

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Climate Resilience

Traralgon – Tuesday 3 September 2024

MEMBERS

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

Jacinta Ermacora

Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

John Berger

Ann-Marie Hermans

Evan Mulholland

Rachel Payne

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Tony Patchell, Secretary, Loch Sport Business & Tourism Association;

Chris Waites, Chief Executive Officer, Gippsland Ports; and

Glenn Arnold, President, and

Stephen Duncan, Treasurer, Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the hearings of the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Climate Resilience in Victoria. We welcome representatives of the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club and the Loch Sport Business & Tourism Association.

All evidence we take today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided under the *Constitution Act 1975* and the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law and you are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence today is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearings, and transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Chair of this committee and a Member for Southern Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council. I will just get the rest of the committee to introduce themselves.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I am Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria Region.

Wendy LOVELL: Wendy Lovell, Member for Northern Victoria Region.

Melina BATH: Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria Region. Welcome.

Gaëlle BROAD: Hi. I am Gaëlle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria Region.

John BERGER: John Berger, Southern Metropolitan Region.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Sarah Mansfield, Western Victoria Region.

Jacinta ERMACORA: And I am Jacinta Ermacora, Western Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: Thanks, everybody. What I might do is get each of you to introduce yourselves and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of, and then I will invite you to make an opening statement.

Stephen DUNCAN: Stephen Duncan. I am the Treasurer of the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club.

Glenn ARNOLD: Glenn Arnold, the President of the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club.

Tony PATCHELL: Tony Patchell. I am the Secretary of the Loch Sport Business & Tourism Association and also the secretary of the foreshore committee.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much for coming in. I will invite you now to make an opening statement and then we will move on to questions. If you can keep your opening statements to around 5 minutes or so, then we will have plenty of time to discuss. I do not know who wants to go first.

Tony PATCHELL: I have been flagged to go first.

Visual presentation.

Tony PATCHELL: I have been a member of the foreshore committee at Loch Sport for almost nine years now – in fact a bit more than nine years. Erosion down there has always been a problem. The sand has a tendency to drift from west to east and since basically the town has been there, people have been putting in

groynes. DELWP put in a lot of groynes. Residents have put in groynes. If you have a look on the screen there, you will see that the way groynes work is they capture the sand on the western side and hold it there, even during storms et cetera. They provide north-facing beaches, and as we go along – I do not even remember how many there are, there are probably about 70 of them. That is the marina just in the left-hand corner there, and as you can see, they just keep on going. Where they stop is where the major erosion starts. Now, we have been fighting for something to be done about this erosion. I have personally been fighting for about nine years. Danny O'Brien has been instrumental in trying to help us raise funds to do something about it – put more groynes in. We have had something like nine reports from coastal engineers, marine engineers, over 20 years telling us that the only permanent fix is groynes and rock revetment. Lily D'Ambrosio granted us a \$400,000 amount of money out of the 2022–23 budget to do something about the erosion.

The community – or should I say the foreshore committee, which is a part of DELWP; it is a committee of management – asked to be on the steering committee. We were ignored. The community was ignored until they had done major – let me put it this way: a report was done in 2021, in May. That report in May was done by a guy that is a coastal marine engineer that has done numerous studies down there over the years – in fact he has done three that I know of – and has always come up with groynes and rock revetment. When we got the \$400,000 – or should I say when DELWP got the \$400,000, they went out and got a further report from a company called BMT, and to make a long story short, BMT came up with six different ways of handling it. The only one they said was permanent – or the most permanent one – was groynes and rock revetment. Two years later we have asked, 'Where is the \$400,000?' Because nothing has been done, absolutely nothing.

With climate change what we are noticing is the winds are becoming exceedingly strong. The prevailing winds there are westerly. When the winds come up – this last week has been a nightmare – the erosion is probably – well, this last week we have probably lost another 2 metres of shoreline. We are in the area that is not protected by the groynes. The Seagull Drive car park, which is a major launching ramp during seasons, is out of action. The Boulevard boat ramp is out of action; that is the other, smaller boat ramp. We have three boat ramps in Loch Sport. Two of them are unusable. The school holidays are coming. We are a tourist town. This is just all getting worse and worse and worse.

As I say, we lobbied and lobbied and lobbied over those nine years. I cannot count how many letters I have written to politicians, and Danny O'Brien is the same. We raised a petition from the residents. There are over 1200 permanent residents in Loch Sport. We raised a petition, which was signed by somewhere near 800, asking for more groynes, and that was presented to Parliament. It has been going on for years, and, as I say, when we finally got some money we were told, 'It's gone.' It has been spent on reports. But no-one can actually – Steve Dimopoulos came down here, and he asked the question of the DELWP staff or the DEECA staff that were there, and they could not answer it.

Wendy LOVELL: What was it spent on, did you say?

Tony PATCHELL: Sorry?

Wendy LOVELL: You said it was spent on something. What was that?

Tony PATCHELL: All we are getting is 'It was spent on reports'.

Wendy LOVELL: Right.

Tony PATCHELL: Now, how you can spend \$400,000 on reports when the last report we got as a committee in 2017 was with a \$10,000 grant – and it was a thorough report from a coastal engineer. The same one, Doug Oldfield, did a report in 2021, and he went and looked at the condition of every single groyne. Some will need repair and some will not, because some are timber.

If you could just go through them, some the residents have put together, which were those tea-tree ones, in frustration over the years. Some are timber, like that, which once again looks like it is a homemade job, if you will forgive the expression. And they are rock ones, which work really well.

If you keep going to the next one, as you can see, this side of the groyne is scooped out. On the other side there is a beach. That does not show it very well, but if you go again, they are the latest ones, which were put in 15 or 16 years ago. That is a better idea because you have got a better picture, but you can see all the sand build-up on

the other side. That is the western side. This side is the eastern side. You tend to get the scooping out, but it is not a problem because it comes out and is as per the first picture. You can see that it is shallow there. There is very little sand there, but it is actually scooped out and there is quite a bit of sand on this other side.

Now, with the recent high tides and massive winds – like, I think we had an extra foot, in the old scale, in the height of the tide, which we have never seen before – those were all covered in water. The water had gone up the sand and over everything with the tide and the waves. They have come back again, so they work. Anyway, I do not want to take up too much of your time.

The CHAIR: That is all right.

Tony PATCHELL: Basically we have put in an FOI to find out where the money has gone.

The CHAIR: Sure.

Stephen DUNCAN: Do you want me to start?

The CHAIR: Either way.

Visual presentation.

Stephen DUNCAN: I suppose now for a bit of history, we are 25 years old as a club, but more recently we installed new clubrooms on the beach in 2010 at a cost of \$1.5 million. And what I have done for the environmental impact is really focus on probably a very simple thing but, in terms of lifesaving, an important aspect, and that is the patrol tower. In 2010 we had a patrol tower on the beach that was sitting on top of a dune, which is basically showing on the right. On this picture here, it is just to the left of the clubhouse on the edge of the beach in 2010.

If you go to the next slide. That shows the patrol tower that was there. It is ground mounted. At the start of the 2013–14 season we had a massive surge tide come in and got quite a lot of erosion there, and that tower was condemned.

Next slide. The brand new elevated tower was put in in 2014–15, and that was the result shortly thereafter. That is the amount of erosion. You cannot see any of the concrete footings et cetera underneath.

Next slide. In 2015–16 the concrete footings were all reinforced by extensive amounts of sandbags and so forth, and shortly thereafter we transitioned in the 2016 season away from the sandbags. They have salvaged the top of the tower, put it on skids and moved it to a totally new location onto a path further up the beach over the course of the season.

That is a newspaper article in 2018 showing the level of erosion that has happened immediately alongside the skid-mounted patrol tower. All of these essentially cost the club quite a lot of money to get a tower up and running, and it is an integral part of our operation.

Next slide. You have got some comparative pictures here. In the 2018–19 season a wet wall was put in front of the clubrooms, and you can see that straight line, which is basically a picket fence in the sand. You can see the extent of the sand dunes in 2018. Over on the right-hand side we have got a picture of the club in 2013. The distance from the front of the clubrooms basically to the waterline is about 70 or 80 metres in that photograph, so there is nearly 60 metres of dune. The 2019 photograph shows where the dune has been eroded to. There was 60 metres of horizontal distance lost over a six-year period.

Next slide. This is what has happened this week. One that may stand out – the *Amazon* was sunk in 1863, and you can maybe see one or two planks over the course of a year. This was taken this week. We were down on the beach there this morning. A portion of the *Amazon* has floated 60 metres from where it was as a result of the erosion that has happened this week. These photographs on the left-hand side show our main access track down, and the gentleman who is standing there is a 6 foot 5 individual. That is how much sand we lost in four days as a result of erosion. They are the sandbags in front of the wet wall, which is those posts that are sticking up. There were 70 metres of sandbags put in I think about 2020 or 2021. The photographs either side of that show that the wave action is now coming around those and starting to dislodge all of those sandbags that were put in. I think the gazetted cost was about \$400,000 to put those sandbags in. We could go on ad infinitum about

how inefficient that process was if you want some insight into it. Yes, it has been saving for the clubrooms as it is at the moment. Could it have been done a hell of a lot better? Yes, it could. Should there have been more remedial action taken since they were put into place? Definitely. That is where we are at at the moment.

If you go to the next slide, this was set up as part of the cape-to-cape resilience program. These are all of the parties that are involved in the process – or the main parties in the process. You have got the Bunurong Land Council, each of the shire councils, Parks Victoria, South Gippsland Water, West Gippsland, Heritage Victoria and Gippsland Ports. We as a community only get inroads through our local shire council.

If you go to the next slide, this is where we are at as a community stakeholder in the direct line of fire. As our representative withdrew due to extreme frustration and the total lack of urgency, we do not know who does what. Who actually makes things happen? We do not know.

Next slide. This is looking at the environmental response. In 2020 the cape resilience program commenced. In 2021 there was a survey done on coastal values and experiences. In 2022 there were coastal hazard and adaptation actions. In 2023 there was a survey on adaptation actions for different cape-to-cape locations. There have been community pop-ups. There have been online community workshops. A draft report we received, which is these reports – we received them two weeks ago. The report adequacy? In my assessment of it, it is completely useless and it is already out of date.

Next slide. This is highlighting only the Inverloch surf beach before the cape-to-cape resilience project. It has got a lot of graphics in it. Probably the key thing is the table over on the right-hand side here. That has got the SLR, which is the sea level resource. Zero is the date at the present time. By 2040 they are saying it is going to rise 200 millimetres, which is not much, and the risk associated with it is between 0.5 metres and 0.8 metres by 2100. It is saying from an erosion point of view the level of risk is medium. From storm tide, it is low at present. Permanent inundation is low all the way through. That is a key graphic.

If we go to the next slide, this is the plan going forward. There is a halt on activities in the area, new subdivisions and all those sorts of things – understand that. Then it goes into the nature-based rehabilitation of the dunes et cetera, and you accommodate the needs. Then we start looking at a 0.2 metre rise in the water level. The trigger point is 2040, when major engineering works would start to happen, and after that point we start to have a retreat process.

If we go to the next slide, this is where it is talking about key stakeholders. It has got in level 5, which is the retreat portion of it, SLSC, which is us, starting to move the clubrooms in 2040. We are at that trigger point now, where the level of subsidence that is occurring in front of it is about to start to impact the foundations of the building. We are in 2024, so there are 16 years of supposed activities, the nature-based activities and accommodation that is supposed to happen, and we are already at 2040.

Next slide. These are going through the actions that are incorporated in this. That is why I am saying the report is totally inadequate. It has taken so long to get there. The community is so riled up about the lack of activity, not knowing who to talk to and not even trying anything. That is where we are at from a holistic point of view. Glenn is going to go through just some information about the club and how much involvement we have from the community as a whole – how many members we have, how many people it affects. We are at a point where we really do not know what the hell to do, and it is all climate-driven.

If we go to the next slide, I have a couple of slides to go through. Keep going. In the meantime we have been having this dune erosion. On the surf side it has continued unabated the entire way through the process. The dune creep is also taking place on the roadside; it is actually encroaching onto the roads. The Anderson Inlet is becoming more hazardous due to the changing channel conditions due to the sand and debris build-up. The sand draw that has been done for creating the sandbags and moving things up is also contributing to the problem, because it is not really well thought out. There are no tangible solutions being trialled in any way, shape or form to address the situation. The situation is getting worse on a daily basis, and on amenities, I have not seen anything happening there.

If we go to the next slide, this is a classic example. The council agreed to a path extension from what we call Ozone Street up to the surf clubrooms. It is about a 500-metre distance. We have been told that DEECA will not allow that original agreed-upon format to go ahead, but we cannot find out if that is true or not. It seems to be one department is saying, 'This is the problem.' They keep handing it off. As sceptics, we think that we are

almost getting to the point where if there is no beach there, then it becomes a roads problem. If there is no roads problem, then it becomes a landholders problem. There is nothing happening from a community point of view.

As a consequence to the surf lifesaving club, we are getting greater numbers of beachgoers further down the beach, away from where the resources are, away from where the flags are. It is putting it into the highest risk area of that particular beach because of the fast-flowing currents et cetera.

The CHAIR: I am just conscious of time. We have got a bit to get through. Glenn, did you want to –

Stephen DUNCAN: It is all part of the theme, so we can either –

Glenn ARNOLD: We can pass it on. I guess what you are hearing is a sheer lack of activity is causing our frustration, and we do not know who to talk to about that. From the club's perspective, we are a club that is growing. You know, we have had a 31 per cent increase in membership just since 2021, so that is greater engagement. We are part of Life Saving Victoria, which of course is part of lifesaving Australia. Lifesaving Australia will tell you we are the biggest youth movement in the country. We do over 50 training programs for young people every year – first aid, rescue, support – and that is all there to help support the community that comes along and of course all of the tourists that come to our club as well.

We host approximately 20,000-odd tourists at the front of our beach every year. That is what we report on, but what we do not report on is the crowds moving down the beach – because they are moving down, and there are reasons for that. We have had an increase of 52 per cent in preventative actions – so over 7000 preventative actions just last year – and a 188 per cent increase in first aid delivery. Minor first aid, rescues – we did eight rescues last year. And then our patrol hours – we patrol over 5000 hours. That is all volunteer work, and that is all surf lifesaving people predominantly looking after tourists and local community members in our region.

The training that we do – obviously, as I said, we probably do close to 200 participants in training every year, and it is all training predominantly on first aid, water safety and security around those areas. And again, this all helps the public and the tourists coming to our area. So yes, that is our participation.

The whole premise of this conversation is around what impact this is having, right? You have seen the photos of the impact that it is having on our club. Our club is really close to falling in the water. We have already seen that around the corner at Wonthaggi. Their club did fall in the water a couple of years ago. The recent finances to rebuild that have been in the \$5 million to \$6 million mark anecdotally. So we have seen the damage that has already taken place through lack of action. We are not asking for much. We are asking for a rock wall, for goodness sake, to stop this happening. It is not rocket science. We are not environmentalists. Put some bloody rocks there and get this done, and then figure out a longer term solution. It is pretty straightforward for many people anyway – laypeople – I think.

In terms of the ongoing effects on us, as Steve alluded to as well, because of the beach erosion that we have had, the public are moving down the beach. What does that mean? We have to move our services down the beach. That takes greater resources. We have to move. It is spreading the risk down the beach and around the corner into the inlet. We have had to increase roving patrols. We will introduce outposts down the beach to start accommodating these public safety issues. So it just puts extra resources on. It has cost us more money. The money that we raise is all done by volunteers and grants, when theoretically we could probably rein some of this in by just some basic management in front of the club and along that beach.

There is a constant conversation about 'We can't build walls'. Well, there are five different versions of walls already along that beachside, so to have that ongoing conversation about how rocks do not work I think is actually pretty ridiculous. We have already got a number of examples of that happening now.

The CHAIR: All right. Thanks, Glenn. Just let me jump to Chris Waites. Chris, if you could just state your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of and then make a brief opening statement, that would be great.

Chris WAITES: Chris Waites. I am the CEO of Gippsland Ports. We are the local port manager pretty much from Anderson Inlet through to the New South Wales border and Mallacoota. We are the largest local port manager in the state alongside Parks Victoria, and we probably have the greatest number of assets to maintain and provide services to generally the recreational fishing and boating community.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. I might go to questions. We are a bit shortish on time, but we will extend the session a little bit. I suppose my opening question is probably to the clubs here. It seems from your evidence that the impacts of climate change are worse than you had expected. Do you think that is a fair assessment of your localised environments?

Glenn ARNOLD: Absolutely. They have come a lot sooner than 2040, and you can see that – that is no secret. It is pretty evident.

Tony PATCHELL: Look, we are exactly the same. We have got all these reports, and this recent one, which seems to have cost us \$400,000, from BMT, basically the timelines on that are right out the window, as far as I can see. What is happening now is crucial to us, similar to you, in that we are a tourist town – that is it. There is no industry. There is just tourism, and even that is summer, school holidays, Christmas and Easter. That is it, and you have got businesses there that are suffering because if the tourists go away, Local business make all their money at those times, and if that goes away then the town is finished, really. But similarly, our whole community is completely frustrated, in particular with DELWP – or DEECA, as they are called now – because you hear nothing. They came and did a community consultation about this report, this BMT report, and everyone there – or I should say 99 per cent of the people there – asked for groynes. The manager of DEECA, who I will not name, turned around and said, ‘I don’t believe in groynes. You’re not getting groynes. If I had my way I’d pull them all out.’

The CHAIR: You said at the end, Glenn, that you think there should be a rock wall built in front of the clubhouse.

Glenn ARNOLD: If you look further down the beach – I am not sure what year it was; it was the same year as when the patrol tower fell in – there is a piece of road just near the RACV club and that was at threat of being washed away. In fact it had started washing away, I think. Within a week, VicRoads had built a rock wall there to save it. It was done instantly. It is done and it is holding up. If you look at it from the roadside, it is virtually invisible. From an environmental perspective it is now covered in with vegetation. You cannot even tell that it is there; it is doing its job, and that was there in a week. It is a pretty simple format, but there is a constant argument that rocks are not the answer.

The CHAIR: Why is that? Is that because of the impact it has on the beach?

Glenn ARNOLD: Because of, I guess, bureaucratic arguments about what might be the best solution. But you know what, it is a solution that will fix it right here and now until we figure out what might be a different solution if we feel we need one. But the rocks are environmentally friendly, they are readily available and probably cost-effective. You throw sand in them, you throw vegetation in them, you will not even see them in a few years time, and they will do the trick. I am not an environmentalist or a scientist. I am not an engineer. But from a basic layperson’s perspective, it is a solution that will get us through in the short term.

Stephen DUNCAN: For comparison, the rock wall and the sandbag system were basically started at the same time. The rock wall was fundamentally finished in a bit over a week. I think the sandbag thing was mooted to take a month and it took three months. I think there have been three occasions since where they have put heavy earthmoving machinery on the beach to augment the sand on either side of it. Both the sandbag system and the rocks system are working okay in the location, but it is either side of those where it stops, which is the problem. There needs to be a holistic approach taken to address the sand erosion as a whole. You have got a chance to be able to do that there now while there is a buffer. The longer it is left and the closer it gets to the road, the less chance there is going to be for a realistic solution to be put into place. It may not be the ideal solution, but those particular ones are reversible. They can be removed if a better system comes up in place. At the moment from the club’s perspective, the sea is now effectively 10 metres from the place of the clubrooms. It is starting to wash in behind. A rock wall will help address that situation in the immediate short term to start to then get to focus. There has to be an approach taken – and that is why I said that there is an opportunity with the pathway to use that as a way to underpin rehabilitation of the dunes as a whole.

Glenn ARNOLD: You also talk about these sandbags. Photos do not show that, but if you look at them today, for example – I was on them this morning – they are softening, their integrity is failing and they are starting to already fall in on themselves and come away. Rocks are not moving but the sandbags are.

We talk about the broader impact as well, about this conversation. The pathway that Steve referenced early on, which is a pathway of some 500, 600 metres – you can see the end of it from the entrance to the clubhouse. Well, that is all a conversation about what is happening on the road side of the fence, but there has been very little conversation about regeneration of the dunes, which is primarily why this argument has stood still. That has an impact on us as well, because they are talking about changing what was originally put forward, which is a two-way system with parking and pathway – you know, reducing traffic to the club – but what has been done is now they have changed that again to a one-way system. They are going to send traffic in through residential areas. It is going to bank up in front of the clubhouse, and there will be a fight for the small car parking that we have. We have something like 250 nippers in our peak season; we have got kids running around everywhere, and now we are going to have people fighting for car parking.

The CHAIR: I am very conscious of time. Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Thank you. Thank you very much, all, for coming in. The cape-to-cape resilience project started in 2020. It is now 2024. I have counted seven state government – not local government – agencies who produced a report that does not have any recommendations in it, and you are there pulling your hair out as your club is at death's door. You are volunteers – except for you, Chris, the rest are all volunteers. Is this ideology over community?

Stephen DUNCAN: I think it is. The community is not getting a say in it. The community endorses a particular thing. Council agree upon it, and then they go back on it because 'Oh, it's an environmental issue. We can't do that.'

Glenn ARNOLD: It is a lazy excuse for inaction: 'It's an environmental issue; it costs too much.' Well, something can be done, and there are other ways to think about this. We cannot keep just using cost and environment as a low-end excuse for inaction.

Melina BATH: Yes, sure.

Tony PATCHELL: They keep quoting to us the Marine and Coastal Act, and we are told all the time that the optimum is to retreat. Now, we have moved a walking track along the shore there three times, at expense. It is getting closer and closer to the back of people's houses. We have got a cliff face that is about to cave in.

Melina BATH: Tony, does anything live on or in those 70 groynes? Are there any microbes or bugs or anything? Do you think they are holding life in them, those 70 groynes, in and around?

Tony PATCHELL: Well, they are holding the sand and the vegetation, particularly in those what they call pillows or geotechnical groynes.

Melina BATH: So they are making environment, in effect –

Tony PATCHELL: The vegetation has come back, and they have made a beautiful sandy beach, and at the back of that is a lot of vegetation that has come back.

Melina BATH: Sure. Okay. So in one way they are making their own micro-environment and they are saving the beach.

Tony PATCHELL: Yes.

Melina BATH: That is creating tourism in your area.

Tony PATCHELL: Yes.

Melina BATH: That is costing almost your, in terms of Inverloch, clubrooms, which are providing opportunities for young people to learn lifesaving skills and creating an economy down there. Is that a fair statement from both?

Glenn ARNOLD: Absolutely.

Stephen DUNCAN: Definitely.

Glenn ARNOLD: Those lifesaving skills also go on and create many careers for a lot of those people as well. They go off into the ambulance service or they go into teaching careers. So it really is an ecosystem that is creating more than just play on the beach.

Melina BATH: Leadership pathways et cetera.

Glenn ARNOLD: Absolutely.

Melina BATH: I want to just go to community consultation. I know you were on that committee and then you were taken off it, or you removed yourself.

Glenn ARNOLD: My predecessor was on that committee. He has removed himself through sheer frustration.

Melina BATH: That is right. Is that Warren Cook?

Glenn ARNOLD: Warren Cook, correct.

Melina BATH: Yes. I have met Warren. I guess you cannot speak for Warren, but do you feel like there is push polling in these community sessions? Is there an agenda being pushed on you and you are supposed to nod and agree, or do you feel like there is actually good two-way consultation happening with them?

Tony PATCHELL: No.

Glenn ARNOLD: Not really. My sense is it is not two-way consultation. It seems to be the agenda is that a decision has been made or it is a naysaying attitude, and that is the end of it.

Tony PATCHELL: Yes: 'This is the way it's going to be. This is what we're going to do.' It is not back and forth.

Melina BATH: You are being consultold.

Tony PATCHELL: Exactly.

Glenn ARNOLD: Yes.

Tony PATCHELL: And yet there is a big thing made of community consultation. We have seen none of it basically.

Melina BATH: What is the cost to the community if these things are not done – environmentally, socially and economically?

Glenn ARNOLD: I guess in the short term and in the long term this report talks about retreat and so that retreat is not just a surf club alone, it is also all of those members. There is lots of housing and tourism associated with that. It is talking about starting to reduce land values behind us, so there is an economic value to that. We talk about mental health. This is a massive opportunity to not destroy people's mental health. People are now worried about their land values and their houses and the retreating environment, and the sheer frustration that is causing people across the board because of inaction. So I think there is a lot more to it than just seeing what a club may cost. There is a lot more to it. I mean, there is a lot of economic impact on that. You have got training programs; you have got safety throughout the community not only within the immediate communities but also with the tourism communities as well. That tourism supports various economic activities within the towns, as has been said. If you really wanted to break this down, you would need a big spreadsheet, I think, with a lot of figures on it.

The CHAIR: All right. Mrs Tyrrell.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Thank you, Chair. Chris, you are sitting there rather quietly. Let us hear from you for a bit, hey. Gippsland Ports – it says they have produced their own strategic plan for 2023–28 which outlines a five-year strategic direction for Gippsland Ports. Could you please elaborate on that a bit for the board?

Chris WAITES: We sit basically within the department of transport, but we are autonomous, being a committee of management, so we are in a lucky place, I believe. Our strategic plan certainly has a climate change focus but for us we are yet to see in the term of this current plan a huge impact that is going to come onto our assets. I listened to the other speakers here today and very much our concerns are around erosion and dredging. You hear about the costs that have gone into planning. That is a frustration also for the likes of Gippsland Ports. So, as an example, we have been dredging Lakes Entrance for 130 years, yet every 10 years – and we have just done it two years ago. We spent nearly \$2 million on planning reports and the like to get federal and state approvals to keep doing what we have done for 130 years. I understand the frustration. I think the public are sitting there going, ‘How could you spend \$2 million on planning?’ But each year there are more studies and the expense of – at the risk of sounding like a Philistine – environmental controls is getting so onerous now on both members of the public but agencies like us that it makes spending on projects so, so difficult. We spend so much money up front, so much money goes into planning that often there is not much left. Sometimes we spend as much on planning as we do on the actual construction of an asset.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Wow. That is incredible.

Chris WAITES: So it is a difficulty. I understand there have to be strict environmental controls, but what we spend on planning and consultation is probably the big expense for us now. As an example, Port Welshpool, we have done a local port area plan. There are new types of plans for the state. I think Gippsland Ports will be doing the second or third one. The consultation process for that, we have been going for two years now. It is almost at an end, but we had great community consultation early and we have been backwards and forwards through the department of transport’s own communications team to make it as risk averse as possible and then we have gone on the Engage Victoria website in the last month – there has been a huge consultation process. And that is a fairly small port.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Do you think that that bureaucratic red tape is getting in the way of perhaps preventing the climate impacts, say, on the natural environments around the coast here?

Chris WAITES: I think the time, and we hear about the time that it has taken at Inverloch, is frustrating the public and it is an expense that I think the public is saying could be spent on practical measures to address – at least in the short term.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: So it is literally coming at a cost to your beaches?

Glenn ARNOLD: And the longer this takes the more it will ultimately cost to resolve it.

Chris WAITES: I am not here saying rock walls are a great thing or not, but they are a practical solution and they may have to be a short-term solution to give you guys the safety you need until a longer term solution –

Glenn ARNOLD: And at least let the environment actually regenerate itself. Give it a break, because we are not giving it any reprieve at all.

Stephen DUNCAN: Just as a practical example, I was involved in a rescue late last year in the entrance area to Andersons Inlet and that was a boat that was coming in at night following the gazetted marking channels and it ran aground. That is because of the erosion that is pushing it all into that area and that is changing on a daily basis.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Tyrrell. Dr Mansfield.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. And thank you for your presentation today. In the climate resilience plan that you put up I noted that the sea level rise predictions are already well out of date, that that has all been based on it saying 0.8 metres by 2100, and we know it is already going to significantly exceed that based on current data. That sort of fits with your on-the-ground experience, that you are experiencing these changes far faster than what was expected and perhaps is being planned for. If we are going to then wait for all of these documents to be updated – you said it was quite a lengthy process to get here – rather than having to go back to scratch, are there other ways we could develop more rapid responses on the ground to deal with some of these

issues that you are all facing? Are there things that you think the government could be doing to ensure we are ready to respond in a more timely manner?

Glenn ARNOLD: I think, going back to some of the earlier conversation about the number of departments that seemingly are involved in this, who is in control? Who is taking charge? Who ultimately gets to initiate the action? At the moment it just seems to be this constant roundtable of people arguing about what might be a solution rather than anybody taking action. I think if we could perhaps come up with a better hierarchy of controls here, we might see some action taking place.

Stephen DUNCAN: I think also we are not alone in this exercise. It is happening all around the world. We need to be taking account of the good things that are taking place and then trying to adapt rather than doing another study to find out a solution. There are solutions already in place, undoubtedly, somewhere else in the world. It is easy enough to do research on them.

Tony PATCHELL: I know between the Wellington Shire Council and DEECA we had a situation where a part of the main lake street was eroded, and the walking track disappeared. It took them two years to do something about it because they argued about whose fault it was and who should do it. Eventually Wellington shire agreed to fix the pathway if DEECA did something about the erosion – put some rocks there or something. But instead of costing what one estimate was when it first happened, which was about \$5000 from a local business, a landscaper, it ended up costing somewhere around \$100,000. You know, to a layperson it is absolutely ridiculous what goes on.

Glenn ARNOLD: The layers of bureaucracy are ultimately just crippling any decision-making and paralysing any action moving forward.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Thank you. One of the issues that you have touched on is more around long-term planning. There will be some potential impacts from a lot of the measures that have been outlined to try and protect some of the coastal areas. It sort of will not matter how much revegetation you do or even some of these rock rivets, there will be decisions that have to be made about having areas that we do not build on. Do you have thoughts on that? Are those the sorts of decisions you are considering about where you actually are and whether we are able to sustain buildings in some of the areas we have them?

Stephen DUNCAN: I would say undoubtedly there are some areas that are not sustainable, and in other areas there needs to be a concentrated effort. We as a club do not dictate that. We are right on the edge of it right at this very point in time, but from a clubroom which is for effective purposes owned by the community and the state to areas that are heavily populated, we are only talking about 50 or 60 metres further on from where they are at the present time. There are people who have invested millions of dollars along Surf Parade and around Andersons Inlet on the coastal areas there. These have all been endorsed by the local council and also the state. You know it by the fact that the township has been created. Do we just all chuck our hands up in the air and just walk away from it, when we have got so much tied in? The report has some, I think, farcical comments in there; they are saying that the land value has only dropped by 30 per cent. Well, if there are no dunes in front of it and the houses are inundated, no-one is going to buy it, so how could you say it is only a 30 per cent reduction in land value or property value? It does not make any sense whatsoever. Some of the statistical figures in there just do not make sense at all.

The CHAIR: Ms Lovell.

Wendy LOVELL: I really do not have many questions; you have covered this really well. I am just wondering, is there a particular sticking point? Where is that sticking point that is not enabling you to break through and get a resolution from the authorities on this?

Glenn ARNOLD: Our only conduit, I guess, is to Bass Coast council, from an Inverloch perspective, so who do we talk to, and ultimately how do we get things moving? How do we get decisions made?

Wendy LOVELL: So is there a coastal committee? The Great Ocean Road have a coastal committee to look at all the projects along the coast there. Is there a coastal committee for this area? No?

Stephen DUNCAN: I do not know.

Melina BATH: There is the cape-to-cape resilience project.

Glenn ARNOLD: But apart from this cape-to-cape thing, I do not think so.

Stephen DUNCAN: I think as a volunteer organisation we are in a good position to know. If we are given the ability to act and to do things, we get it done. At the moment we cannot do things. We cannot be an influence. We cannot stop people walking on various areas of dune. We cannot on our own bat go out and put rock down in front of it. We cannot repair the track. There need to be some tangible points that we can go to. And the community will respond to it and actually help to implement a lot of the things, but we cannot do any of that because we are hamstrung by the council, by DEECA. All of these sorts of things have an overriding say in it, and where do you go?

Glenn ARNOLD: None of them can agree on action for it either. There is too much bureaucracy in there. We can have the best of all worlds with a little bit of energy here, right? We can protect millions and multimillions of dollars worth of assets and infrastructure. It is not actually going to take a great deal of effort to protect what we have. It does not hinder what we have got. It does not destroy the environment any further. We could have the best of all worlds with very little effort in the greater scheme of things.

Wendy LOVELL: We have seen volunteers at beaches right throughout Victoria and throughout the bay area particularly after the dredging of the channel where beaches were eroding. It just does not make sense that they are not moving on this one.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Lovell. Mrs Broad.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you very much for your presentation. I think the photos are very stark. The frustration that you must be feeling – I mean, it is pretty clear, a bit like groundhog day. Just at the risk of sounding like this is another inquiry, another report, if there were three top recommendations that you would like to see to actually bring about some change, what would be those top three?

Glenn ARNOLD: Action now. Stop arguing about what solutions might look like and actually take some action that can be dealt with now. For example, rocks – they might not be the longer term solution, and there is going to be debate about whether they are good, bad or indifferent, but they are in immediate solution to protecting an expensive asset and infrastructure. They are a short-term, immediate solution, cost-effective and readily available. Let us get on with it. I do not understand why we are debating that. It can be done straightaway. To me that is something that can be done immediately. I think longer term discussions and community engagement, as you said. There is grand opportunity here as well. We talked earlier about communities surviving on tourism alone, but there is actually opportunity here to create some employment opportunities and small industries to help manage this. We can work on whatever wall structures are available, and there are multiple opportunities and examples from around the world that we should be looking in on. We could be creating new businesses. We could be creating employment opportunities for locals. It is not just about putting some rocks down; there are grand longer term opportunities for this. We talk about housing issues, we talk about accommodation issues just for tourism alone – there is so much beautiful broad stuff that we could be doing here that we just seem to be so short-sighted on at the minute. So my immediate thing is get some rocks down, and that is an easy fix.

Gaëlle BROAD: So a decision is better than no decision, because otherwise a decision will be made for you. That is right, yes?

Glenn ARNOLD: It will be too late. I mean, if we keep just bating this even for another week or two – we are at risk right now. We are literally metres from dropping a multimillion-dollar building into the ocean. That is crazy behaviour when we could be dropping rocks in front of it and protecting it right now.

Gaëlle BROAD: As far as recommendation number 2, are there any thoughts? You talked about leadership and just the lack of it, because it is kind of groundhog day; you are going round and round in circles. Who would you like to see lead this project?

Stephen DUNCAN: Well, personally I think that it is the community that has to lead, and in this instance the community is represented by the council. That should be the first port of call. And they should be charged with making the decision, not an organisation that is based out of Melbourne or whatever that really is not

impacted by it. The moneys that are raised out of the town should be going back to address the issues. From an Inverloch perspective, we see a lot of action going down around Phillip Island because it is a bigger community, but the moneys are being channelled away from the Inverloch community to other areas. The local communities throughout regional Australia are losing control of their community, and they are the ones that actually live in it. They are the ones that have to deal with it every day. If it is a decentralised control base, they could not give a stuff about what is going on locally.

Gaelle BROAD: I know certainly in other parts – I am from Northern Victoria – the removal of the right of local communities to appeal renewable energy projects through VCAT has been a big issue. What are your thoughts on that removal of the community's say?

Stephen DUNCAN: I think it is a terrible thing, it is a divisive thing. It is breaking the communities apart. It is driving people away from the areas.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Broad. Ms Ermacora, Mr Berger, any questions from you?

Jacinta ERMACORA: No. I think that is fine.

John BERGER: No. I am all right. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you. Well, all, thank you for the evidence you have provided today. A copy of the transcript will be forwarded to you for review before it is made public. I want to thank you again for coming in. We are going to take a short break before our next witnesses.

Witnesses withdrew.