Distinctive Areas & Landscapes

Surf Coast Declaration Area: Boundaries Advice

Consolidated Report: September 2019
Introduction

As part of the Distinctive Areas and Landscapes: Landscape Assessment Review Stage 1 (Scoping), Claire Scott Planning was engaged to provide advice on the proposed Surf Coast Declaration Area, and subsequent to that, on three additional "boundary investigation areas".

The boundary investigation areas were highlighted by the community during consultation and engagement as landscapes under threat and/or of significance, and required more detailed assessments to be undertaken as to whether they should be included in the Declaration Area.

The three areas were:

• Barrabool Hills

• Thompson Valley (North) ‘green break’ - south of the Armstrong Creek growth area (and north of Mount Duneed Road and the Surf Coast Shire municipal boundary)

• Lake Modewarre and surrounds

This report is a consolidated version of all boundary advice provided to the Department on the Surf Coast Declaration Area.

Cover image: Torquay Front Beach, author’s own
Declaration Area Criteria

In considering the inclusion or exclusion of land in the Declaration Area, regard must be had for the recently gazetted distinctive areas and landscape legislation, the objectives of which are:

a) to recognize the importance of distinctive areas and landscapes to the people of Victoria and to protect and conserve the unique features and special characteristics of those areas and landscapes; and

b) to enhance the conservation of the environment in declared areas including the unique habitats, ecosystems and biodiversity of declared areas; and

c) to enable the integration of policy development, implementation and decision-making for declared areas under Statements of Planning Policy; and

d) to recognize the connection and stewardship of traditional owners in relation to land in declared areas.

Under the Planning and Environment Amendment (Distinctive Areas and Landscapes) Act 2018, the Minister must be satisfied that an area has a majority of the following attributes in order for it to be declared a distinctive area and landscape:

e) outstanding environmental significance;

f) significant geographical features, including natural landforms;

g) heritage and cultural significance;

h) natural resources or productive land of significance;

i) strategic infrastructure or built form of significance;

j) an attribute prescribed for the purposes of this section.

Also –

The Minister must be satisfied that an area is under threat of significant or irreversible land use change that would affect the environmental, social or economic value of the area in order to recommend that the area be declared as a distinctive area and landscape, whether that threat arises from:

a) land use conflicts; or

b) multiple land use changes over time; or

c) any other land use threat prescribed for the purposes of this section.

Having undertaken fieldwork; reviewed background material, including past landscape assessment studies; and reviewed the legislative criteria, advice regarding the proposed Surf Coast Declaration Area is included in the following sections of this report.
Initial Advice:

Surf Coast Declaration Area

The proposed Surf Coast Declaration Area is mapped on page 5, and is based on the following points of justification/explanation:

- Development pressure decreases with distance from the coast. This assumption has been confirmed by Council Officers.

- There are no significant landscapes or landscape features to speak of, in the hinterland. Mount Duneed, the creeks and waterways, and remnant stands of vegetation could be argued to be of local significance (and the latter two are covered by the ESO and the VPO) only.

- The landscape character changes subtly from 'localised flatlands' to 'western plains, cones and lakes' at Anglesea Road, making it a logical boundary in the northern part of the declaration area.

- Being relatively flat to gently undulating, the landscape is highly visible from the main road corridors. This is supported by visibility mapping.

- Land either side (and visible from) the Surf Coast Highway, and the Great Ocean Road, should therefore be included. Hence the western extension from Anglesea Road, along Hendy Main Road, and then down Elkington Road.

- The areas of RCZ zoned land outside the Anglesea township boundaries should be included. Hence the western boundary in the very southern part of the declaration area following Hurst Road (excluding the western deviation), to the coast. An alternative is for the boundary to follow the boundaries of the National Park in this area.

- The landscape between Bellbrae and Jan Juc should be included, as well as the Thompson Valley, from the point of view of managing green/natural breaks between settlements.

- The northern and eastern extent is logically the Surf Coast municipal boundary.

Visibility and topography mapping are included on pages 6 and 7 of this report to further illustrate these points.
Proposed Surf Coast Declaration Area, base map source: Google Maps
Topography: Surf Coast

Distinctive Areas & Landscapes - Landscape Assessment Review (Stage 1)
Barrabool Hills

The Barrabool Hills are located to the west of Geelong, and extend inland approximately to the small settlement of Gnarwarre. The hills slope steeply down to the Barwon River to the north, and are incised by numerous other small creeks and gullies. The eastern edge of the Barrabool Hills is bisected by the M1 Geelong Bypass, and the lower foothills on the eastern side of the freeway are almost fully developed with residential subdivisions, at average suburban densities.

Landscape significance

To the west of the freeway, the landscape is characterised by a series of rolling bucolic hills, steep in parts, with expansive outlooks from the higher reaches. The open, pastoral hills are mostly cleared for grazing, but stands of remnant vegetation are scattered throughout, particularly adjacent to waterways. Dwellings and farming structures associated with large rural holdings are located intermittently in the landscape, but these are more concentrated around the Barrabool and Ceres settlements, where smaller hobby farms (and a small number of wineries) exist.

The Barrabool Hills were not included in the study area for the Great Ocean Road Region Landscape Assessment in 2003, but were assessed in 2007 as part of a separate study undertaken by Planisphere for landscapes within Surf Coast, north of the Princes Highway. The assessment concluded that the Barrabool Hills are distinctive for their undulating to hilly topography, historic buildings and shelterbelts, but while described as ‘scenic’ they were not found to be significant.

The hills are, however, listed by the National Trust and are rated as being of Regional Significance (Hermes Number 191879; Classified: 01/06/2009).

This is based on the following attributes:

- The Barrabool Hills are significant for its aesthetic qualities and for geological and geomorphological reasons at Regional Level.
- The Barrabool Hills are significant for it strong association with indigenous peoples at a Regional Level.
- The Barrabool Hills are of historical importance at a Regional Level.

Source: Google Maps
Other significance

As noted in the aforementioned National Trust statement of significance, the Barrabool Hills are considered significant:

- For their geological and geomorphological qualities. The area is known for its Barrabool Stone, a sandstone that was sourced from quarries around Ceres from the 1850s. The stone has been used in many prominent buildings in Geelong and Melbourne. A number of Heritage Overlays are in place in the Barrabool Hills, protecting local stone buildings.

- For their cultural heritage importance, particularly to local Aboriginal people, the Wathaurong. A number of sites are listed in the Barrabool Hills under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

The area is also considered important for its status as productive rural land.

Strategic issues & threats

The Barrabool Hills are located at the intersection of three municipalities, Surf Coast Shire, the City of Greater Geelong and Golden Plains Shire.

While the lower eastern foothills (to the east of the M1) are zoned General Residential and are almost fully developed, the majority of the Barrabool Hills landscape to the west of the M1 is zoned Farming.

The Barrabool Hills are included in the *G21 Regional Growth Plan* (2013) as an 'identified settlement break'. The purpose of this settlement break is outlined on p. 31:

- To protect National Trust classified landscape of cultural heritage significance. Rural production is the primary land use activity in addition to the small settlements of Ceres and Barrabool.

The Barrabool Hills are not considered to be under threat of significant or irreversible land use change that would affect the landscape or other values of the area.

View of the hills looking southwards from Merrawarp Road, near the Hamilton Highway

Rolling, cleared hills as viewed from Gully Road

Expansive outview over the hills towards Geelong from a high point in Gully Road
Barrabool Hills recommendation

- Do not include in recommended Surf Coast Declaration Area

Based on the following explanation / justification:

- The distinctive areas and landscapes legislation is in place to protect and manage areas of importance to the people of Victoria, implying a threshold of state significance.

- While the Barrabool Hills are a picturesque and highly visible landscape feature, and are considered regionally significant by the National Trust, they are not of state significance for their landscape attributes.

- The Barrabool Hills are not considered under threat as they are appropriately zoned Farming, and are not identified as a growth area, nor are they located immediately adjacent to a designated growth area. Quite the contrary, they are highlighted in the G21 Regional Growth Plan as an ‘identified settlement break’, and are explicitly described as such on p. 31.

- Further, the hills do not relate geographically to the Surf Coast area that has been recommended for declaration, which is centred on the coastline and focused on the management of development pressures in those fragile and popular coastal environments, of state landscape significance.
Thompson Valley (North) green break

The Thompson Valley (North) ‘green break’ investigation area is located to the south of the designated growth area of Armstrong Creek, immediately to the north of the Surf Coast Shire municipal boundary, to the north of Mount Duneed Road. It is bound generally by Ghazeepore Road in the west, and Baenschs Lane in the east.

Landscape significance

Mount Duneed is a notable rise at the eastern end of the investigation area and Mount Duneed Road climbs to this topographical high point, and then slopes down towards the west. Apart from Mount Duneed, the land is relatively flat and open comprising cleared grassy paddocks with scatterings of indigenous vegetation, including isolated large trees. Exotic shelter belts and agricultural fencing demarcate the paddocks and add to the rural character.

The existence of this ‘green break’ creates a sense of rural openness when travelling along Mount Duneed Road, and is important for the role it plays in this visual ‘breathing space’. The new dwellings of Armstrong Creek and associated subdivision works are visible at a distance to the north, across the open pastures. This area links geographically and visually to the open, rural landscape to the south of the municipal boundary, with both areas combining to create the visual experience of the ‘open, green landscape’ while travelling along Mount Duneed Road.

Mount Duneed Road / Surf Coast Shire boundary formed the northern extent of the Great Ocean Road Region Landscape Assessment in 2003, and therefore this area was not assessed as part of that study.

While important for the role it plays as a visual and physical green break, the landscape is not significant (when measured against established visual significance criteria), with the exception of Mount Duneed itself, which is potentially of local significance.

The Thompson Valley (North) ‘green break’ investigation area, shown with a dashed line.

Source of original plan: G21 Regional Growth Plan, 2013
Other significance

The Thompson Valley (North) green break contains a number of (mostly locally) significant features that are covered by various overlays in the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme:

Environmental significance – ESO1 covering stands of remnant vegetation and creeks and waterways to protect areas of flora and fauna habitat; and ESO2 protecting Lake Connewarre and surrounds (at the eastern edge of the investigation area) as a high value Ramsar wetland, with associated flora and fauna habitat.

Significant vegetation – VPO1 applies to significant indigenous roadside vegetation and linear reserves throughout the area.

Cultural heritage significance – a number of individual sites comprising historic residences, cottage ruins and/or associated farming structures and infrastructure are covered by the Heritage Overlay, including HO315, HO317 and HO1716.

Strategic issues & threats

The Thompson Valley (North) green break is zoned Farming, which currently protects its status as an open, rural landscape.

The area is located immediately to the south of the Greater Geelong Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), and is highlighted in the G21 Regional Growth Plan as part of an ‘identified settlement break’, with the purpose as follows (p. 31):

- To ensure a strong farmed landscape character between the urban areas of Armstrong Creek and Torquay, encourage rural production and maintain existing town identities.

Photos above depict the open rural character of the Thompson Valley (North) ‘green break’ from various points along Mount Duneed Road. The southern development front of Greater Geelong can be seen in the photo, bottom right.
Strategic issues & threats continued

While highlighted as an identified settlement break, the above purpose statement refers only generally to the area “between Armstrong Creek and Torquay” and is mapped on p. 27 of the G21 report with a symbol that appears to be located to the south of Mount Duneed Road.

Therefore, while currently located outside the Greater Geelong UGB and recognised for the role it plays as a green break between settlements, this recognition is not absolutely explicit. It could be argued that mapped and written references to the area in the G21 report are open to interpretation. In conclusion, the area’s geographical location immediately abutting the southern development front of Geelong makes it vulnerable to development pressure and future change.

Thompson Valley (North) ‘green break’ recommendation

- Include in recommended Surf Coast Declaration Area

Specifically, extend the recommended Surf Coast declaration area to include the investigation area depicted on the map on p. 6 of this report, with consideration of the location of the adjacent Bellarine area that has been recommended for declaration.

Based on the following explanation / justification:

- While not a significant landscape (when measured against established visual significance criteria), the area is very important visually and geographically for the role it plays as part of a broader strategic landscape area i.e. as an open rural green break between settlements, and between Geelong and the Great Ocean Road landscapes.

- The wider Thompson Valley green break has a direct relationship with the coastal landscapes of state significance further south, in that it separates them (and specifically Torquay) from the built-up urban area of Geelong.

- When travelling along Mount Duneed Road, the Thompson Valley (North) green break acts as an important ‘distance barrier’, mitigating the visual impact of the southern development front of Geelong. It also relates visually and geographically to the open landscape to the south of the municipal boundary; the two areas combining to form the whole ‘landscape experience’ when driving along Mount Duneed Road.

- The area’s geographic location immediately abutting the Greater Geelong UGB potentially makes it vulnerable to development pressure and policy change in the future.

- The inclusion of the Thompson Valley (North) green break in the recommended Surf Coast declaration area ensures that the whole landscape between the southern reaches of Geelong and Torquay are included and appropriately managed.

- It could be argued that the exclusion of the area is arbitrary and based solely on a municipal boundary i.e. it is a very important part of the wider Thompson Valley settlement break, which bears no relationship to a municipal boundary.

- The area includes a number of locally significant environmental and heritage sites, and stands of valued indigenous vegetation.
Lake Modewarre and surrounds

Lake Modewarre is a shallow crater lake located between the Princes Highway and Cape Otway Road, to the east of Winchelsea. When full, the water body covers an area of approximately 540 hectares. The lake is popular for recreational fishing.

Landscape significance

Lake Modewarre and surrounds are located within the Western Plain, Cones and Lakes landscape character type that was defined in the Great Ocean Road Region Landscape Assessment in 2003. The area is characterised by generally flat topography, divided into large open paddocks. Indigenous vegetation is mostly cleared, and large shelterbelts of cypress pines have been planted as dividers and wind breaks throughout the landscape.

Due to the flat topography and the small number of access roads leading to Lake Modewarre, views to the water body and surrounds are generally not available.

The lake and its environs were not identified as regionally or state significant in the 2003 landscape assessment. A full significance assessment would most likely reveal a visual landscape rating of local significance.

Other significance

Lake Modewarre is subject to an overlay in the Surf Coast Planning Scheme that denotes environmental significance or importance, as follows:

- The lake and its tributaries are covered by ESO1 denoting a significant wetland and/or waterway, and an aquatic system that supports important flora and fauna species.

Location of Lake Modewarre and environs, surrounded by a patchwork of paddocks.

Source: Google Maps
Strategic issues & threats

Lake Modewarre itself is zoned Public Conservation and Resource in the Surf Coast Planning Scheme, with land adjacent to the eastern edge zoned Rural Conservation. The wider environment is zoned Farming.

It is understood that the area was highlighted by the local community in Stage 1 of the DALs community engagement due to a development proposal for sports, accommodation and retail facilities that is currently under consideration by a Development Advisory Committee appointed the Minister for Planning (February 2019).

Lake Modewarre and surrounds recommendation

- Do not include in recommended Surf Coast Declaration Area

Based on the following explanation / justification:

- The landscape is not visually significant at a state (or regional) level.

- While the lake and its surrounds are located adjacent to a current and contentious planning permit application, this alone is not a reason to justify its inclusion as a distinctive area and landscape.

- A separate planning process has been established for the current development proposal, and is being overseen by the Minister for Planning.

- Lake Modewarre and environs are physically removed from the Surf Coast area recommended for declaration, which is centred on the coastline and focussed on the management of development pressures in those fragile and popular coastal environments, of state landscape significance.

Photos above depict the low, flat grassy shores of Lake Modewarre, and the prevalence of exotic shelterbelts in the landscape, bottom left.