

Parks Victoria Renewal Funds

Submission from Wye River, Separation Creek and Kennett River Community Resilience Committee

The CRC thanks DELWP and Parks Victoria for the invitation to have direct input into this consultation, and most importantly for making funding available to support the ongoing renewal of our area.

The Wye River and Separation Creek Renewal Plan (March 2017 – 2018) ¹has been endorsed by the community, and informs the work of agencies involved in the recovery and renewal. It stems from an agreed community values statement:

Values and Principles

Wye River and Separation Creek is a small, inclusive and respectful community in a place of great natural beauty that highly values the forest, beach and natural landscape, and works to preserve and sustain them

- *All community voices are valued and respected*
- *Natural beauty is enhanced by small scale and informal facilities*
- *Regeneration of indigenous flora and fauna has the highest priority*
- *Development is sympathetic to the environment and of minimal impact*
- *Risk is managed to balance amenity, public health and safety*

All proposals considered for funding as part of this consultation, regardless of their source, must meet these values.

The community has been advised that the criteria for utilisation of the Parks Victoria funds is: tourism, environmental, cultural or visitor-related infrastructure. We are presenting the aspects of the Renewal Plan that mesh with these. Some of these proposals are un-costed as we would not presume to have that expertise, and have chosen not to include speculative estimates. Where we have included costings they are based on pre-existing work or external sources, which are acknowledged in this submission

¹ http://wyeseconnect.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Wye-River-Renewal-Plan_March2017_FINAL.pdf

The pertinent, currently unfunded components of the Renewal Plan are:

Replanting to renew flora and fauna

Activity: Develop a replanting and weed eradication/control plan to support a coordinated approach to landscape regeneration by property owners, COS, Southern Otway Landcare Network (SOLN) and DELWP that contributes to land stability, local character and the recovery of local fauna and flora

Outcome: The essential character of the community is restored and the landscape regenerated through the planting of a significant number of plants and trees each year for the next 4-5 years, encouraging the return of local fauna and flora species without unduly increasing bushfire risk; protecting and enhancing ecosystem health and biodiversity through a weed control program targeting identified high-risk species and priority areas; a monitoring program established to track the success of weed control and revegetation and associated community engagement, education, and support

Commentary: While progress has been made, it has been significantly hampered by lack of funds. There has been some natural regeneration, more needs to be done to support it, and weed control should be a very high priority. Weed invasion post-fire poses the highest threat to the resilience and composition of the native vegetation and this in turn impacts on fauna. Birds, ground dwelling mammals and koalas are depleted and subject to predation by feral animals. **Based on the initial proposal from the WVRC² it is suggested that \$100, 000 be spent per year for four years** for the purpose of weed control drawing on Appendix E (weeds triage), F and G (target areas), an additional \$5, 000 per year used for trapping feral animals, and a further \$50 000 in total be used for revegetation, in addition to funds already committed. The amount for weed control would cover about 100ha of treatment per year, and should be used in the components of the target areas with the greatest long term impact on weeds within Wye/Sep/Kennett. It should be noted that there is particularly strong community support for revegetation and weed control in the fire impacted gullies in Wye River and Separation Creek

Additionally there is evidence -based concern about fishing rubbish (particularly discarded lines) making their way into the sea as tourism returns. It suggested

² WVRC Wye River & Separation Creek Bushfire Vegetation Restoration Long-term Project Specification Version 1.0 November 2016), and Appendices A-J. Prepared by the Wye River Vegetation Restoration Committee

that a fisheries education officer be at engaged at peak times to undertake education and enforcement. This person could work from Lorne to Apollo Bay and also empty the fishing line containers at Sturt Point, Artillery Rocks etc. Signage at major fishing spots in different languages about responsible practice would also be beneficial.³

Community education about caring for our environment would be beneficial – following on from the work to date of the Flora Fauna and Beachscape Work Group. \$2000 per year over 4 years would assist with local initiatives.

A severe weed infestation at the Wye River end of Paddy's Path below the surf club bunkhouse has been highlighted as needing particular and repeated attention. Weed control along Paddy's Path generally remains a concern.

Improve beach access between Wye River and Separation Creek

Activity: Advocate for improved beach access between Wye River and Separation Creek at high tide and thereby ensure there is safe pedestrian access between Wye River and Separation Creek if landslip occurs along Paddy's Path and/or the Great Ocean Road is closed causing residents to be isolated. This would also provide a new walking loop incorporating Paddy's Path

Outcome: Safe pedestrian access between Wye River and Separation Creek is provided at all times and isolation of residents is prevented

Commentary: There has been particularly strong support for this item at recent community meetings, as either a board walk beside/below the road, or a beach walk incorporating a board walk (or similar) over the rocks at the Wye River end. This would create a circuit walk incorporating Paddy's Path.

Extension of Great Ocean Road Walk

Activity: Advocate for the extension of the Great Ocean Road Walk from Apollo Bay to Torquay

³ <http://www.environment.gov.au/marine/marine-pollution/marine-debris>

Outcome: Support for long-term feasibility analysis of the opportunities and impacts of the extension of the walk

Commentary: Funding is not yet available, \$300, 000 is required⁴. A Skenes Creek to Apollo Bay feasibility study is currently underway. Where possible walks funded through this Parks Victoria opportunity should be routed to be able to be part of the proposed Great Ocean Walk.

Wye River Walking Tracks

Activity: Plan and build walking tracks in Wye River along former logging rail and more recent fire tracks, including the Rail Trail Loop adjacent to Wye River, provide mapping and signage of local tracks and roads that may be suitable for walks and investigate the potential formation of a walk from Separation Creek to the Jamieson River camping reserve using the original walking track linking Wye River to Lorne

Outcome: Recreational activities developed to encourage tourism and the health and wellbeing of residents

Commentary: Walking tracks have been heavily supported in recent community meetings. In addition to the above: The mooted walk along Jamieson River associated with an enlarged free camping is supported – there is concern that some are being priced out of a holiday in our area. We also support extension of the Wye River Walk to at least the weir. This is a beautiful part of the river which firefighting operations have made much more accessible – the additional distance is about 1 km. It provides an opportunity for visitors to view a pristine Otway’s river within walking distance of the town. Overwhelmingly the greatest support has been for tourist projects which promote physical activity and environmental engagement.

⁴ Costed unsuccessful application to Building Better Regions Fund - deemed not to meet the criteria for that fund.

Improving tourist infrastructure on the Great Ocean Road (Wye River and Separation Creek Section)

Activity: Advocate for improving the basic infrastructure on the GOR near Wye River and Separation Creek that is essential for tourists, such as toilets and rubbish collection

Outcome: The basic infrastructure and services expected by tourists to the GOR is in place and is maintained and is consistent with the character of the GOR

Commentary: There is widespread support for an upgrade to the inadequate and aging Wye River foreshore toilets. Toilets at the proposed Jamieson River campsite will be required but we support long drop toilets to maintain the bush experience. Toilets at Kennett River are essential as the current informal arrangements are no longer practicable due to increased visitor numbers⁵.

Community input not included in the Renewal Plan:

1. Kennett River Projects: The March 2017 - 2018 Renewal Plan was created in the post-fire environment and in general does not include Kennett River. By December 2017, a draft plan for 2018 for the wider community, including Kennett River, Separation Creek and Wye River, will be developed and released for community discussion. The focus of the plan will continue to be post-fire renewal.

Safe Pedestrian Walk⁶

- A new pathway is required on Crown Allotment 10B to link Cassidy Drive and Ridge Drive to the main township of Kennett River. Ridge/Cassidy drive contains 63 houses, of the total 152 houses in Kennett River. 14 families live permanently on this ridge. Currently there is no safe pedestrian access from Cassidy Drive to the main township area. People currently walk along the edge of the Great Ocean Road around a blind corner with no guardrail to get to the township. The pathway could link to the proposed Great Ocean Work, support renewal of business and tourism, and add another walking opportunity for visitors.

⁵ Otway Coast Committee - Coastal Management Plan May 2013 pp 30 and 35

⁶ As above

Formalisation of Kennett River Walk

- Formalisation of the existing walk to include wayfinding and interpretive signage and improved surface. This would be beneficial to the community and provide an additional activity for visitors to the area.⁷

2. History Projects:

There is general interest in documenting our history, consistent with the culture parameter around this project. The community feels that this is an area of great potential.

The Wye Experience

A group of 11 Wye River women developed a concept for documenting our experience of logging, fire and the regeneration of the environment. A synopsis follows:

The people of Wye River and Separation Creek value the natural beauty of their environment. They have repeatedly experienced the harshness and joy of our situation. This includes fire, flooding and isolation. Just as the environment regenerates over time, the people of this place are resilient and adapt to change. There are many stories of longitudinal tenacity of individuals and families, dealing with the aftermath of fire and consequent adaptation. The adaptation may be to stay and rebuild/repair/consolidate, or to take the opportunity to move on and re-establish elsewhere.

Unexpected events can present a catalyst to move on in various ways. The stories of response to the forces of the natural environment should be recorded and told so that the history gives perspective for the current community and our past/current/future families, future communities experiencing the impact of fire locally and internationally, and to inform visitors to the area of our history and characteristics. The focus of the narrative is fire and natural regeneration of flora and fauna.

The purpose is to capture the stories of adaptation over time, particularly across the fires of the 1930's, 1960's and 2015. The intention is to have a professional, short film that can be used to encourage and inspire our own community and others to build a perspective around the impact of natural phenomena and resilience. A focus will be the natural regeneration of the landscape, across assault from a period of significant logging through to three major fires and the present day

The collation and recording will include filming, production and sound recording of people telling their stories of "the show must go on", whether the decisions

⁷ As above

taken are to leave the area after fire devastation, or to stay and be part of renewal. Either response is seen as valid. It is envisaged that the film created will be lodged in the National Library, and become a lasting historical record. It is anticipated that there be a launch to the community and to other fire affected communities along the Ocean Road. We think that the film created will be no more than 30 minutes, but this is open to discussion

It is intended that the project will invite participation from across the community. This is in keeping with the values and principles statement at the top of this document.

A community member has assisted with the development of pricing for a professional 30 minute documentary. Indicative costs for research, writing and script development are \$32, 000 and for filming and production \$84, 000 – Total \$116, 000.

The output would be of benefit to other coast towns and other fire affected areas across the state and nationally – past, present and future - as an example of resilience and regeneration, and be available to the local community at no charge through usbs or other multimedia.

Other History Projects

There is general support for interpretative signage that indicates historical sites – particularly around the Wye/Sep/Kennett logging history. Some initial support has been made available through the RDV/GORRT Destination Action Plan project.

A community member has suggested that Wye River becomes a centre for the Otways logging history, with ideas ranging from a model woodcutter village to collections of logging artefacts. This idea is uncoded, and would require community input, but would be a tourist attraction.

The Community Resilience Committee has incorporated and will in future be known as the Wye Sep Kennett Renewal Association Inc. Its purpose and functions are unchanged. As before it comprises community representatives and members of the major community associations, namely Wye River Surf Life Saving Club, Wye River CFA, Wye River and Separation Creek Progress Association and Kennett River Association. The first AGM will be held early next year. Details of how interested community members can offer to be closely involved in our work will be available soon.

