tilde (~) indicates a suggestion that was part of mixed or conflicting suggestions made across the feedback.

Theme	Key suggestions from community and stakeholders	Agreement
<b>Protecting cultural and heritage sites</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to provide for protection of cultural and heritage sites within the draft plan</li> <li>Remove or address conflicts between use and cultural values currently identified within the draft plan</li> </ul>	✓ ✓
<b>Education and promotion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain focus on enhancing visitor experience through promotion of heritage and cultural values</li> <li>Emphasise opportunities to collaborate with local traditional and local community</li> </ul>	✓ ✓
<b>Access and uses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with local communities as well as identified partners on any changes to access and uses</li> </ul>	✓

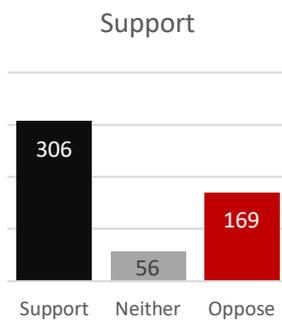


## About 'Healthy Country'



**531 Participants**  
**421 Comments**

7 Email  
376 Online surveys  
119 Submissions  
29 Handwritten surveys



**More than 530 participants indicated their level of support for the chapter on 'Healthy Country'. Of these, 58 percent support or strongly support the directions of this topic. Another 32 percent were opposed or strongly opposed the proposed directions.**

There was a total of 421 comments from participants on this chapter. The comments below are summarised under sub-headings.

### PROTECTION OF NATIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS

There was strong support for the strategies in 'Healthy Country' which focused on habitat protection, with particular focus on the Hooded Plover and Orange-bellied Parrot populations, and managing the ongoing impacts of invasive pests and weed species such as marram grass.

*'I strongly support temporary fencing and signage around individual breeding sites... These birds are at great risk of extinction unless protected'*

*'Build walkways over dunes, remove marram grass, promote re-planting of native grasses and controls rabbits and foxes.'*

### COMMERCIAL HORSE TRAINING ON THE RESERVE

More than 30 percent of comments on this topic preferred no commercial training on the reserve.

*'I do support aspects like maintaining and enhancing habitats, reducing the impact of pest species and visitors, better management of marine and freshwater habitats, minimising fire risk and building resilience to climate change. However, the plan fails to take account of the extreme risk posed by commercial horse training.'*

Most suggested this directly conflicted with impact data included in the draft plan, or with the general intent of conservation and preservation.

*'The establishment of a Conservation Zone is appropriate, but utterly inconsistent with proposals to permit commercial horse training in the reserve... a strategy to allow such incompatible uses is like driving a car with one foot on the accelerator and the other foot on the brake.'*

Others, particularly dog walkers and recreational horse riders, highlighted the perceived double standards in banning these recreational activities while continuing to support commercial training.

*'The conservation zone allowing horses is an unfunny joke. How can a sensible plan allow the exclusion of leashed dogs and the inclusion of galloping horses?'*

### PROPOSED ZONING

Approximately 10 percent of comments commended the draft plan for establishing zones.

While approximately 4 percent of comments on this topic wanted to see more conservation zoning, significantly more comments called for a revision of the conservation zone, expressing concerns about the impacts on their enjoyment of the reserve and lifestyle.

*'...if you take the beach usage away from the rest of us riding horses and walking dogs it will significantly impact on the local people. This is why I moved to this area, to have access to these beautiful beaches.'*

Consistent messaging from submissions articulated the importance of recreation to local community members, and their physical and mental health.

*'I believe the entire area should remain a shared conservation - recreation zone. I agree we need dog leash regulation in nesting season. I have learned much about hooded plovers during this process and truly believe that co-existence is possible not just an ideal. We need PR for the plover to increase public awareness not just to its existence but also to their nesting patterns, life cycle, feeding habits, pair bonding behaviour, how they rear their young. People might then be enchanted by the birds and want to protect them. We need better signage; informative signage and we need rangers out there engaging the community.'*

Some comments also suggested that the environmental threat from people, dogs and recreational horse riding had been exaggerated.

*'I feel very strongly about conservation... however, I don't feel that the recreational horse riders impact so severely on the environment as to restrict their use so severely. As long as dogs are kept on the leash, I also feel they don't impact so severely as to be this restricted.'*

The following table outlines summarised feedback as suggestions against the main themes of this chapter, together with indication of how consistent this message was from community feedback. A tick (✓) in the 'Agreement' column indicates when a majority of comments about the chapter provided similar suggestions. A tilde (~) indicates a suggestion that was part of mixed or conflicting suggestions made across the feedback.

Theme	Key suggestions from community and stakeholders	Agreement
<b>Zoning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider revision of the Conservation Zone boundaries to allow for dog walking (on lead), and recreational horse riding along the shoreline.</li> </ul>	~
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider dynamic/seasonal zoning to balance environmental needs and community needs</li> </ul>	~
<b>Habitat protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate feasibility of seasonal restrictions on uses and activities for habitat protection</li> </ul>	~
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revise the allowances made for commercial racehorse training to further reduce impact</li> </ul>	~
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep rehabilitation and replanting programs to support dune and wetland health</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with impacted local communities on the potential closure of any informal tracks</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trial track closures to measure changes in fox and rabbit populations, and fire risk</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage and control of weeds impacting neighbouring properties, including boxthorn and hemlock</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Target fox and rabbit populations across the reserve, and with neighbouring landholders</li> </ul>	✓
<b>Visitor impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide greater education to beach users on shorebird vulnerability and encourage good behaviours</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide easy to understand evidence to community of the effects of beach visitation and use on vulnerable species</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to mark nesting sites with temporary fencing and signage</li> </ul>	✓
<b>Marine and wetland habitats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the wetlands and swamp areas are able to flood and drain as they have historically</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide further evidence of the impacts of use on the aquatic values of the Belfast Lough</li> </ul>	✓
<b>Climate change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor, model and build local resilience to climate change</li> </ul>	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the impacts of extreme weather events, storm surges and extreme tides on shorebird survival</li> </ul>	✓

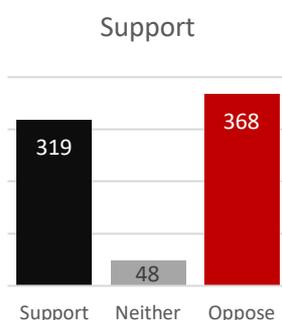


## About 'Recreation and use'



**735 Participants**  
**1,591 Comments**

20 Email  
379 Online surveys  
299 Submissions  
37 Handwritten surveys



**More than 730 participants indicated their level of support for the chapter on 'Recreation and use'. Of these, 43 percent support or strongly support the directions of this topic. Another 50 percent were opposed or strongly opposed the proposed directions.**

There was a total of 1,591 comments from participants on this chapter. The number of comments is significantly higher due to additional questions asked in the online survey focusing on commercial racehorse training, and dogs on the reserve. Findings are summarised under sub-headings.

### PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

Most commonly, opposition to the proposed activities and uses came from two camps: those who felt that the draft plan did not do enough to protect these values; and those who felt that the draft plan excessively impinged on their lifestyle and enjoyment of the reserve in order to protect these values.

### COMMERCIAL HORSE TRAINING ON THE RESERVE

More than 520 comments talked specifically about the continuation of commercial racehorse training in the reserve. Approximately 60 percent of these were opposed to the current proposal.

Reasons often provided for opposition to this included:

- Commercial racehorse training provides little or no public benefit and simply should not occur on public land.
- Commercial racehorse training is a significant threat to native plants and animals, and to the safety of people.
- Commercial racehorse training impacts other users' access and enjoyment of the reserve and infrastructure such as carparks.
- Purpose-built facilities need to be built to replicate beach and dune training.
- Permits should only be provided to small (hobby) trainers or permitted numbers capped much lower than proposed.

Approximately 30 percent of the comments about commercial racehorse training on the reserve supported the proposal to permit this activity.

Reasons most commonly given for this focused on the therapeutic importance of beach training for the horses, and the significance of horse racing to cultural and economic fabric of the region.

### ACCESS FOR DOGS

More than 450 comments on 'recreation and use' talked specifically about dog access on the reserve. Of these approximately 30 percent supported the current proposal to restrict dogs access to the conservation and recreation zone.

A further 36 percent of comments called for greater access to the conservation zone for dogs, access across the entire reserve for dogs on-leash, or seasonal restrictions. Many of these comments came from local participants who stated that most dog owners are responsible and care about their local beaches, and that banning dogs would significantly impact on their lifestyles and respectful enjoyment of the beach.

Amongst comments calling for a complete ban of dogs (approximately 8 percent of comments) common reasons included the challenge in enforcing any seasonal rules, waste management, and the ongoing risk to breeding sites and people from dogs.

### RECREATIONAL RIDING

A consistent criticism of the permitted uses was a perceived bias towards commercial racehorse training – with many questioning this decision in relation to recreational riding.

*'Commercial horse training allowed, and recreational horse riding effectively banned. How is this good for anyone other than the almighty dollar? Your plan for managing the area has been meet with much cynicism...'*

More than one in seven responses called for the final plan to allow recreational riding to continue through the reserve, in accordance with existing conditions and codes of conduct. This activity was again strongly associated with longstanding social, cultural and lifestyle habits for the area.

The following table outlines summarised feedback as suggestions against the main themes of this chapter, together with indication of how consistent this message was from community feedback. A tick (✓) in the 'Agreement' column indicates when a majority of comments about the chapter provided similar suggestions. A tilde (~) indicates a suggestion that was part of mixed or conflicting suggestions made across the feedback.

Theme	Key suggestions from community and stakeholders	Agreement
<b>Commercial racehorse training</b>	• Reduce or remove commercial racehorse training on the reserve	~
	• Limit licencing to small or hobby trainers	~
	• Work with the horse racing industry to establish effective purpose-built training off the reserve	✓
	• Provide further explanation in final plan if the current balance between commercial racehorse training and recreational riding remains	✓
<b>Motor vehicle and motorbike use</b>	• Address the impact of 4WD vehicles and motorbikes on the dune and swamp/wetland systems	✓
<b>Dog walking / exercising</b>	• Consider seasonal allowance for dogs on-leash on the shoreline of the whole reserve	~
	• Provide more educational information about the vulnerabilities of native plants and animals	✓
	• Trial lesser restrictions for one year and monitor dog owner behaviour, compliance and litter management	~
	• Work with community and land managers to develop alternative walking tracks away from shorebirds to facilitate health and wellbeing, connected to townships and other off-leash areas	✓
<b>Recreational horse riding</b>	• Consider allowance for recreational riders on the shoreline of the whole reserve	~
	• Provide more educational information about the vulnerabilities of native plants and animals (in relation to impacts of horses)	✓
	• Trial for one year and monitor rider behaviour and compliance	~
	• Work with community and land managers to develop safe alternative riding tracks	~
<b>Visitor activities</b>	• Revise restrictions on windsurfing/kitesurfing for the Belfast Lough	✓
<b>Access and infrastructure</b>	• Work with impacted local communities on the potential closure of any informal tracks	✓
	• Track closures to be assessed within 12 months to measure increase in fox and rabbit populations and fire risk	✓
	• Separate parking and access for beach users and horse floats	✓
	• Provide access dunes using boardwalks where feasible	✓
<b>Public safety and education</b>	• Address the risk to public safety of concentrated activities and uses proposed within the conservation and recreation zone	✓
	• Ensure clear and concise dog walking, horse riding and visitor behaviour standards are communicated across the reserve, together with details for reporting an offence	~
<b>Tourism</b>	• Retain focus on enhancing visitor experience through promotion of heritage and cultural values	✓
	• Emphasise opportunities to collaborate with local traditional owners and local community	✓

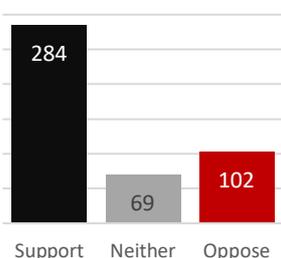
## About ‘Managing in partnership’



455 Participants  
254 Comments

2 Email  
362 Online surveys  
65 Submissions  
26 Handwritten surveys

### Support



**More than 450 participants indicated their level of support for the chapter on ‘Managing in partnership’. Of these, 62 percent support or strongly support the directions. Another 22 percent were opposed or strongly opposed the proposed directions.**

There was a total of 254 comments from participants on this chapter. The comments below are summarised under sub-headings.

### COORDINATED MANAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

More than half of the comments said this approach was good, supporting collaboration and coordinated management with a range of recommended groups including: Traditional Owners groups, land managers, community groups, volunteers, local residents, and peak bodies with relevant areas of expertise.

*‘All decisions should be made jointly, with the best interest of the reserve in mind.’*

Commonly, proforma submissions and surveys expressed a desire to see greater collaboration and/or a single land manager (Parks Victoria) appointed across the reserve.

Approximately 20 percent of comments stipulated that collaboration and coordinated management could only work with transparency in decision-making, and clear roles and responsibilities amongst partners.

### MANAGING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Approximately 25 percent of comments about ‘managing in partnership’ focused on support of

joint management of the reserve with Traditional Owner groups.

*‘I fully support the Traditional Owners, and hope for joint management by Eastern Maar of this area in the future.’*

*‘The Traditional Owners need to be involved at every stage and in every way. This is really important.’*

### WORKING WITH COMMUNITY

Comments also focused on the important role of community groups and local residents in the future management of the reserve. Some concern was expressed about equity of access to decision-making processes, and advised that every effort should be made to listen to both community groups, and to the broader community.

*‘I believe the area has been utilised and respected long enough by a number of different interest groups. I think it has been managed by minority groups for too long and needs to be a community decision.’*

*‘I will change to supportive if you can show that you are prepared to establish and strengthen partnerships with regular caring beach users and our families.’*

The following table outlines summarised feedback as suggestions against the main themes of this chapter, together with indication of how consistent this message was from community feedback. A tick (✓) in the ‘Agreement’ column indicates when a majority of comments about the chapter provided similar suggestions. A tilde (~) indicates a suggestion that was part of mixed or conflicting suggestions made across the feedback.

Theme	Key suggestions from community and stakeholders	Agreement
<b>Coordinated management</b>	• Establish and communicate clear roles and responsibilities across the management partnership	✓
	• Develop strong collaborative working relationships with land managers, and relevant peak bodies	✓
<b>Managing with Traditional Owners</b>	• Develop strong collaborate management practice with local Traditional Owner groups	✓
	• Establish and communicate clear guidelines on roles and responsibilities in this partnership	✓

Theme	Key suggestions from community and stakeholders	Agreement
<b>Working with community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with community groups and local residents to foster 'ownership' of management initiatives</li> <li>• Establish and communicate clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities in these partnerships</li> <li>• Seek balance in opportunities to be involved across community groups and the broader population</li> </ul>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>

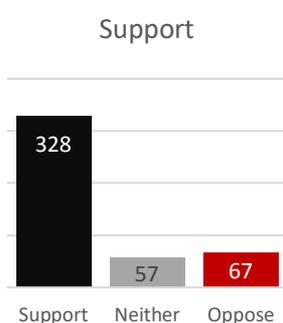


## About ‘Research and monitoring’



**452 Participants**  
**241 Comments**

2 Email  
362 Online surveys  
61 Submissions  
27 Handwritten surveys



**More than 450 participants indicated their level of support for the chapter on ‘Research and monitoring’. Of these, 73 percent support or strongly support the directions of this topic. Another 15 percent were opposed or strongly opposed the proposed directions.**

There was a total of 241 comments from participants on this chapter. The comments below are summarised under sub-headings.

### STRONG GENERAL SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Approximately one quarter of comments provided general support for research and monitoring directions in the draft plan.

*‘Research is crucial to measure the success of the goals in this plan.’*

A further quarter felt that research and monitoring of the reserve would lead to better ‘evidence-based’ management.

*‘It is imperative that the land managers understand the needs and science of the reserve, rather than making politically popular decisions...’*

### MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Approximately one in every eight comments mentioned a shorter review cycle would be necessary in the early stages of the management plan – given the highly sensitive nature of the reserve, and the public attention on the draft plan.

*‘Monitoring cannot simply be set up to document the decline but must inform changes in management. There must be*

*processes in place to allow the results from monitoring to trigger management changes. Any activity shown to be detrimental to the natural environment of cultural values must be able to be discontinued in response to the observed impact.’*

Some comments also highlighted the need to understand compliance and enforcement issues as they stand 12-months after implementation.

### WORKING WITH COMMUNITY

Comments also focused on the ongoing role for community groups, beach users, and local residents in both research and monitoring through citizen science programs and other management activities.

*‘I’d be keen to hear about volunteering opportunities – we only come down a few times a year, but it’d be good to get the kids involved’*

*‘Conducting research by including the community can best monitor the health of the reserve. It will also indicate how successful the plan is, and where adjustments may be needed. Community and visitor support will increase its effectiveness.’*

The following table outlines summarised feedback as suggestions against the main themes of this chapter, together with indication of how consistent this message was from community feedback. A tick (✓) in the ‘Agreement’ column indicates when a majority of comments about the chapter provided similar suggestions. A tilde (~) indicates a suggestion that was part of mixed or conflicting suggestions made across the feedback.

Theme	Key suggestions from community and stakeholders	Agreement
Research opportunities	• Ensure research is independently validated, processes are timely and transparent	✓
	• Use local research of the area to inform and/or justify management approaches	✓
Monitoring and evaluation	• Implement a shorter initial review period (such as 12 months), to address issues early	✓
Working with community	• Work with beach users, encourage citizen science for research and monitoring activities	✓
	• Make research and monitoring results easily accessible to local community and beach users	✓

## 5. Concluding comments

### Response to project objectives

It is important to reflect on the project objectives, and the extent to which these have been achieved. The objectives and responses are below:

Objective	Response
Building trust between stakeholder groups and the project team.	<b>Partially achieved.</b> Relationships with stakeholder groups were fostered throughout the process with one-on-one briefings, and the opportunity to attend all community events. The provision of the same independent listeners at all community events also helped community and stakeholders build a relationship with the process. This objective was partially undermined by extraneous circumstances such as changes to beach access signage, the timing of the engagement process (beginning in school holidays), and some challenging media coverage.
Community and stakeholder groups feeling part of the process and that their views have been heard.	<b>Partially achieved.</b> Every effort was made to assure community and stakeholders that they had been heard, and that their feedback would be considered by the team. This will, naturally, continue to be proved by the actions of the project team, Parks Victoria, and the state government.
Generating better community and stakeholder understanding of management planning process and scope.	<b>Achieved.</b> Community members were provided multiple opportunities to engage with the project team at community events, through email, or phone. An important part of this was explaining the management planning process, activities to date, and next steps.
Building better understanding of the diversity of views and opinions present in the community.	<b>Achieved.</b> Although sometimes a challenging process, community members were encouraged to listen to a variety of community or stakeholder perspectives in group discussion at the open house events and listening posts. Participants commonly shared information, opinions, values and stories about the reserve.
Collecting community and stakeholder group feedback to inform the final plan.	<b>Achieved.</b> The community feedback process was designed to provide a consistent and simple structure for responses across online surveys, handwritten surveys and submissions.

### Considerations for future processes

Future engagement for the Belfast Coastal Reserve could consider the following feedback from community and stakeholders:

- Establish a community reference group or ‘citizen jury’ for the finalisation of the management plan.
- Better activation of local networks for promotion of the engagement process.
- Use traditional print media promotional tools such as letter-box drops.
- Provide more accessible and easy to read educational material relating to the key issues and opportunities within the draft plan to enhance discussion and feedback.
- Provide both a simple online survey, and a more in-depth survey to measure levels of support against each management goal or strategy.



