

St Leonards Progress Association

Submission to the Bellarine Peninsula Distinctive Area and Landscape – Draft Statement of Planning Policy



Background: In June this year residents and home owners of St Leonards, and across the Bellarine Peninsula, received a letter from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning inviting feedback on the *Bellarine Peninsula Distinctive Area and Landscape – Draft Statement of Planning Policy*. The St Leonards Progress Association has actively encouraged community participation in this process; and in drafting this submission sought feedback from Association members and friends. Their support and feedback has informed the completion of this submission.

As a member of the Combined Bellarine Community Associations, the St Leonards Progress Association has contributed to the groups' ongoing involvement in Bellarine Peninsula DAL consultation processes. We were heartened to see a number of key policy areas advocated by the group, now reflected in the draft Statement of Planning Policy. We offer our strong support to the CBCA and each of the Associations' submissions to the current consultation process.

The St Leonards Progress Association welcomes this opportunity to make the following submission to the *Bellarine Peninsula Distinctive Area and Landscape – Draft Statement of Planning Policy*.

OVERALL RESPONSE: The St Leonards Progress Association offers strong support for the Bellarine Peninsula DAL draft SPP inclusive of each of the eight objectives. In particular the Progress Association strongly supports the recognition given to St Leonards as a 'small coastal village'; the

natural environment; and the setting of standards around the scale and character of future housing growth. In addition we submit the following for consideration.

Giving priority protection to the natural environment and long term settlement boundaries.

- Of concern to many in St Leonards is the negative impact of accelerated and expanding urban-style housing construction in the area. We believe that old and new; people and the natural environment; can (and must) coexist.
- Our boldest aspiration is to see the reintroduction of the Southern Brown / Eastern Barred Bandicoot to the area.
- We strongly support the priority status given to the areas' significant landscapes including nature reserves, green breaks and agricultural land, and the establishment of permanent settlement boundaries.
- We ask that settlement boundaries not be included in the proposed ten year review of the SPP.

We strongly support the prominence given to the Wadawurrung "statement of significance" and recognition of Wadawurrung peoples' knowledge and responsibilities to care for and protect Country and culture.

- However, unless otherwise agreed by the Wadawurrung people, we support strategies aimed at partnering with the Wadawurrung people to be included under all objectives.
- Further we ask that not only are Wadawurrung voices heard, but they are listened to and considered. A shared understanding of partnership and the practice of meaningful engagement will require the development of clear definitions; accountabilities for developers and RPEs; and additional resources to be provided to the Wadawurrung. We ask that this be considered in the process of finalising the SPP.

We support the strengthening of the language of expectation and accountability in each of the policy domains.

- We support this strengthening to realise the intention of the policy objectives and give credence to the very reason the Bellarine Peninsula was declared a distinctive area and landscape in the first place.
- Further, we believe the 50-year vision set out as a condition of DAL SPP warrants a high level of protection against minimalist interpretations at the implementation stage, government changes and powerful interest group lobbying.

Over-development and urban development impacts.

- St Leonards is a designated 'village' under the SPP which means that 'future growth . . . needs to respond to the existing settlement and landscape character and role as [a] small coastal village'. However, in a short space of time the town has seen rapid housing estate expansion and considerable multi-unit 'infill' within the original township. These activities have significantly compromised sensitive natural environments, the small coastal village character of the town and undermined efforts toward sustainability and other intentions of the DAL vision and draft SPP.
- Given the housing estates are already committed to, including the two marked 'growth areas', we suggest: an immediate halt to new planning and building approvals pending implementation of the SPP through amendments to relevant CoGG policies; and development of an Action Plan to address and where possible reverse the negative impacts over over-development.
- Given 'infill' housing often involves the demolition of coastal character houses and construction of multiple units we ask that the SPP articulate standards around infills to ensure they do not compromise the village character, tree canopy, soil permeability, green spaces and coastal heritage of St Leonards.

Protecting green breaks and settlement boundaries.

- The importance of corridors of indigenous vegetation, tree canopies and wetlands across the Bellarine Peninsula as well as within townships cannot be underestimated if native flora and fauna, as well as agriculture, is to survive and flourish. The threat to privately owned green spaces and settlement boundaries given strong political lobbying and public pressure by developers is a concern shared by most communities on the Bellarine.
- In St Leonards, the (original) golf course has been halved, with the eastern section now falling within the settlement boundary and under construction as a housing estate. The owner/developer of this land has made clear an intention to see the settlement boundary shifted west to Ibbotson St and build an extension to the housing estate. This proposal is not supported by many in the community, or by the environmental imperatives as identified in the SPP Background Papers, given the land's patches of remnant vegetation, wildlife habitat and place in the network of Ramsar wetlands and nature reserves on the peninsula. We suggest an Action Plan be developed specifically for the protection of land such as this, as well as biodiversity corridors, roadside vegetation and settlement boundaries bordering sensitive natural environments.