



GOOD DESIGN + THE COAST

ISSUE 03
THE OFFICE OF THE
VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECT

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This publication is intended to direct the community to existing strategic documents that support good design on the coast. It seeks to raise awareness of the issues surrounding coastal design and inspire innovative responses to these issues as we work towards a better quality, sustainable and highly valued built environment on the coast.

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Importance of the coast

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Culturally, the coast is of great importance to indigenous communities, for the history of early settlement in Australia and now for millions of Victorians who visit, work or live in coastal areas. There is significant social value in the diversity of coastal experiences.

Victoria's coast also has notable economic value, in terms of the natural resource industries, tourism and recreation that prosper through operation in a coastal environment.

Good coastal design shows respect to both the natural environment and the character of coastal towns.



The Victorian Coastal Council

The Victorian Coastal Council (VCC) is the peak body for the strategic planning and management of the Victorian coast and advises the Minister for the Environment and Climate Change on the planning, management, conservation and ecologically sustainable use and development of Victoria's coast. It prepares strategic state-wide guidelines for the planning and management of coastal areas.

The achievability of a built environment that is sustainable and supports local social, cultural and environmental values will depend on our expectations of good design. It will involve the community and it will rely on learning from good examples. The Victorian Coastal Council is a body that advocates for good design and is leading a growing awareness of how good design can provide solutions to some of the planning and development issues faced in our coastal areas.

Victorian Coastal Strategy

The strategy, revised and updated every five years, maintains a long-term vision for the planning and management of the Victorian coast. It provides the framework to ensure that the coast of Victoria will be protected so it remains a pleasure to experience by both present and future generations, respected by all and recognised as one of Victoria's assets.

Local governments in some coastal areas have put in place Local Planning Policy Frameworks containing strategic statements and planning policies that reflect the recommendations and objectives of the Victorian Coastal Council.

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Landscape Assessment Studies
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The guidelines have been developed to assist the Victorian Coastal Council, coastal managers, local governments and other stakeholders to implement the Victorian Coastal Strategy. The primary purpose of the guidelines is to define those issues which should be considered in the siting, design and construction of new structures and the improvement of existing structures in coastal areas.

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The awards are presented annually by the Victorian Coastal Council and Coast Action/Coastcare to celebrate and recognise the great work that a diverse range of groups, individuals, businesses and governments undertake to protect and enhance Victoria's unique marine and coastal environments. The Building and Design category recognises excellence in developing built facilities in coastal locations that are functional, minimise public risk, and respect and complement the coastal landscape.

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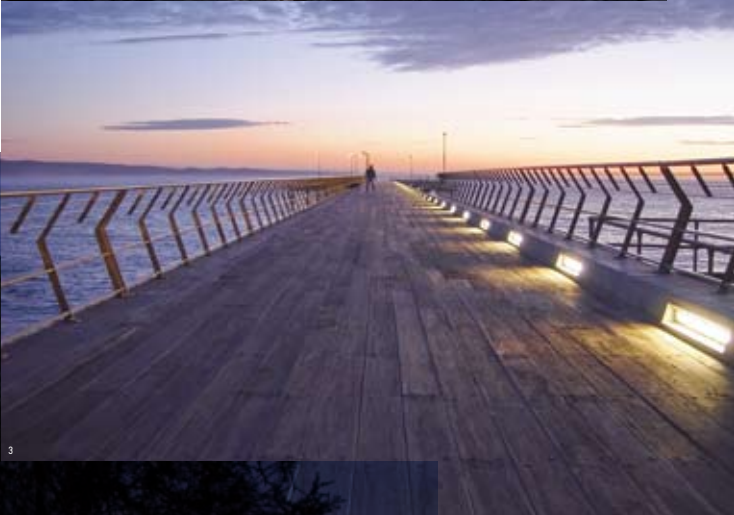
Building in the Coastal Environment
What to do

At each stage of a project - feasibility, briefing, procurement, construction, ongoing operation and management - government, community and designers can play an important role in helping raise expectations for the quality of the built environment in coastal areas.

Seven actions are suggested:

- 1 Recognise good design in coastal areas and raise awareness of its value to the coast and the community.
- 2 Recognise the importance of the users and the community and involve them in consultation and design development processes.
- 3 Communicate and develop an understanding of design considerations specific to coastal areas.
- 4 Seek advice from qualified architects, designers and planners.
- 5 Understand the planning scheme of the municipality and any other policies that will affect development in coastal areas such as urban design frameworks, structure plans, and neighbourhood character studies.
- 6 Refer to the Victorian Coastal Council's "Siting and Design Guidelines for Structures on the Victorian Coast" <http://www.vcc.vic.gov.au/siting/index.htm>
- 7 Ensure the procurement and construction processes support good design.

Every new project is a chance to inspire and contribute to our cultural identity. Coastal projects can't be hidden - they will be part of our experience of the coast and should be carefully designed to enhance that experience as much as possible.



Credits

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Issues and challenges on the coast

Compelling demands and expectations, and potential impacts on important natural and cultural values are at the foundation of many debates related to coastal planning and development. Strong policies and strategies that support good siting and design at the local level are needed to ensure projects are respectful of the specific characteristics of coastal environments.

Population pressures and the sea change phenomenon

Coastal municipalities are continuing to experience rapid population growth, particularly those located within 60-90 minutes drive of Melbourne. The increased popularity of the coast has seen coastal populations grow at faster rates than Victoria as a whole.

The populations of coastal towns vary greatly throughout the year because of seasons, festivals and major events. These population fluctuations place pressure on the natural coastal environment and existing services and infrastructure, as well as the fabric of local communities.

Recognising these population pressures is an important first step in achieving sustainability in coastal settlements.

Local character and sense of place

Coastal settlements and communities have been shaped by a diverse range of historical and economic influences. This is demonstrated in the unique character of different coastal towns. Maintaining and evolving the character of local coastal communities while accommodating fast growing populations is an increasing challenge.

Achieving greater density through height is one approach that needs careful definition. Decisions like these need to be made in the context of structure plans that address broad issues within towns and most importantly on the rural-urban interface.

Public access and facilities

The Victorian public owns a remarkable 96 per cent of Victoria's foreshore. Public infrastructure such as life saving clubs, amenity blocks, car parks and pathways are provided on the foreshore. This infrastructure should facilitate the public's enjoyment, needs and safety and control access to sensitive areas.

Many poorly designed private developments along the coast are encroaching on the public owned foreshore. This has a negative impact on the coastal environment by restricting views and public access, overshadowing public spaces and diminishing the beauty of our coastal places.

Environmental issues

- continued habitat fragmentation and subsequent biodiversity loss in sensitive coastal ecosystems;
- weed and pest animal invasion causing large scale changes to coastal environments;
- deterioration of water quality and quantity in coastal catchments; and
- disturbance of coastal acid sulfate soils that can cause significant damage to the environment and infrastructure.

Climate change

Rising sea levels will have a significant impact on Victoria's coastline; low-lying coastal areas will be inundated more often and more severely, shorelines will erode, and dune systems will move landward. Importantly, the current extent of the public owned foreshore will diminish as the sea encroaches and shorelines retreat.

The frequency and magnitude of extreme storms and storm surges is also expected to increase. Sea level rise and more frequent extreme weather events resulting from climate change pose a heightened risk to infrastructure such as buildings, roads and piers.

How does good design give us value on the coast?

GOOD DESIGN PRINCIPLE	VALUE
Reflect and respond to community needs and identity	Promote pride in our places, increase public safety, reduce vandalism and strengthen community connectedness
Reflect and respond to cultural values and diversity	Develop a strong sense of community and place, support a sense of belonging, and contribute to contemporary culture and identity
Retain and integrate cultural heritage	Celebrate history and support memory. Promote understanding of and continuity with the past
Integrate and enhance key views and local features	Enhance local identity and pride in places, and support tourism
Prioritise and enhance the design of public places	Provide safe, positive places that promote community pride and ownership through responsiveness to natural beauty
Provide for physical and visual access to the foreshore and outdoor spaces	Enhance the sense of connection to the environment and the community through improved accessibility. Promote inclusiveness and recreation
Treat public infrastructure on dune systems and foreshore (access ramps, steps, look-outs, benches etc) with careful consideration	Reduce visual clutter and protect the natural environment
Promote the clustering of activities and shared use of facilities	Provide accessible services, reduce travel distances, reduce footprint, protecting and preserving our natural environment
Celebrate great community facilities	Give expression to local identity and cultural values
Avoid 'ribbon' development, infill within existing town boundaries	Minimise town expansion, preserve natural landscape and vistas, retain distinction between towns
Provide diverse housing types and costs	Promote inclusive communities through more choices to suit changing and diverse household demographics
Adopt Ecologically Sustainable Design principles including controlled solar access, natural light and ventilation, responsive siting, use of local materials and services, rainwater capture and water recycling	Minimise impact on the environment and maximise comfort and enjoyment of built spaces
Minimise disturbance to indigenous vegetation and use locally indigenous species in landscaping	Protect habitat for indigenous species and preserve ecosystems
Design for impact of harsh coastal weather on the built environment and outdoor spaces	Minimise maintenance, increase longevity of structures

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Address
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Department of Premier and Cabinet
Level 2, 1 Treasury Place Melbourne VIC 3002

Mailing Address
Office of the Victorian Government Architect
Department of Premier and Cabinet
PO Box 4312 Melbourne VIC 3001

Telephone -61 3 9651 6583

Email info@governmentarchitect.dpc.vic.gov.au

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Printed on Australian made paper



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Designing on the coast

The fundamental principles of good design remain important, as when designing in cities, suburbs or remote settings, but on the coast an approach that considers the following specific issues is vital:

- coastal culture and the appropriateness of new built form for the existing character of the place;
- protecting significant views of waterways and from waterways;
- the coastal environment and coastal landscapes as a dominant setting;
- the spaces around buildings and maintaining the coastal landscape between towns along the coast, avoiding 'ribbon' development;
- continuity of the built and natural public realms;
- effects of extreme coastal weather on the built environment and outdoor spaces; and
- effects of different use-patterns and seasonal occupation.

Definition of the coast

The Victorian coast is broadly defined to include the sea and seabed to the State limit (5.5 kilometres from the high water mark), and all land and inland waters within the coastal catchment. However, regarding good design in coastal areas, it is important to consider the impacts of developments when:

- the development will have an impact on the character or sustainability of a coastal community;
- the structure can be seen from the foreshore, or the foreshore can be seen from the structure;
- the development will have an ecological impact on the foreshore or marine environment, for example, through stormwater drainage, runoff, or on biodiversity; and
- the foreshore or marine environment will have an impact on the development, for example through erosion, flooding, wave attack, or corrosion.

The definition of a coastal community is still widely debated, but the inclusion of those cities, towns, and other settlements within 5 kilometres inland of the foreshore is generally accepted.

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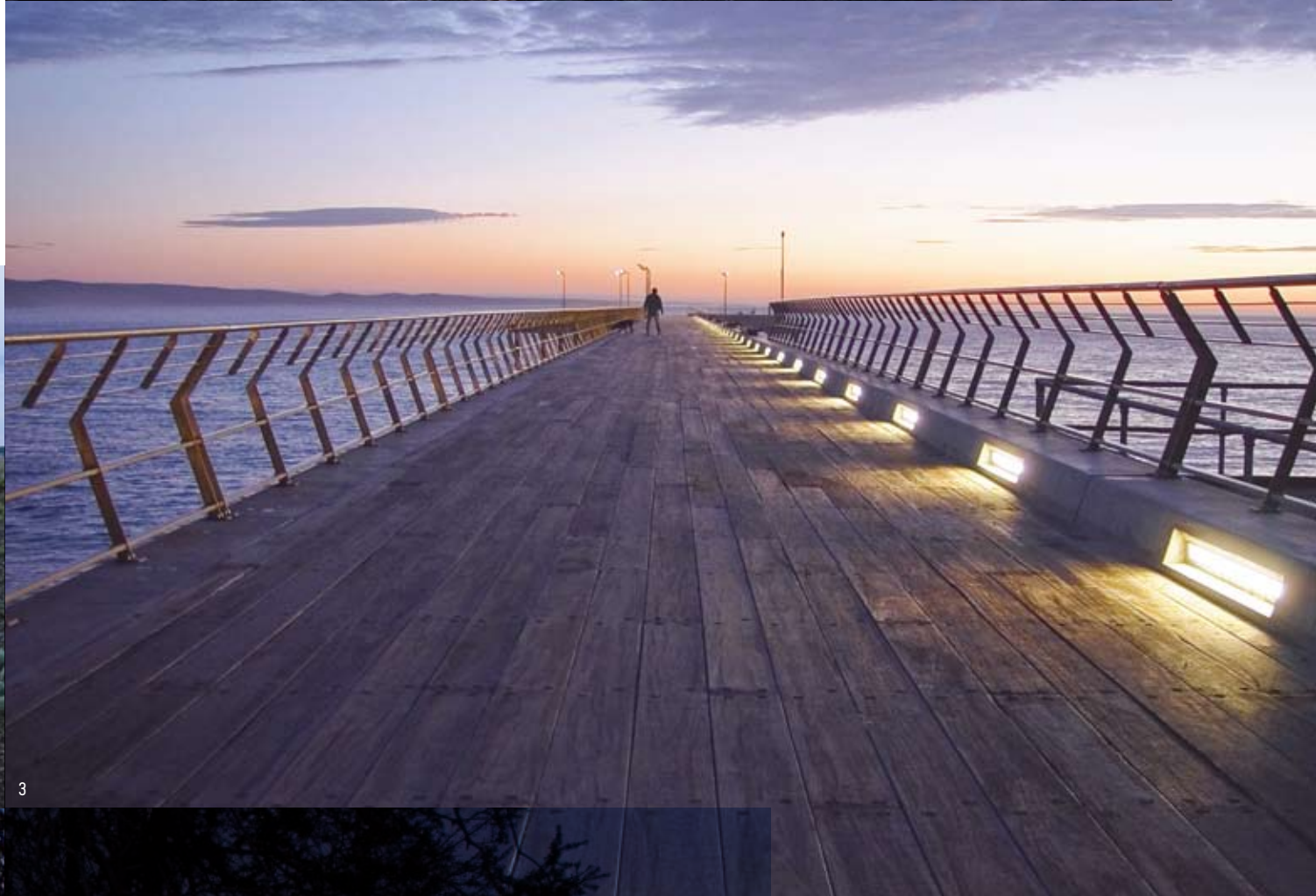
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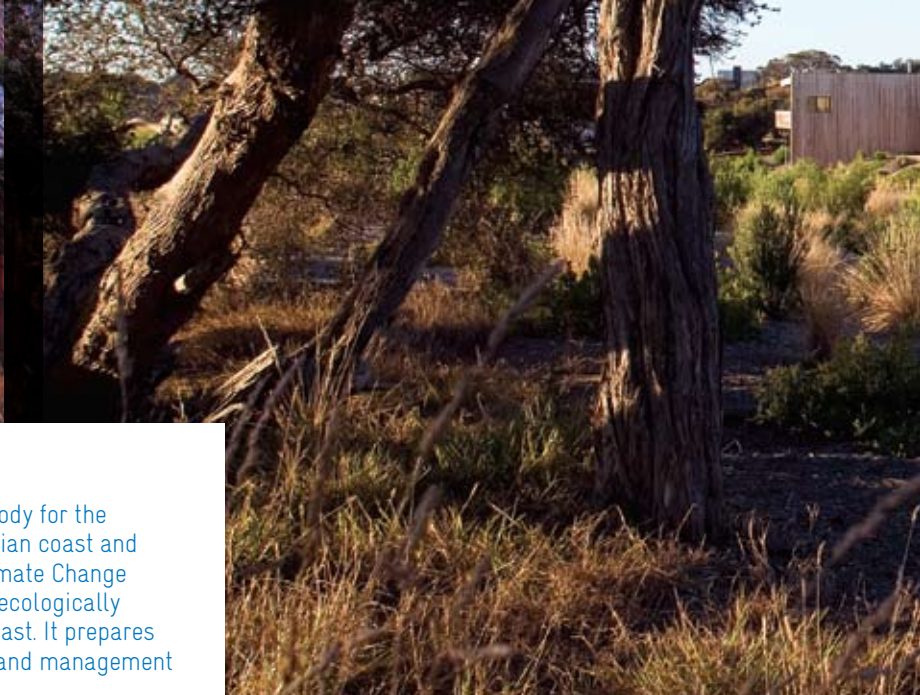
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Environmental issues

Specific issues of major concern along the coast include:

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These are not typical suburban environments. Simple, modest and informal buildings that avoid dominating the landscape and celebrate a local sense of place will ensure we can continue to enjoy the things we value most about our coastal places.

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Telephone +61 3 9651 6583

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