Acknowledgments
We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.

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Content

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 5

About Bellarine Peninsula ........................................................................................................ 5

Distinctive areas and landscapes ............................................................................................ 7

Declaration of the Bellarine Peninsula ...................................................................................... 7

Bellarine Peninsula Statement of Planning Policy .................................................................... 7

Community engagement .......................................................................................................... 8

Developing a shared vision ...................................................................................................... 11

Have your say .......................................................................................................................... 11

Policy domains ....................................................................................................................... 13

Landscapes ............................................................................................................................. 14

Biodiversity and environmental values ..................................................................................... 16

Heritage ..................................................................................................................................... 18

Economy and infrastructure ..................................................................................................... 20

Environmental risks and resilience ........................................................................................... 22

Settlements .............................................................................................................................. 24

References ................................................................................................................................ 30

List of figures

Figure 1: Bellarine Declared Area .......................................................................................... 6

Figure 2: Bellarine Peninsula distinctive attributes and values .............................................. 8

Figure 3: Threats to distinctive attributes and values .............................................................. 8

Figure 4: Means to protect distinctive attributes and values ................................................ 9

Figure 5: Bellarine Peninsula terrain units ............................................................................. 14

Figure 6: Areas of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity ................................................... 18

Figure 7: Northern Bellarine Peninsula existing settlement ................................................ 25

Figure 8: Southern Bellarine Peninsula existing settlement .................................................. 26
Introduction

About Bellarine Peninsula

The Bellarine Peninsula is located south-west of Melbourne. Its western boundary lies just to the east of the City of Greater Geelong, and it is bounded by Corio Bay to the north, Port Phillip Bay to the east and Bass Strait to the south.

The peninsula is characterised by its coastal and marine environments. The Lake Connewarre wetlands complex — Lake Connewarre, Reedy Lake, Hospital Swamps, Salt Swamp and Murtnaghurt Lagoon — and the Swan Bay wetlands are part of the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Site: they are wetlands of international importance. The rural hinterland stretches back from the coast and is mostly an open-farmed landscape with gently undulating terrain that covers much of the central to northern peninsula. The cleared, rolling hills of former and current grazing land provide valuable urban breaks between townships and add to the character of the area. The area is renowned for its attractive rural panoramas, boutique wineries and artisan producers. With coastal and historic towns (such as Queenscliff) and excellent beaches, the peninsula is an iconic tourism and recreation destination.

The Bellarine Peninsula is coming under increasing pressure from development, visitation and climate change impacts (such as flooding and erosion), increasing the threat of degradation to its landscape, environment and heritage values. There is a need to manage residential and visitation growth and their associated challenges sustainably and safely.
Figure 1: Bellarine Peninsula declared area
Distinctive areas and landscapes
The Victorian Government has legislated to protect and enhance Victoria’s distinctive areas and landscapes. Under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (the Act) Part 3AAB, an area of Victoria can be declared a distinctive area and landscape (DAL) if it has a majority of the attributes the Act specifies — outstanding environmental, geographical, heritage, cultural, natural resources or productive land, strategic infrastructure or built-form significance — and if its attributes are threatened by land use change.

Declaration of the Bellarine Peninsula
The Bellarine Peninsula was declared a DAL under the Act by order of the Governor-in-Council in October 2019. Figure 1 shows the declared area. It is almost the same as the area covered by the 2015 Bellarine Peninsula Localised Planning Statement, but its western boundary is different, and it extends 600 metres seaward of the low water mark from Leopold to just before Breamlea.

The declaration followed an assessment by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), with input from the City of Greater Geelong, the Borough of Queenscliffe and local communities, to confirm the declared area meets the requirements in Section 46AP of the Act for a DAL.

Bellarine Peninsula Statement of Planning Policy
The declaration is the first step in the government’s commitment to protecting the Bellarine Peninsula’s distinctive attributes and values. The declaration triggers the development of a Statement of Planning Policy (SPP), which is a framework for the future use and development of land in the declared area to ensure its landscape and township characters and other distinctive attributes and values are protected and enhanced. The SPP will:

- set a 50-year vision that identifies the attributes to be protected and enhanced
- set out how planning and decision-making for the declared area will be integrated
- detail the declared area’s Aboriginal and post-contact cultural heritage values
- include a declared area framework plan that integrates environmental, social, cultural and economic factors and which may specify may settlement boundaries in the DAL or specify settlement boundaries in the DAL as protected settlement boundaries.

Following an extensive community and stakeholder engagement process and after the SPP is approved, it will be incorporated into the Greater Geelong and Queenscliffe planning schemes and implemented by responsible public entities. Some changes to local planning controls may be needed to implement the SPP and ensure the Bellarine Peninsula’s distinctive attributes and values are protected and enhanced.

The Bellarine Peninsula Localised Planning Statement (LPS) was developed in 2014 by the Victorian Government in partnership with the City of Greater Geelong and the borough of Queenscliffe. Localised Planning Statements were introduced to recognise and protect highly valued key areas that have significant geographic and physical features which contribute to the quality of life for Victorians and are a distinctive part of our state. Localised Planning Statements are in place for the Bellarine Peninsula, the Mornington Peninsula, and the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. The Bellarine Peninsula LPS will be updated and transitioned to a Statement of Planning Policy now the area has been declared as a distinctive area and landscape under the Planning and Environment Act 1987.
Community engagement

The Bellarine Peninsula Distinctive Area and Landscape project has three community engagement phases:

- Phase 1 finished in July 2019 and informed the declaration of the Bellarine Peninsula as a DAL.
- Phase 2 starts in April 2020 and will gather feedback about the content of this discussion paper and other relevant ideas people want to raise, to inform the draft SPP.
- Phase 3 will occur in mid-2020, when the draft SPP will be released for public consultation, with opportunities for written submissions.

Phase 1 engagement

Phase 1 of engagement occurred from 14 May 2019 to 15 July 2019. Engagement activities included eight, two-hour open-house workshop sessions, an online survey and a mapping tool. The phase 1 Community Engagement Findings Report is available online. In all, 196 written and online submissions were received, and 585 comments were mapped.

In phase 1, DELWP engaged with Bellarine Peninsula residents and stakeholders to notify them about the process to declare the area as a DAL and to seek their feedback about the area’s distinctive attributes and values. Figure 2 shows the attributes and values people most-frequently nominated as important. Figure 3 shows what people saw as threats to those attributes and values, and Figure 4 shows how they might be protected.

Figure 2: Bellarine Peninsula distinctive attributes and values

Figure 3: Threats to distinctive attributes and values
Phase 2 engagement

This discussion paper aims to promote community and stakeholder discussion about opportunities to protect and enhance the Bellarine Peninsula’s distinctive attributes and values, to inform the draft SPP.

DELWP prepared the paper in collaboration with the City of Greater Geelong, Borough of Queenscliffe and Traditional Owners the Wadawurrung, and it has been informed by the findings of the phase 1 engagement. It provides an overview of the policy domains, and it contains the draft vision to be included in the draft SPP.

We would like to hear your views about the ideas and issues in this paper and any other ideas you have about protecting and enhancing the Bellarine Peninsula DAL’s environment, landscapes and lifestyle.

We seek feedback about:

- the draft 50-year vision
- issues and strategic directions in each policy domain
- any other ideas you have about protecting and enhancing the DAL’s values.
Developing a shared vision

Below is a draft of a long-term — 50 years, to 2070 — vision for the Bellarine Peninsula DAL: a vision that governments, land managers, businesses and the community can work together to achieve.

In 2070, the Bellarine Peninsula continues to be an iconic coastal destination that values and protects its natural environment and landscapes. Significant landscape features (such as the Ocean Grove – Point Lonsdale bluff and cliffs, the Bellarine Hills and Port Phillip Heads) are preserved and enhanced. The panoramic views across the peninsula and out over The Heads past Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean, vistas across Port Phillip Bay to the You Yangs and beyond, and views of Lake Connewarre and Swan Bay, are protected from encroachment by inappropriate development and accessible for residents and visitors.

Aboriginal cultural heritage is highly valued, and Wadawurrung knowledge and practices inform planning and land management decisions to protect biodiversity and environmental values, respecting the area as a place of significance to the Wadawurrung people.

The area’s rich maritime and early settler heritage and historic architecture is respected and preserved for its contribution to the identity and character of the Bellarine Peninsula.

The Bellarine Peninsula’s natural environment is healthy and cherished by the local community and visitors. Ecosystems are restored and biodiversity much-improved. Remnant native vegetation is protected, enhanced, expanded and connected: it is no longer cleared. A healthy natural environment supports the Bellarine Peninsula in adapting to climate change. Native terrestrial and marine wildlife flourishes.

The area’s unique waterways and water resources are healthy and sustainably managed to improve resilience, rural productivity and liveability.

The undeveloped coastline is protected from vegetation clearance and intrusive development. The coastline and coastal settlements are enhanced by the natural backdrop of surrounding nature reserves and rural land. Green breaks are visible between settlements, and rural land is occupied by productive agricultural uses.

The quiet, relaxed and distinct character of settlements is maintained and enhanced. The connections between townships, coast and country are retained as an integral part of culture and identity. Valued heritage sites are recognised, respected and preserved for the future. The district towns — Ocean Grove, Leopold and Clifton Springs / Curlewis / Drysdale — provide higher-order services for the region within well-defined settlement boundaries. Settlement and township areas are well-planned, and urban development is situated in appropriate locations and respectful of distinctive areas, high-quality agricultural land and the natural environment. Community connections remain strong, with sustainable active transport routes and outdoor activities helping to build relationships between community members and their surroundings.

The flourishing and prosperous local economy, based on green economic principles, is centred on sustainable agricultural production and sensitive natural resource utilisation. The Bellarine Peninsula is recognised as a world-class, sustainable tourist destination, and it attracts visitors all year round. Tourism is managed to ensure local lifestyles and the distinctiveness of the area’s landscapes are maintained and preserved.

The Bellarine Peninsula is powered by renewable energy and produces net-zero carbon emissions. The urban and rural features and infrastructure of the area are preserved, enhanced and made resilient to climate change impacts including reduced rainfall, coastal erosion, flooding, rising sea levels, bushfires and extreme weather events.

Have your say

What do you think of the draft vision?

Are there other things we should include in the draft vision?
Policy domains

The proposed policy domains align with the objects of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 for distinctive areas and landscapes, and they were informed by phase 1 engagement feedback. The policy domains are:

- Landscapes
- Biodiversity and environmental values
- Heritage
- Economy and infrastructure
- Environmental risk and resilience
- Settlements
The Bellarine Peninsula’s coastal and rural landscapes are distinctly spectacular and beautiful, and locals and visitors treasure them. They include Port Phillip Heads and Point Lonsdale, the Lake Connewarre wetlands complex and Swan Bay wetlands, the ruggedly beautiful southern coastline and the gently undulating rural hinterland; and they provide numerous opportunities for the community to relish unique, expansive views, connect with nature and feel a distinct sense of place. There are Ramsar-listed wetlands, farms, vineyards, treed windbreaks, flat and rolling topographies, coastal and riverine scenery, historic seaside towns and ships passing close to shore through The Rip at the entrance to Port Phillip; all contribute to the overall landscape character.

The peninsula forms a distinctive geological and landform unit to the south-west of Port Phillip, and it comprises the three broad terrain units shown in Figure 5:

- a central area between Leopold, Portarlington and Ocean Grove of undulating, low hills and plateau
- an eastern fringe of gently undulating, sloping lowland enclosing Swan Bay around to Ocean Grove
- a broad area of lowland extending between Stingaree Bay at Geelong to the Bass Strait coast at Breamlea.

The declared area’s coastline is fringed by dunes, bluffs, low-lying salt marshes and swamps. There is a major river outlet — of the Barwon River — in the south, and coastal settlements nestle between, and

Figure 5: Bellarine Peninsula terrain units
frequently among the coastal features. Between the coastal areas are the Bellarine Hills, which separate the volcanic plains of the Barwon River valley in the west from the low, undulating terrain around Swan Bay in the east. Views of these features and more distant landmarks across the water — including the You Yangs to the north-west and Point Nepean and the rugged Bass Strait coastline stretching away to Cape Schanck to the south-east — contribute to the special visual character of the declared area.

Local planning scheme controls (like Significant Landscape Overlays [SLOs]) are often used to protect significant views from obstruction by new developments. Currently, 11 of the City of Greater Geelong’s 15 SLO schedules apply to the Bellarine Peninsula, and all three of the Borough of Queenscliffe’s SLO schedules apply to the area. The area’s viewing corridors and places of visual appeal must continue to be recognised and protected, so people can enjoy them in future.

Coastal processes are continually shaping the peninsula’s coastline: for example, the sand spit at the southern end of the Swan Bay – Edwards Point Wildlife Reserve is steadily being separated from the rest of the reserve. Climate change impacts — reduced rainfall, coastal erosion, flooding and rising sea levels — are likely to reshape the DAL’s coastline, threatening coastal settlements. Adaption activities (such as raising the height of coastal roads and paths to act as levees) could also detract from the appearance of the coastline and township character.

Given the history of land-clearing — the area of indigenous vegetation is only an estimated 5% of what it was pre-contact — protecting and enhancing remnant indigenous vegetation is a priority. Most is along road reserves, in the riparian zones of waterways and along the coast. The Greater Geelong Planning Scheme uses Vegetation Protection Overlays (VPOs) and Environmental Significance Overlays (ESOs) to protect remnant indigenous vegetation. Significant revegetation will also be required to supplement the protection of remaining vegetation, much of which is rare or endangered. This will help enhance the DAL’s rural and urban landscapes.

The landscape features, long-distance views and proximity to Melbourne and Geelong are the main reasons why tourism has been so essential to the peninsula’s economic development since European settlement. The Greater Geelong and Queenscliffe planning schemes actively encourage the growth of tourism. To manage that growth, development and land uses in rural and urban areas must safeguard the long-term attractiveness of the DAL’s rural and urban landscapes.

**Strategic directions**

To protect and enhance the significant coastal and rural landscapes of the Bellarine Peninsula DAL, the SPP may include planning controls, land management strategies and/or other mechanisms to:

- guide development within settlements to ensure it is sympathetic to their surrounding landscapes (such as through controls on building heights, setbacks and other built forms)
- identify and protect key viewing corridors and vantage points
- avoid development along the coast and protect green breaks between townships
- retain and increase indigenous vegetation cover that contributes to landscape character.

**Have your say**

Do you agree with the strategic directions?

How else can the SPP protect and enhance the Bellarine Peninsula’s landscapes?
Biodiversity and environmental values

Despite its relatively small area, the Bellarine Peninsula’s diverse natural environments and habitats include unique coastal and marine environments, woodlands, grasslands and freshwater, semi-saline and saline waterways.

The Lake Connewarre complex and Swan Bay wetlands support large migratory and non-migratory bird populations (such as the critically endangered Orange-bellied parrot) and migratory shorebird populations (such as the threatened Eastern curlew). The endangered Growling grass frog and other significant wildlife are also found in areas across the peninsula.

The peninsula is also home to important flora species including the regionally distinct subspecies the Bellarine yellow gum, Coast Bitter-bush and Rare Bitter-bush, as well as important coastal marshes and several threatened coastal Moonah Woodlands communities.

However, the natural environment is not what it was two centuries ago. It has been highly modified by land-clearing for pastures, logging, urban development, poor stormwater drainage and the introduction of invasive plant species, weeds and pests. Much of the remnant indigenous vegetation is dispersed in fragments across the peninsula, resulting in poor connectivity between habitats and less genetic diversity and wildlife. Non-indigenous native and exotic species also provide habitat for birds, but they must be managed so they don’t threaten the indigenous vegetation.

Public land managers including Parks Victoria, the City of Greater Geelong, the Borough of Queenscliffe, the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority and the Barwon Coast and Bellarine Bayside committees of management, as well as local environmental groups and private landowners, are important conservers, managers and promoters of the Bellarine Peninsula’s natural environment.

Climate change is also a threat to biodiversity and the environment: its impacts will put further pressure on an already fragile environment.

Waterways and terrestrial environment

Wetlands, lakes, river, creeks, mudflats and saltmarshes are defining features of the Bellarine Peninsula’s natural environment. The Lake Connewarre wetlands complex is the ‘jewel in the crown’ in the Bellarine Peninsula, being Victoria’s largest water body listed under the Ramsar convention. Other notable waterway environments include the Begola Wetlands at Ocean Grove and the Lonsdale Lakes system, part of the Swan Bay catchment.

Urban development has reduced the quality and ecological stability of the wetlands: most urban stormwater from surrounding areas drains into them. Altered flow regimes with poorer-quality stormwater will continue to threaten these waterways if it is not appropriately managed. Also, most of the riparian zone of the waterways is privately owned, making it harder to consistently monitor, preserve and enhance the waterways’ ecological health.

Remnant indigenous vegetation is mostly in public reserves and on roadsides, railway reserves and private property. The most notable examples include:

- the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve, the most-significant remaining intact example of the Grassy Woodland ecological vegetation class (EVC) that once dominated the landscape

- the Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve, the last remaining example of Damp Sands Herb-Rich Woodland EVC

- the Swan Bay saltmarshes and mangroves that fringe Swan Bay, which are habitat for the Orange-bellied parrot

- the Buckley Foreshore Reserve, the only relatively unmodified intact coastal dune environment on the Bellarine Peninsula and which support its largest Coastal moonah woodland community

- the Lake Connewarre and Barwon River estuary saltmarsh and mangrove communities, which are the largest contiguous areas of remnant indigenous vegetation.
Have your say

Do you agree with the strategic directions?

How else can the SPP protect and enhance the Bellarine Peninsula’s biodiversity and environmental values?
Aboriginal cultural heritage

The Traditional Owners of the Bellarine Peninsula DAL are the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin nation, who have looked after and cared for Country for over a thousand generations. The Wadawurrung have an enduring, deep connection with all aspects of the land, sea, waterways and coastal areas. Aboriginal stories of history, culture and achievement identify the peninsula’s waterways and coastal areas as the most-valuable, dominant features of Wadawurrung Country. Aboriginal people had permanent and temporary living spaces along the coastline and inland, near high vantage points and close to what was then woodland.

The following statement of significance that accompanied the declaration of the Bellarine Peninsula as a DAL illustrates its importance to the Wadawurrung people:

We deeply respect our people of the past. Elders, children, men, women. We deeply respect their knowledge of Country, water, life, their care of the traditions and of each other, we stand with their spirit.

Great spirit Bundjil told us to take care of the great life within the land. To only take what you need without selfishness.

Wadawurrung shared their knowledge of singing, dance, trade, camps, fishing, hunting, paintings, and homes to us to protect for our future generations.

We all need to help.

Our Wadawurrung family group lived within Barwon River and Bass Strait, with a large land of forested areas and wonderful banks of the ocean, near many water bodies.

The Bengali family were the caretakers of the Bellarine land.

Beangala, Nerm, Lake Connewarre, Barwon River all provide ideal life to birds and fish, eels. Reeds turned into our baskets.

Life in the forest gave resources like food and lots of tools to use for trade, building, journey. If there were lots to trade, we would share with our families and celebrate.

Figure 6: Areas of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity
We would name our Country, by what we could see.
Yeraioo, Perweit, Wooranalyook, Boronggook. Home of Wadawurrung.

Our Country is remembered by Wadawurrung, our proud spirit walks to tomorrow to teach others the care of our earth.

Stories from the Wadawurrung oral tradition, archaeological evidence and early-settler accounts indicate the Wadawurrung were not nomadic: rather, family groups moved between permanent and temporary living spaces within their lands according to the influence of the seasons on their food sources. Archaeological evidence of middens, mounds and artefacts across the Bellarine Peninsula provide a means of understanding Aboriginal cultural heritage, and the surviving oral traditions of the Wadawurrung diaspora and the wider Kulin nation improve the understanding. Figure 6 shows areas of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity in the DAL.

During the colonial period, the Wadawurrung people were devastated by killings, introduced diseases, forced relocations and family break-ups. This interrupted the continuous flow of stories across more than a thousand generations of Wadawurrung family groups — a catastrophe experienced by Aboriginal people across Australia — and it denies people today a better understanding of Wadawurrung history. However, we can promote the continued, emerging knowledge of the Wadawurrung family groups, so the DAL’s cultural history is more widely understood. Doing so is consistent with the City of Greater Geelong’s recognition of its Indigenous cultural heritage (in Clause 21.06-1 of its planning scheme) as of critical importance to the city’s identity. The Queenscliff Planning Scheme (in Clause 21.04-2) also recognises that the ‘the Borough’s significant heritage elements provide a reference for residents and visitors to appreciate the social and cultural history of the local area’, and it also acknowledges that more policy work is needed to address Aboriginal cultural heritage in consultation with Aboriginal Victoria and the local Aboriginal community.

Post-contact cultural heritage
The Bellarine Peninsula’s post-contact cultural heritage has been shaped by its proximity to Melbourne and its strategic location at the Port Phillip Bay entrance. It has a strong military and maritime heritage, and important features include the Point Lonsdale Maritime and Defence Precinct, the Shortland Bluff Lighthouse and the 50-plus shipwrecks scattered along the coastline. The monument commemorating the landing of Matthew Flinders in 1802 and John Batman in 1835 at Indented Head, early farms (such as Spray Farm at Bellarine) and the short-lived Portarlington (flour) Mill also remind us of the area’s more-recent past.

Tourism was an important early industry, with historic sites including the Geelong–Queenscliff Railway (established in 1879), Clifton Springs Mineral Springs, numerous summer houses and grand hotels (such as Portarlington’s Grand Hotel and Queenscliff’s Vue Hotel). Most sites are protected by Heritage Overlays, listed on the Victorian Heritage Register or both.

We can easily see the legacy of the peninsula’s post-contact period in its memorable buildings of various styles, but there is also a social legacy: a story of developers, architects, builders and occupiers and how the society they began continues today. This built and social legacy makes many settlements major tourist destinations (such as the Queenscliff town centre), contributing greatly to the local economy.

Demolition, insensitive development and increasing tourism are the main threats to post-contact cultural heritage. To preserve it for future generations, development driven by population growth and the expansion of tourism infrastructure needs to be appropriately managed. Also, some sites are not yet identified as historically significant, and they need to be investigated to determine if they should be protected with Heritage Overlays.

Strategic directions
To protect and enhance the declared area’s Aboriginal and post-contact cultural heritage, the SPP might include planning controls, strategies, actions and/or other mechanisms to:

• actively involve the Wadawurrung people in the management, protection and enhancement of Aboriginal cultural heritage

• build awareness and knowledge of Wadawurrung heritage, language and cultural practices

• identify, monitor and protect sites and locations of heritage significance.

Have your say
Do you agree with the strategic directions?

How else can the SPP protect and enhance the Bellarine Peninsula’s Aboriginal and post-contact cultural heritage?
Economy and infrastructure

Agriculture and natural resources

The Bellarine Peninsula has a long history of aquaculture and agriculture — broadacre cropping, grazing, dairy and cattle production — as well as horticulture and extractive industries. Agriculture and fishing alone add an estimated $56 million a year to the local economy.

Aquaculture has a very long history in the area: the Wadawurrung people harvested the local seafood, and post-contact settlers established small commercial fisheries. Today, Australia’s largest abalone farm is located off Indented Head.

Land-based agriculture is mainly modified pasture grazing and intensive uses: horticulture, vegetable cropping and viticulture, which is a growing industry. Recently, agriculturalists are recognising the value-adding opportunities the thriving visitor economy offers (such as farm gate sales): such activities draw more visitors and showcase the area’s produce. It is important to continue to protect high-value, productive agricultural land.

Extractive industries in the area include quarries that provide raw building materials and contribute to the local economy. The Victorian Government’s Extractive Resources Strategy identifies different parts of the peninsula as either Extractive Industry Interest Areas or strategic resource local government areas.

The Victorian Government’s Planning for Melbourne’s Green Wedges and Agricultural Land initiative is strengthening planning for agricultural land in Melbourne’s peri-urban areas including in the declared area to protect it from competing land uses. Upgrading and expansion of the existing recycled water infrastructure could ensure the sustainability of agricultural production as well as improving waterway health.

Tourism and recreation

The Bellarine Peninsula is close to Melbourne and Geelong — where most of Victoria’s population lives — and is easily reached by road, rail, ferry or air (through Avalon Airport), making it a popular destination for domestic and international visitors seeking relaxed coastal settings, distinctive rural landscapes and diverse cultural heritage.

The area’s abundant natural resources and attractive landscapes have drawn the Wadawurrung people to it for generations. In the 19th century, maritime, military and agricultural activity, as well as the perception that the seaside was a healthy environment, steadily increased visitor numbers and established a holiday culture that continues to be an essential element of the peninsula’s economy and society. The area has developed a thriving, diverse tourism and recreation industry that offers golfing, food, wine, cultural and nature-based experiences and attractions. Tourism-related activities currently add an estimated $327 million a year to the local economy.

With the number of visitors and residents increasing, the planning system must help ensure tourism and recreation activities, land uses and development are carefully planned to respect and maintain the distinctive attributes and values on which the tourism and recreation industries rely.

Transport and infrastructure

The social, economic and environmental resilience of the declared area depends on the provision, maintenance and upgrading of transport, essential services and community infrastructure. Growing residential and visitor populations add to demand for this infrastructure, which must be managed to protect and enhance the peninsula’s distinctive attributes and values.

A steadily increasing number of active and public transport choices are making the Bellarine Peninsula more-accessible for visitors and residents. Six bus routes and an expanding network of bike lanes and off-road pedestrian paths provide many sustainable transport options, and active transport infrastructure is also being improved by work to realign the Bellarine Rail Trail and make it safer and projects to improve and increase track and trail coverage.

The Portarlington and Queenscliff safe harbours have seen much investment and development in the last decade, which has increased the capacity of...
Have your say

Do you agree with the strategic directions?

How else can the SPP help build a prosperous, sustainable Bellarine Peninsula economy with adequate infrastructure?

Strategic directions

To protect and enhance the economy and infrastructure of the Bellarine Peninsula, the SPP may include planning controls, strategies, actions and/or other mechanisms to:

- protect high-value, productive agricultural land and agricultural operators
- build a sustainable, year-round visitor economy that respects the Bellarine Peninsula’s distinctive attributes and values
- help ensure transport infrastructure improvements are sensitive to the area’s distinctive attributes and values and promote sustainable modes of transport
- protect state-significant resources and assets including mineral sand resources, recycled water resources and associated pipeline infrastructure, and opportunities for renewable energy generation.

Major infrastructure projects currently include the Ocean Grove stormwater drain works and the Fibre to the Bellarine fibre optic project. Future infrastructure projects need to adequately and sympathetically consider the DAL’s values.

The Bellarine Highway, Murradoc Road and Queenscliff Road are key transport corridors for getting agricultural and aquacultural products to market, and current and planned projects (such as the Drysdale Bypass and Bellarine Link) will improve connectivity within and beyond the DAL. The Drysdale Bypass is a $117 million investment to reduce congestion and freight costs, improve safety and access to jobs and economic opportunities, and to retain the township character of Drysdale.

Infrastructure projects will be necessary as the area’s population grows, and they will need to protect and enhance the peninsula’s distinctive attributes and values.

their marinas and enabled a Port Phillip Ferries service to Portarlington. As usage increases, it will be necessary to ensure these harbours remain community assets.

their marinas and enabled a Port Phillip Ferries service to Portarlington. As usage increases, it will be necessary to ensure these harbours remain community assets.
Climate change

The Bellarine DAL, along with the rest of Victoria, is already experiencing climate change impacts: it has, on average become warmer and drier. Looking forward, it will see:

- higher average temperatures throughout the year
- less cool-season rainfall
- more-frequent extreme weather events and more-extreme events (including more intense rainfall events in summer, which will increase the amount of stormwater and pollutants being washed into waterways)
- longer, harsher fire seasons
- increased coastal erosion and flooding
- sea levels continuing to rise.

These changes will make some land uses less-viable and landscapes and waterways less-resilient, and they may reduce visitor numbers and therefore economic activity. They also threaten marine habitats and may change the reproductive characteristics, number and distribution of species. Settlements and non-urban areas must be able to adapt to these impacts and appropriately respond to one-off events.

Community concerns about climate change and the need for action are growing. In December 2019, the Borough of Queenscliffe joined the growing number of national, regional and local governments across the world that have declared a climate emergency. The City of Greater Geelong also acknowledges that climate change poses a risk to the people of Geelong and Australia and that it requires a genuine, coordinated response.

Bushfire

Much of declared area is at risk of bushfire, with its short and long-term impacts on the environment, settlements, agriculture and tourism. Victoria’s Climate Science Report 2019 forecasts that the number of high-risk fire days will increase as average temperatures increase and rainfall decreases.

Managing bushfire risk is a key task for the planning system. Clause 13.02-1S of the Victoria Planning Provisions prioritises the protection of human life by directing population growth and development to low-risk areas and by making communities less-vulnerable by considering bushfire risk at all stages of the planning process. There is also the challenge of rebuilding damaged settlement areas after bushfires.

Most of the declared area (except for settlement areas) is located in either the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) or identified as being bushfire-prone. Some properties within the BMO or that meet Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Clause 52.12 requirements do not need a permit to remove vegetation.

Greater bushfire risk means more risk to tourism and agriculture. Nature-based tourism is a major component of the DAL’s tourist economy, and food and wine, wildlife, arts and culture are also important. Bushfires can make the area less attractive to visitors and reduce access to tourist destinations and activities. Bushfire is also a key threat to agriculture, due to losses of productive land, stock and infrastructure.

Coastal risks

Rising sea levels and coastal erosion are a risk to coastal settlements and significant landscapes, particularly in low-lying areas.

Modelling for the Corio Bay Local Coastal Hazard Assessment estimated the impacts of various sea-level-rise scenarios on settlement areas around the Bellarine Peninsula. Rising sea levels of up to 1 metre by 2100 is a real risk for low-lying areas (such as Fisherman’s Flat). Action is needed to ensure the long-term resilience and viability of these areas.

Rising sea levels also pose risks to significant landscape features. Swan Bay, the Salt Lagoon St Leonards Wildlife Reserve and the Edwards Point Wildlife Reserve are among areas that will be at risk, as will the biodiversity and fauna that rely on these areas. Significant sites of Aboriginal and post-contact cultural heritage may also be affected: many sites are in or near coastal reserves.

Climate change will increase erosion of the declared area’s beaches and coastal reserves. The rate and amount of erosion will need monitoring, to ensure it is managed in a practical, sustainable way.

Areas around waterways and low-lying areas in urban and nonurban areas will be at particular risk of increased flooding. This will change the ecology of these areas and the time some areas (such as public reserves) are open for public use.

Water

As the climate warms, there is less cool-season rainfall and droughts are longer. Agricultural businesses will need to adapt and develop new methods of production to remain viable.

Settlements will also need to adapt to longer droughts. To ensure there is adequate potable water
for household and agricultural consumptive uses, we must protect water supplies and invest in infrastructure. Land uses that need less water or benefit from recycled water will become increasingly attractive, and the planning system will also need to consider the drought preparedness plans of water corporations, to improve water security.

Human impacts
As demand to use the area’s natural resources — its beaches and coastal and nature reserves — increases, so too will the need to manage human impacts on these areas. Increased demand is likely to lead to greater damage to the environment (such as more rubbish from illegal dumping and careless behaviour, trampling of vegetation due to unmanaged access and illegal clearing of native vegetation)

Strategic directions
To mitigate environmental risks and improve resilience on the Bellarine Peninsula, the SPP might include planning controls, strategies, actions and/or other mechanisms to:

- avoid the development of sensitive land uses in areas at high risk of bushfire or coastal or riverine flooding
- ensure land use and development planning aligns with and integrates sustainable, resilient water management practices
- adapt to drought and the reduced availability of surface water and groundwater
- reduce the use of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions (such as by improving public and active transport infrastructure)
- mitigate coastal erosion risks.

Have your say
Do you agree with the strategic directions?

How else can the SPP help mitigate environmental risks and improve resilience on the Bellarine Peninsula?
Settlements

Settlements and townships

The Bellarine Peninsula is characterised by distinct settlements located fairly close to one another along the coast and through the mostly rural hinterland. Despite their closeness, each settlement has its unique character and feel, which residents and visitors alike cherish.

The SPP will aim to ensure the preferred character of each settlement is preserved. To do this while providing greater certainty to communities and developers, there is a need for further guidance about:

- what the preferred character of each settlement is, and what factors contribute to the character
- the urban extent of settlements, identified by long-term, protected settlement boundaries
- other areas potentially suitable for urban growth.

Population and housing

In the last decade, the Bellarine Peninsula’s population has grown rapidly, accounting for 35% of the City of Greater Geelong’s population growth. Settlements have grown, and higher-density infill development has begun to threaten the unique character of each settlement as well as the landscapes that surround settlements.

While the population of the Bellarine Peninsula will continue to grow, the City of Greater Geelong’s 2018 Settlement Strategy proposes to reduce future housing development on the peninsula and direct a greater proportion toward Geelong’s new northern and western growth areas.

The G21 Regional Growth Plan designates the declared area’s three largest settlements — Ocean Grove, Leopold and Drysdale / Clifton Springs — as district towns: larger centres that provide a higher order of services to their locality, are on transport routes and are connected to and support smaller settlements. These district towns have accommodated most of the peninsula’s population growth over the last decade, in planned, greenfield growth areas identified in the G21 Regional Growth Plan as well as in infill development within settlements. Most of the smaller settlements (such as Queenscliff and Barwon Heads) have significant constraints that limit their capacity for anything more than incremental growth.

Settlement planning and development

The City of Greater Geelong Settlement Strategy was adopted by Council in October 2018. The Settlement Strategy was developed to guide decision making and investment around settlement planning and housing provision across the municipality to 2036. In March 2019, Council adopted the Northern and Western Geelong Growth Areas Framework Plan under the guidance of the Settlement Strategy. Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Amendment C395 seeks to implement these documents into the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme.

Amendment C395 is currently subject to an independent review by Planning Panels Victoria. Public hearings recently concluded and a report outlining the panel’s recommendations will be considered by Council in the coming months. The distinctive area and landscape process will consider the strategic directions of the Settlement Strategy as part of a broader policy review in the development of the Bellarine Peninsula Statement of Planning Policy.

The City of Greater Geelong’s Settlement Strategy forecasts that infill development will comprise 50% of housing in the municipality by 2047. Nevertheless, preliminary analysis has identified that there is approximately 20 years of greenfield development capacity within existing settlement boundaries on the Bellarine Peninsula. Any potential expansion of existing settlement boundaries will need to consider the impacts on the declared area’s distinctive attributes and values.

Current planning policy supports smaller-scale, infill development and higher-density forms of housing in and around main activity centres. Infill development must be planned and managed to ensure it respects preferred township character. Respecting township character does not necessarily mean preventing change: it means identifying the existing distinctive attributes and values of towns and ensuring new development protects and enhances them, not adversely affects them.
Settlement boundaries

Under the Planning and Environment Act 1987, a settlement boundary — a boundary that defines a township’s outer urban limit — in a declared area can be ‘protected’ under a SPP. A protected settlement boundary can only be changed by an approved planning scheme amendment ratified by both Houses of Parliament. This is the same level of protection as Melbourne’s urban growth boundary.

Figures 7 and 8 show the settlement boundaries currently designated in structure plans and in the City of Greater Geelong’s Settlement Strategy. All the Bellarine Peninsula’s settlements (other than Queenscliff, which is geographically constrained) have settlement boundaries, which are based on extensive strategic planning work by councils. The declaration of the Bellarine Peninsula DAL creates the opportunity to consider the currency of these existing boundaries and whether the SPP should protect some or all of them. The boundaries designated in structure plans are a logical starting point for this consideration.

The SPP could protect settlement boundaries if outward growth might threaten:

- areas of environmental significance (such as nature reserves and parks)
- significant geographical features (such as prominent hills, mountains and other natural landforms)
- areas of cultural heritage significance (such as Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and heritage buildings)
- natural resources or significant productive land (such as geothermal or mining resources or agricultural land)
- strategic infrastructure (such as ports, treatment plants and significant roads).

Climate change and bushfire risks and infrastructure capacity should also inform considerations about whether to protect settlement boundaries.

Figure 7: Northern Bellarine Peninsula existing settlement boundaries
Township character

The townships and other settlements of the Bellarine Peninsula are characterised by their village feel, mature introduced and native vegetation and easy access to open space, and by the agricultural open spaces between them. Settlements along the coast reflect the seaside lifestyle: buildings are nestled into the landscape; they use materials that suit their surrounds; and there is space between properties. Low-rise buildings ensure that views of the natural landscape, coastline and seascape are retained.

The City of Greater Geelong and the Borough of Queenscliffe have completed design frameworks, structure plans and other strategic planning activities to protect the character of most settlements. These activities often use planning mechanisms such as design and development overlays (DDOs) to align development with particular character-protection objectives. Along with planning controls in land use zones and overlays (such as the Heritage Overlay [HO], Environmental Significance Overlay [ESO], Vegetation Protection Overlay [VPO] and Significant Landscape Overlay [SLO]), the main method for influencing township character is the planning permit process. The main aim of the SPP is to ensure planning controls and mechanisms align with the SPP’s objectives to protect and enhance the characters of settlements.

DELWP is undertaking a township character assessment to identify neighbourhood character and opportunities for adjusted planning controls to protect and direct the preferred character of townships and settlements.

Ocean Grove

Ocean Grove is currently the largest township on the Bellarine Peninsula, and it has grown significantly in the past decade. Most of this growth has been greenfield development to the north of ‘old Ocean Grove’ between Grubb Road and Banks Road, but infill development is still significant, with larger residential lots being subdivided and three-to-four-storey developments built or being built around the main centre. The existing settlement boundaries detailed in the Ocean Grove Structure Plan reflect that it is constrained from outward expansion by the Barwon River and Ocean Grove Nature Reserve to the north and west, the foreshore to the south and Lake Victoria to the east. To the north, rural land use forms a non-urban break to the Bellarine Highway.

Despite its growth, Ocean Grove still has the character of a coastal town, and its undulating topography provides ubiquitous views: of the Barwon River, the Ocean Grove Foreshore Reserve, the Spit and Bass Strait among others. These views are complemented by the township’s modest built form: most buildings are one to two storeys and set within...
well-vegetated lots and streetscapes. Some more-contemporary development is beginning to threaten this coastal feel: established vegetation on roadsides and private lots has been removed and not replaced, and larger developments have dominating built form and materials, limited boundary setbacks and minimal vegetation, all of which threaten the township character.

**Barwon Heads**

Barwon Heads is mostly flat, although the elevation increases to the south of the township along the Barwon Heads Bluff and the Barwon Heads Golf Club. The 2017 *Barwon Heads Structure Plan* noted there is limited housing supply in Barwon Heads. The settlement boundary for Barwon Heads has not changed since the 1996 Barwon Heads Structure Plan, mainly due to geographical constraints (such as the Barwon River Estuary, Murtngagurt Lagoon and Barwon Heads Bluff). The boundary delineates the township from the rural landscapes to the west.

The township consists mostly of low-scale residential developments, and the built form is mainly one-to-two-storey buildings set in vegetated lots and streetscapes. The town centre continues this theme with mostly low-scale, fine-grain commercial developments along tree-lined streets. More recently, there has been mixed-use development up to three storeys in and around the town centre. Vegetation removal and consolidation of lots for larger developments threaten the low-scale, fine-grain, unpolished coastal feel of Barwon Heads and its relationship to its surrounding landscape.

**Leopold**

Leopold is currently the second-largest township on the Bellarine Peninsula, and it has grown moderately in the last decade. The township sits atop a high point, making it the focal point of views when arriving along the Bellarine Highway. Leopold has significant views to Port Phillip, Corio Bay, Geelong and the surrounding rural landscapes. It also has expansive residential areas that have been developed over time, particularly to the south towards Lake Connewarre.

Leopold is subject to a range of natural and artificial physical and infrastructure constraints. These influence urban growth opportunities and directions, particularly greenfield growth: for example, the southern township boundary is constrained by Lake Connewarre. Nevertheless, as identified in the *Leopold Structure Plan*, there is modest capacity for growth within its existing settlement boundaries, particularly for infill development where larger residential lots could be subdivided or used for higher-density development.

Leopold’s pattern of growth and role as a satellite town of Geelong has limited its ability to establish a definable, unique character. It is typically suburban: the township’s built form is mainly low-scale, detached dwellings of one to two storeys with generous, well-vegetated gardens. Development to the south is typically smaller-lot, residential subdivisions with limited vegetation.

**Clifton Springs / Curlewis / Drysdale**

Clifton Springs, Curlewis and Drysdale have grown moderately in the last decade, and the Geelong Settlement Strategy identifies they can accommodate some further growth. Set mainly on coastal grassy plains, development extends from the newly constructed Drysdale Bypass north to the sandy Port Phillip Bay foreshore. The undulating topography affords views out to Port Phillip Bay. Creeks and waterways meander through the township, providing natural features and green spaces.

Residential growth to date has mainly been accommodated within the western Curlewis growth area. Port Philip Bay and the Drysdale Bypass constrain opportunities for further greenfield development. The town has seen little infill development, but larger residential lots could be subdivided in future. The *Drysdale Clifton Springs, Structure Plan* outlines directions for future growth of the township.

The township characters of Clifton Springs, Drysdale and Curlewis vary. Drysdale has significant heritage characteristics, whereas Clifton Springs is characterised by medium-sized residential subdivisions and Curlewis by more-contemporary, smaller-lot-size residential development. Drysdale and Clifton Springs are older settlements and have more vegetation than Curlewis. Despite the differences in each area, the built form is typically one-to-two-storey detached houses, and two storeys are more-common in locations with views. Vegetation removal from public and private land and large-scale development with setbacks and scales inconsistent with heritage characteristics are the main threats to township character.

**Portarlington**

Portarlington is set on a grassy coastal plain, and development extends down to the sandy foreshore, which has occasional rocky outcrops. The township rises up the hill from the foreshore, and most streets have views of the bay and surrounding landscape. The views from the Portarlington Pier and the water include views of Portarlington’s heritage built form sitting prominently on the hill within a canopy of mature trees.
Portarlington's capacity for outward growth is limited, and its settlement boundaries, identified in the current Portarlington Structure Plan, have barely changed since the 1993 Portarlington and Indented Head Structure Plan. The township has Port Phillip Bay and the foreshore to the north and Point Richards and its wetlands to the west. Beyond the eastern and southern boundaries are the green break and landscape features which help define the town. Portarlington’s larger lots do however provide opportunities for moderate infill development.

Portarlington has an informal, village, coastal character with mainly low-scale, residential buildings set on larger lots along wide streets. There are some unsealed roads and medium-to-high levels of mature vegetation, which contribute to township character. Built form is typically one to two storeys, but there are larger developments up to four storeys including heritage buildings. Contemporary development south-west of the township is typically of two storeys, on smaller lots and with less vegetation.

**Indented Head**

Indented Head is mostly residential in character with a mix of low-scale, older beach shacks and contemporary developments. Growth in Indented Head is constrained by the Salt Lagoon Wildlife Reserve to the south and the foreshore to the east, while the northern and western boundaries are important green breaks that define the settlement. The Indented Head Structure Plan outlines the existing strategic framework for the future planning and development of the township.

The foreshore is the main feature of Indented Head, and it comprises reserves and campgrounds. The topography is flat, but there are views of the foreshore reserve and beyond throughout the settlement. The long stretches of clean, sandy beaches that line The Esplanade, as well as the informal street settings, reinforce the township’s coastal character. Large-scale infill development with inappropriate setbacks and minimal vegetation, vegetation removal and coastal inundation are the main threats to the character of Indented Head.

**St Leonards**

St Leonards is mostly a flat, low-scale settlement. Its outward residential growth is constrained by the foreshore to the east, the Salt Lagoon Wildlife Reserve to the north and Edwards Point to the south. Despite these constraints, St Leonards has accommodated low levels of growth to the west within the settlement boundaries identified in the 2015 St Leonards Structure Plan. Rural land to the west of St Leonards forms a green break.

St Leonards has an informal, coastal character. Built form is typically low-scale and one to two storeys, with larger developments located along the foreshore to take advantage of the views. Many of the older residential areas north of Murradoc Road includes examples of fibro beach shacks, with higher levels of vegetation on public and private land. Unsealed roads and informal streetscapes contribute to the township character. Large-scale infill development with inappropriate setbacks, minimal vegetation and vegetation removal are the main threats to the character of St Leonards.

**Queenscliff**

Queenscliff has the character of a heritage town, with historic buildings of various scales and types varying from grand, freestanding hotels and landmark buildings to intimate, single-storey residential cottages. Outside the heritage precincts, residential development is mostly low-scale and one and two storeys. Fisherman’s Flat consists of intact, uniform, low-rise streetscapes that reflect the precinct’s history as a fishing village. The undulating topography affords intermittent views of Swan Bay, Port Phillip Bay, the Mornington Peninsula and Fort Queenscliff. There is significant vegetation along the foreshore, on roadsides and on private lots.

Queenscliff is geographically constrained and has no capacity for outward growth. There has been some infill development, which is constrained by Queenscliff’s heritage significance. Infill development with inappropriate side setbacks and scale for the heritage context, vegetation removal and rising sea levels and coastal inundation are the main threats to Queenscliff’s character.

**Point Lonsdale**

Point Lonsdale is located on a rocky outcrop at the south-eastern tip of the Bellarine Peninsula. The undulating dune topography and dense, coastal tea tree and Moonah vegetation in private gardens, along road verges and in foreshore areas create a coastal, informal, village atmosphere for residential areas south of Lawrence Road and east of Fellows Road. This atmosphere is enhanced by grassed road shoulders and broad, densely vegetated road reserves that disguise the front boundaries of private properties in the residential areas to the north of Lawrence Road and south of the Bellarine Highway. There are contemporary residential developments on the western edges of the township, in the City of Greater Geelong local government area. The township’s commercial centre is along Point Lonsdale Road, and it is mainly two to three storeys with a fine-grain, coastal character.
Point Lonsdale has significant environmental and geographical constraints including the foreshore, Swan Bay and Lake Victoria, that limit its outward growth. Despite these constraints, Point Lonsdale has experienced moderate expansion west of Fellows Road. Infill development has also been moderate. Planning and development has been undertaken to date in line with the strategic framework outlined in the Point Lonsdale Structure Plan.

The main threats to Point Lonsdale’s township character are large-scale development not in keeping with its coastal character, the replacement of modest dwellings with larger developments and vegetation removal.

**Rural-living-style settlements**

The Bellarine Peninsula includes several rural-living-style settlements (such as Wallington and parts of Leopold, Curlewis and Drysdale). These are typically 10-acre lots, and they provide housing in a rural setting, which many people want. These settlements have home-based businesses (such as small wineries and orchards, nurseries and agistments) that benefit from their rural setting and contribute to the peninsula’s diverse economy. In many instances they provide a transition from urban areas to rural areas (such as on the edges of Ocean Grove and Drysdale). Large rural-living lots are typically not an efficient use of land: they often remove land from agricultural production and natural systems, settle people in areas with insufficient infrastructure and threaten green breaks and landscape character between townships.

**Strategic directions**

To protect and enhance township character and significant landscapes while catering for future population, housing and settlement growth in the Bellarine Peninsula DAL, the SPP might include planning controls, strategies, actions and/or other mechanisms to:

- provide clear direction about the locations of future urban growth by defining a settlement hierarchy and long-term settlement boundaries if required
- manage growth in coastal townships to protect their distinctive attributes and values
- ensure the design of new urban development fits in with the existing township character through effective built form controls (such as for building heights, setbacks and landscaping)
- encourage a range of housing types to support a diversity of housing needs and changing demographics
- provide direction about the extent of rural living and appropriate land uses.

**Have your say**

Do you agree with the strategic directions?

How else can the SPP ensure settlement growth is managed to protect and enhance the Bellarine Peninsula DAL’s values?
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