



# Victorian Coastal & Marine Environment Community Attitudes and Behaviour Research: Wave 3

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Prepared for:** Victorian Coastal Council, Department of  
Sustainability and Environment

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## Executive Summary

This Executive Summary outlines the key findings from the 2007 Wave 3 'Victorian Coastal and Marine Environment Community Attitudes and Behaviour Research', which Ipsos has conducted on behalf of the Victorian Coastal Council (VCC) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

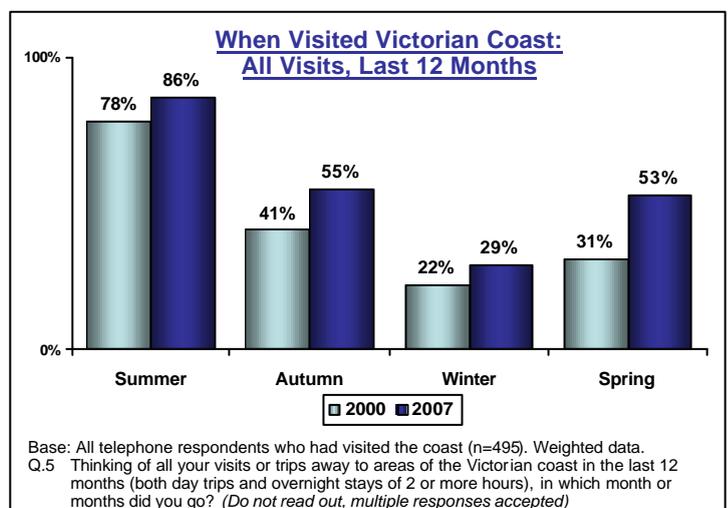
The research included a number of components, including a series of stakeholder interviews, seven Community Engagement Forums with residents and business operators along the Victorian coast, and a telephone survey of 601 Victorians aged 15 years and over – which is the focus of this Executive Summary. The results of the telephone survey have been weighted by age, gender and location (Melbourne versus the rest of Victoria) to more accurately reflect the views of the total Victorian population.

### *Most Victorians living close the coast visit regularly, largely to escape from the daily pressures to a clean, healthy, natural environment*

The vast majority of Victorians have visited the coast at least once in the last 12 months (87%), with day trips remaining the most popular form of visit; 74% of respondents had visited an area of the coast away from their local area, for at least 2 hours (compared with 80% in 2000). On average, these Victorians had done so 9 times over the previous year.

The next most popular form of visit is an overnight stay, which 54% had enjoyed at least once (and 3 times on average over the last year). Many had also made a short visit of less than two hours (47%), and this form of visit tends to be more regular (an average of 14 times in the last 12 months).

Understandably, the closer one lives to the coast, the more likely they are to visit, and the warmer months remain the most popular – especially December and January (with 63% and 66% of visitors having done so during these months, respectively). This represents a slight shift from the 2000 study, when January and February were the standout months (at 59% and 47% respectively).



The significant increase in visits across all seasons reflects Victorians' increased use and reliance on the coast since 2000, which respondents described qualitatively.

Notably, younger Victorians are more likely to have visited the coast in the last 12 months, with only 6% of those aged under 31 not having visited the coast at all, compared with 11% of those aged 31-50 years, 18% of 51-65 years olds and 24% of those aged over 65 years. Among those who have visited the coast, though, younger Victorians tend to enjoy more overnight trips whilst older Victorians tend to make more day or short trips.

In terms of locations, Phillip Island, Apollo Bay and Sorrento are equal first for the most popular, followed by St Kilda beach, Torquay and Rosebud, then Lorne, Anglesea, and Warrnambool. This represents a slightly different mix of locations from 2000, although it is important to note that this includes a new category of short trips of less than 2 hours.

For those who had an overnight stay on the coast during their most enjoyable trip, staying at a friend's or family's place remains the most popular form of accommodation. While there was an increase in people staying at their own holiday home from 1996 to 2000, this has now returned to 1996 levels. There has also been a continued decline in people staying at caravan / camping parks (from 27% in 1996 to 24% in 2000 and 19% in 2007), as well as hotel / motel resorts (from 23%, to 16% and now 13% respectively). Meanwhile, there has been a marked increase in use of rented homes, units or cabins (from 12% in 2000 to 22%)

The most enjoyable or valued aspects of people's coastal visits on an *unprompted* basis centres around simply being at the beach, spending time with friends and family, getting away from it all and having a change of scenery – particularly one that is natural and involves water, as well as enjoying the peace and quiet. Qualitatively, people spoke of the coast being an increasingly important place to visit, given the widespread appeal of places with water, especially as many inland waterways are suffering and becoming less accessible due to the on-going drought. Meanwhile, specific activities such as walking, swimming, eating, sightseeing and shopping etc, are considered important secondary factors.

Specific, *prompted* attributes contributing to people's enjoyment of the coast are quite similar, and somewhat consistent with the previous waves of the research (as shown in the table). The key drivers are really about being in a clean, healthy environment, getting away from it all and relaxing with loved ones, more so than engaging in any specific activity.

Crucial Reasons for Visiting the Coast	1996 %	2000 %	2007 %
Being in a clean, healthy environment	53	52	50
Escaping from the pressure of everyday life	52	61	46
Spending time with family	44	51	45
A feeling of open space or freedom	44	47	44
Enjoying nature and wildlife (Previously 'Viewing nature and wildlife'.)	N/A	13	34
Spending time with friends away from family	25	27	28
The presence of undeveloped coastal landscape	N/A	N/A	25
Sporting activities such as walking, jogging, boating or bicycle riding	N/A	N/A	25
The place being quiet and uncrowded (Previously 'Being away from crowds and other people'.)	36	38	24
The presence of recreational facilities such as jetties or picnic tables	N/A	N/A	20
The presence of cafes, restaurants or seaside town life	N/A	N/A	16
The presence of cultural icons or heritage	N/A	N/A	11

Base: All telephone respondents who had visited the coast, last 12 months (n=495). Weighted data.

Notably, enjoying wildlife and nature has become a far more important factor in contributing to people’s enjoyment of Victoria’s coast and marine environments, with 34% rating this as a crucial factor in 2007 (compared with 13% in 2000).

Indeed, the natural environment is seen to be of far better quality and plays a far more important role than man-made attractions in contributing to overall enjoyment of the coastal experience. These findings highlight the important natural capital that the Victorian coast offers, as well as the fact that the community is increasingly recognising this.

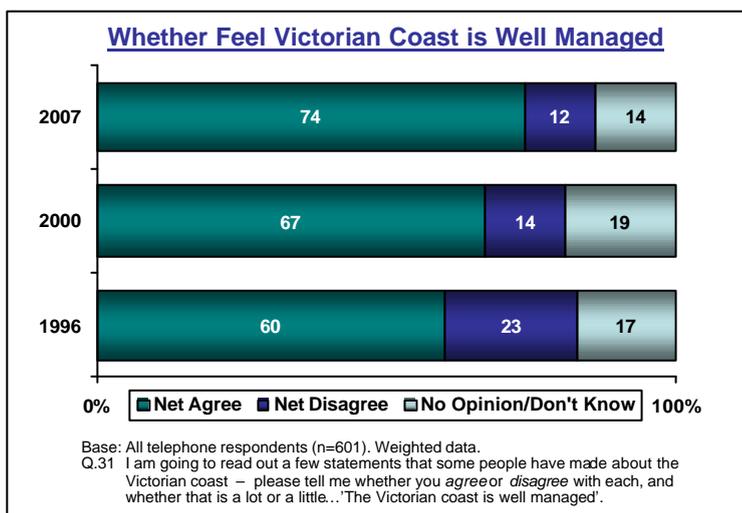
The top three factors (by far) that are seen to contribute to a ‘good day at the beach’ were the *beach being free of litter and debris* (39%, up from 32% in 2000), *clean clear water* (at 32%, up significantly from 2% in 2000), and a *pristine / natural / undeveloped environment* (31% mentioned this, which was a new code).

At the next level down, a reasonable proportion mentioned the beach *not being too crowded with other people* (17% up from 10% in 2000). *Toilet facilities and changing rooms* remain fairly important (at 15% compared to 12%), while there is much less emphasis on *safe swimming conditions* than in 2000 (down from 14% to 6%). These findings point to an increased sensitivity to the impacts of human activities on the coast, which was certainly observed during qualitative discussions in the Community Engagement Forums.

### More Victorians believe that the coast is well managed

The majority of Victorians continue to agree that the Victorian coast is well managed, at 74% *agree a lot / a little*, which has continued to increase with each wave of the research. In 2000, this was due to a decrease in those disagreeing with the statement and appeared to more clearly reflect efforts to improve management of the coast.

However, in 2007, this is partly due to a drop in the number of respondents without an opinion (from 19% to 14%). What this means is that more Victorians are now engaged on the topic of coastal management. This is supported by the qualitative research, where respondents described a higher level of coastal usage, as well as community education and awareness of coastal issues, which is also a reflection of the coast now being more important to more Victorians.



Notably, the proportion who agreed *a lot* that the Victorian coast is well managed has also increased to 32% (from 27% in 2000), although this indicates that there remains plenty of room to improve. Although a small majority of Victorians could not report anything that specifically concerns or annoys them about the coast or marine environments (56%), a significant proportion did (44%).

Those most likely to express concerns were:

- females (49% vs 40% of males);
- people living within 5kms of the coast (48%);
- those who visited the coast 6 or more times in the last year (52% vs 39% those who had visited less often);
- those who had sought information about the coast or marine environments in the last 12 months – who represent 24% of respondents (at 62% vs 39% among those who had not sought information);
- those who belong to an environment or conservation group – who represent 14% of respondents (at 60% vs 42% of others); and
- those with children – who represented 29% of respondents (at 51% vs 41% of those without children).

### ***The impact of human activities is placing more and more pressure on the coast – pollution remains the key concern, and over-development is increasingly of concern***

There are two key, stand out issues of concern to Victorians in relation to the coast – namely rubbish, in terms of litter, plastic bags, cigarettes etc on the beach and in the water (28%), followed by overdevelopment or inappropriate development (14%), which was not raised spontaneously as a concern in the 2000 telephone survey – highlighting its impact on the community. These were also the top two issues expressed by coastal dwellers in the Community Engagement Forums, where reducing pollution was the standout funding priority.

At the next level down was over-crowding / overpopulating areas (7%, similar to the 6% level in 2000), decreasing natural habitat / lack of conservation (a new issue at 7%), poor water quality (a fairly consistent 8%), pollution in general (8%), and concerns about dredging of Port Phillip Bay (a new issue at 8%).

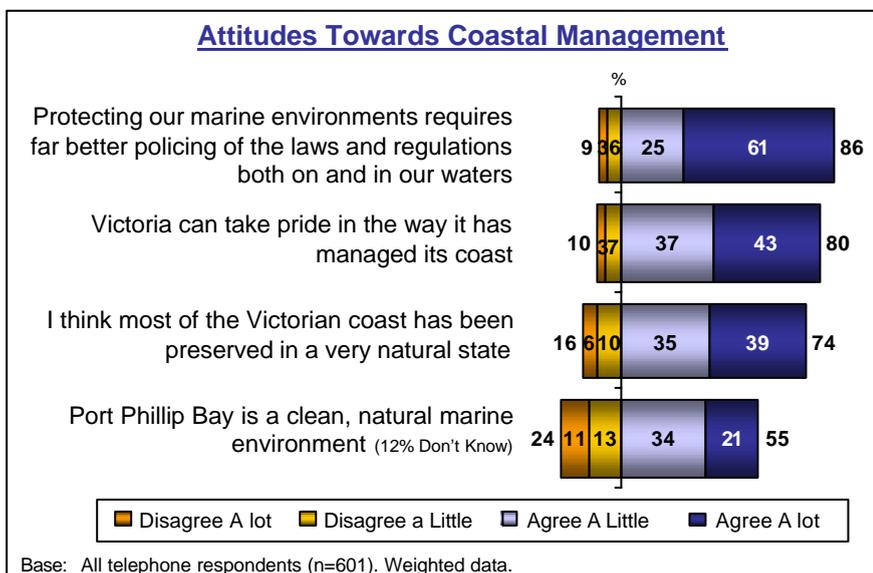
Many other issues were also cited, from too many jet skis and motor boats impacting on the sense of peace and quiet, polluting the water and coming too close to swimmers, a lack of bins, drunks / hoons, over-fishing and poaching (both commercial and leisure fishers),

insufficient beach access in terms of both parking and walking trails, need for greater control of dogs on beaches, effluent outfalls, developments too close to the beach, too many large commercial ships in the bays, need for more revegetation, and a general lack of policing controls in coastal and marine environments.

Some of those who described themselves as being ‘into fishing’ also felt that there are too many Marine Parks. However, in a later question, the vast majority of respondents who were aware of Victoria’s Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries (71% of the population), were also supportive of these (92%, with 71% *strongly* supported them and just 3% were unsupportive). Many agreed that these Parks and Sanctuaries are working to improve marine populations. It should be noted that significantly fewer people from a non-English speaking background were aware of these Parks and Sanctuaries (51% compared with 75% of other Victorians), indicating that targeted communications are required to raise awareness among this significant segment of the community (i.e. around 20% of Victorians as per Census 2001).

Linked with this issue is some anecdotal feedback from fishing enthusiasts in the Community Forums that people from non-English speaking backgrounds have been seen to be more likely to be engaging in inappropriate if not illegal fishing activities, which is thought to be exacerbated by a lack of policing of the waters. Indeed, most respondents agreed that ‘Protecting our marine environments requires far better policing of the laws and regulations both on and in our waters’ (86%, with 61% agreeing a lot – which is fairly consistent with 2000 results). Qualitatively, many participants spoke of excessive fishing being a real problem.

Despite these concerns, Victorians remain quite proud of the way in which the coast has been managed. Many also think that *most of the coast has been preserved in a very natural state*, although this is trending down over time (from 79% net agreement in 1996, to 77% in 2000 and 74% in 2007), reflecting increasing concerns about over-development.



Commendably, efforts to clean up Port Phillip Bay are being recognised, with 55% now agreeing that this is a clean, natural marine environment (up from 44% in 2000 and 37% in 1996).

Other areas of improvement in recent years that respondents acknowledged via the qualitative research components include:

- efforts to clean up beaches in certain areas (particularly metropolitan - where efforts to remove syringes from certain beaches have been recognised, with just 3% nominating this as a concern in the telephone survey, compared to 7% in 2000);
- increased community awareness and education of the importance of coastal conservation;
- improved beach access in some areas through the establishment of designated walking trails, which have the added benefit of reducing the impacts of trampling over sand dunes;
- conservation efforts to revegetate some coastal areas and remove weeds; and
- the establishment of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries, which are thought to have resulted in increased marine wildlife and improved marine health.

### ***Coastal developments are thought to be having social and environmental impacts***

Despite perceptions that the coast is well managed, over half of the Victorian population still lack confidence in Government planning and building guidelines to protect the character and feel of towns along the coast.

In the survey younger Victorians (aged up to 30) were more likely to believe there are appropriate guidelines in place (49% net confident). However, qualitatively it was found that younger respondents

were less aware of controls in place and less affected by and sensitive to recent developments because they have a shorter frame of reference in terms of not having seen the same extent of changes as older Victorians.

Confidence in Current Government Planning to Protect Character of Towns	2000 %	2007 %
Very confident	3	4
Fairly confident	34	31
Not too confident	35	34
Not at all confident	18	18
<b>NET CONFIDENT</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>NET NOT CONFIDENT</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>52</b>
Don't know	10	13

As shown in the chart overleaf, there is a significant rise in the proportion of Victorians who believe the state's coastal towns are increasingly looking like suburbia, with 40% *agreeing a lot* (up from 29% in 2000).

Among the general population there is an increase in agreement that local communities generally have enough say in planning decisions affecting their area (from 32% to 39% net agree).

However, in the Community Engagement Forums with coastal dwellers, this was not the

case, with respondents who had proactively sought to influence the outcome of certain decisions expressing a sense of powerlessness. Indeed, those who belong to an environment or conservation group were more likely to disagree with this statement (50%).

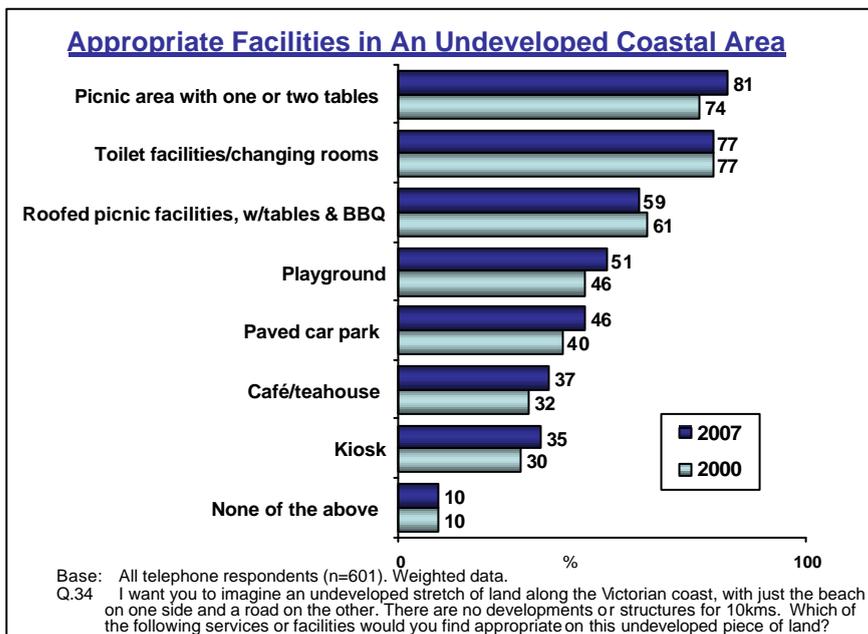
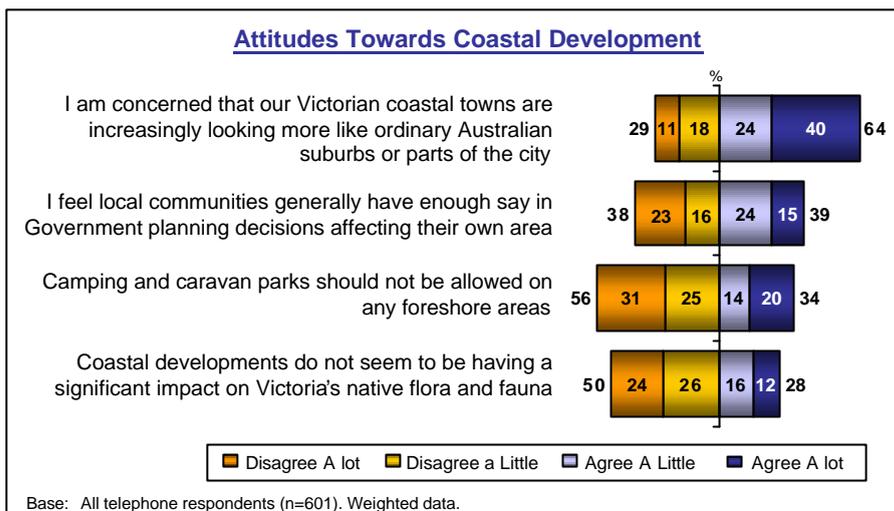
Few Victorians believe that coastal developments are *not* having a significant impact on Victoria's native flora and fauna (just 12% agreed a lot). Qualitatively, people spoke of the natural environment being increasingly fragmented and placed under pressure by developments. Importantly, many also sense that there are impacts they are not aware of.

When it comes to specific services that people believe would be acceptable on a 10km undeveloped stretch of the coast, there is little shift in preferences since 2000. Support remains highest for lower impact facilities such as a picnic area with one or two tables and toilet facilities with changing rooms. A consistent 10% felt that no facilities should be introduced to such an environment.

*"I worry that the shire call for people's input. I don't want our coastline to be like Queensland, the Gold Coast, and fortunately it hasn't happened yet. They call on the people and it goes to Council and then council just rolls over and tells DSE or VCAT what they are expecting to hear."* (Inverloch)

*"I think they just think develop anything on the coast that they can, the developers. There's got to be some limits on that development on the coast."* (Morrington)

*"Over development is an issue. I live in Port Melbourne and the amount of changes over the last 5 years is amazing. The big developers have come in. I see it as more of an environmental issue. It used to be just a beach. Now there is restaurants and condominiums."* (Elwood)



## Marine environments remain quite mysterious to Victorians

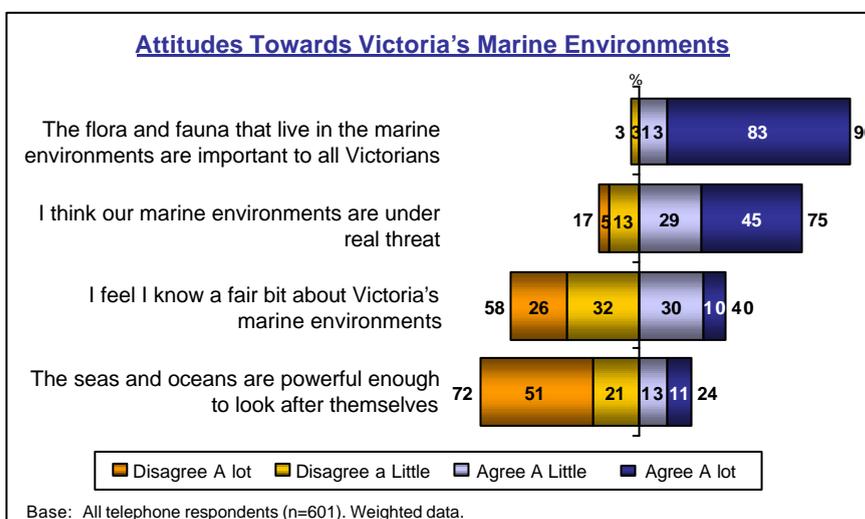
In the Community Engagement Forums, respondents undertook a roundtable brainstorming exercise where they were asked to list the factors that indicate to them whether the coast and marine environments are healthy and whether they are unhealthy. The outcomes for an unhealthy coastal environment were similar to the issues that people cited in the telephone survey.

There is a sense (and understanding) among some Victorians that there may be 'invisible' problems that they simply do not know about, and many expressed a concern about the likely impacts of increasing coastal development on the marine environment, beyond what they can see themselves. For some who are exposed to more acute issues such as the Gunnamatta outfall, one's sense of smell also comes into play.

Very few respondents felt confident to discuss the health of marine environments, as most had not experienced these. Being shown images of marine life in and around Port Phillip Bay generated a strong sense of the importance of protecting the marine environment, and educating the community not only about what is 'down there', but also about the potential impacts of their actions on marine flora and fauna.

Notably, a key insight here is that the general public has limited ability to assess the health of these environments, beyond a primarily visual appraisal. This indicates that there is room to promote the indicators of the health of coastal environments more widely, as a means of engaging the community more closely, addressing concerns and instilling a greater level of confidence about its future management.

Attitudes to the marine environments remain fairly consistent with those in 2000. An overwhelming majority maintain that marine flora and fauna are important to all Victorians (with 83% *agreeing a lot*). However, Victorians are more inclined to *agree a lot* that *our marine environments are under real threat* (rising from 41% in 2000 to 45% this year). Interestingly, although most people disagree (72%), more now agree that *the seas and oceans are powerful enough to look after themselves* (from 15% to 24% net agree).



## Looking ahead, significant efforts are still required to foster greater levels of public confidence

Public attitudes remain polarised in terms of being confident that there are effective long-term strategies in place to preserve and protect the coast in a state that future generations will be happy with (with a decline in net confidence from 48% to 44%, and only 6% being *very confident*).

Confidence in Long Term Strategies to Preserve and Protect Victorian Coast	2000 %	2007 %
Very confident	7	6
Fairly confident	41	38
Not too confident	33	33
Not at all confident	15	15
<b>NET CONFIDENT</b>	48	44
<b>NET NOT CONFIDENT</b>	49	48
Don't know	4	8

While the government is most commonly thought to be responsible for managing and protecting the Victorian coast (Local, followed by State), many of the forum respondents *spontaneously* acknowledged the importance of *everyone* doing their bit to help protect the coast. There is a sense that more education is needed to foster higher levels of personal responsibility and ensure that more people clean up after themselves, which also means that people need to better understand the impacts of their actions.

There is some appeal in taking further action such as volunteering in coastal conservation activities, although many feel that they do not have enough time. The introduction of 'Clean Up the Victorian Coast' days was therefore suggested by forum respondents, with fairly high appeal, mainly because it requires less sacrifice of personal time, but also because it sounded like there would be more fun and momentum, with more people participating.

In turn, a series of questions was posed in the telephone survey to gauge interest in volunteering and offering financial support. The results confirm that people are far more interested in the idea of a Clean Up day than in joining a volunteering group (49% vs 29% respectively). Notably, the younger the respondent, the higher the level of interest in this form of participation (especially among females), suggesting that targeted initiatives could be developed for this segment of the community.

As distinct from offering one's time, a reasonable three in ten respondents said that they would be willing to offer financial support to better protect Victoria's coast. This was much higher among those who belong to an environment or conservation group at 50%, and those with higher incomes were somewhat more likely. Among those willing to contribute financially, per annum amounts ranged from \$5 to \$5,000, with the average amount being \$213 (or \$59 among all respondents).

- Those living closer to the coast suggested the highest amounts (supporting the finding in previous waves that such an initiative could be managed via Council rates). Those aged under 30 years were most likely to contribute and suggested a significantly higher amount than those aged 31+ (i.e. among all respondents including those not willing to

contribute anything, an average of \$128 compared to \$35 respectively). Interestingly, those in the \$60-85K income bracket were the most generous (\$146 on average – again among all respondents), whereas those earning more than this were the least generous (at \$28 on average).

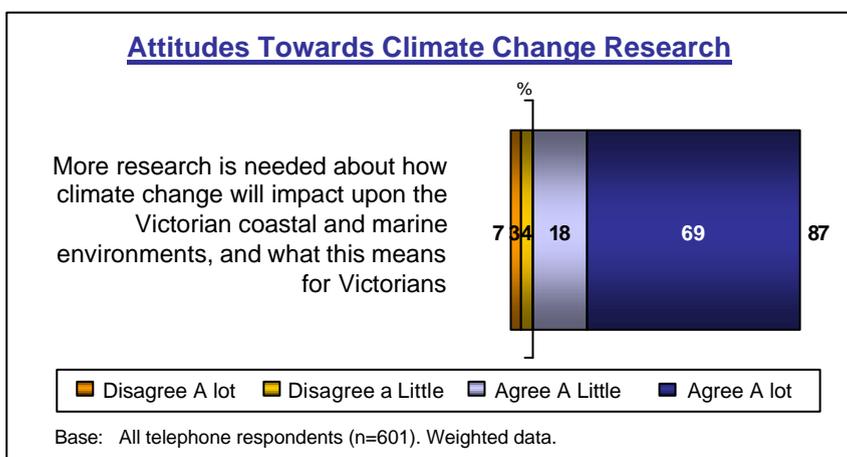
The key reasons for not being willing are *not being able to afford it* (34%), *already paying enough tax* (19%) and this being seen as *the government’s responsibility* (19%).

In terms of people being engaged on coastal matters, almost a quarter of respondents had actively sought information on the Victorian coast or marine environments in the last 12 months. Those who are more likely to have done so are members of environmental or conservation groups, more frequent users of the coast, and those who are concerned about the coast. Notably, only 4% of Western Port Bay residents had done so.

### **The importance of addressing climate change impacts on the Victorian coast cannot be underestimated**

As well as addressing the growing concerns about pollution, development and other impacts of human activities on the coast, there is an emerging issue that the community believes requires attention – namely, climate change.

Respondents felt quite strongly that more research is needed into the likely impacts of climate change on the Victorian coast (69% *agreed a lot*), indicating not only that this is a topic that they know very little about, but also that this is a key area that should be addressed within the updated Coastal Strategy.



Linked with this is a need to continue community education as to what individuals can do to reduce their greenhouse emissions, as few forum respondents could clearly make the link with coastal impacts and what they can personally do. Such communications should also touch on what is being done globally to address climate change, to foster a greater sense of momentum and address concerns expressed by some forum respondents that Victoria’s efforts will have little *total* impact on global emission reductions. This will also mean explaining that private individuals and households are responsible for a large share of global energy and electricity consumption, and hence emissions into the atmosphere.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations for the VCC and DSE's consideration are based on feedback from the Victorian community across the qualitative and quantitative components of the research.

- Ensure that the community's concerns about coastal development are seen to be taken very seriously. This means developing stricter planning and building guidelines that place greater value on maintaining, if not restoring, the significant natural capital that the community is increasingly recognising and valuing in the coast.
  - This also requires more effective engagement and communication with the broader community on planning decisions and how and why these are made, to ensure that their concerns are better addressed, and to instil greater public confidence.
  - Building height limits and other controls, including ecologically sustainable designs, should be considered to address concerns that coastal towns are looking increasingly like suburbia and having detrimental environmental impacts.
- Strive to provide more resources to police and enforce fishing, boating and other controls on activities such as marine pollution and litter, loutish behaviour, removal of dog droppings and keeping dogs on-leash – especially in Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries. This visible presence is important in demonstrating efforts that are being made to protect the coast.
- Determine and dedicate what will be regarded as a significant and appropriate level of funding for research into how climate change will affect the Victorian coast, and hence users of this environment, in recognition of strong community concerns about this emerging issue. Efforts in this regard should in turn be communicated to the public, also linking in empowering messages about what individuals can do.
- Continue to fund community-based coastal conservation efforts, and other coastal restoration activities including pollution reduction, pest and weed control, revegetation and improved access through establishment of designated walking trails. Indeed, pollution being the number one concern means that a significant proportion of coastal funding should be dedicated to addressing pollution issues.

- Consider developing a marketing strategy and campaign to instil a greater sense of value in the community as to the natural capital of the coast, and hence how important it is that everyone does their bit to protect this unique and fragile environment for today and future generations alike. This would be an important means of fostering a greater level of engagement with the community, whilst also incorporating the community education that many Victorians believe is required in order to address people's concerns and hence reduce the growing impact of human activities on the Victorian coast.
  - Such a campaign would require supporting information on how people can contribute, whether through taking more personal responsibility for their actions, participating in conservation activities (especially in reducing pollution, but also in reducing the impact of harmful actions such as walking over sand dunes), and/or offering financial support to the various Coast Action / Coast Care groups, or other means.
  - Messages not only about the environmental impacts of various activities, but also the social impacts (such as fines and other penalties for inappropriate or illegal behaviour, the potential of people or wildlife being injured – e.g. by broken glass, plastic, watercraft being too close to swimmers and snorkellers, etc), should be targeted towards those in the community who tend to be less aware, including younger people, males, those from a non-English speaking background and even those who are fishing enthusiasts.
  - This is also an opportunity to promote the Coastlinks website more widely.
- Consider developing a 'Clean Up the Victorian Coast Day' to encourage more community involvement. This could be targeted towards younger Victorians in particular, who are generally more interested in the idea than older Victorians.
- Consider developing targeted communications for Victoria's non-English speaking populations about the establishment of the Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries, and link this with the need for strict adherence to fishing laws to help restore a healthy and sustainable level of fish stocks in Victorian waters.
  - Other information about the impacts of various activities should also be tailored for this segment, where awareness of issues is generally lower.