



APRIL 2023

# Board Communiqué

**On behalf of the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (the Authority) Board, I am pleased to share our April 2023 Communiqué to inform our stakeholders and communities about the work of the Board.**

## **NATIVE TITLE DETERMINATION**

Our second Board meeting for 2023 welcomed the Federal Court's recent native title determination, recognising Eastern Maar's ongoing connection and relationship with their Country in south-western Victoria, including a large portion of the Great Ocean Road coastline from Grey River to Warrnambool.

The consent determination recognises the Eastern Maar peoples' rights regarding access, management and protection of the natural resources in line with their laws and customs, including the right to be consulted on policy development, planning and decision-making for the future self-determination of generations to come.

The outcome is a result of years of work invested to acknowledge Eastern Maar's intrinsic connection to Country and reflects the strong relationships and principles of good faith maintained with neighbours over time to agree on boundaries and to enable real reconciliation for this region, as a collective society despite a history of confronting experiences.

Our Board constitution includes nominees from both Eastern Maar and Wadawarrung Traditional Owner groups, including a member of the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation who attended the solemn

yet celebratory event at Logans Beach, Warrnambool alongside the CEO (an Eastern Maar citizen) and Authority staff.

## **INAUGURAL MEETING WITH THE MINISTER**

An inaugural meeting with our new Minister for the Environment the Hon. Ingrid Stitt MP was held on 16 March 2023. The meeting included the Authority's performance against the Minister's Statement of Expectations, which serves to focus our core tasks across six priority areas including:

1. Cultural competency and self-determination
2. Transformation and transition of the Authority to its end state
3. Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks protection
4. Community engagement
5. Visitor experience
6. Financial sustainability.

The meeting was warmly received, with positive feedback and interest from the Minister on the Authority's performance and outcomes to date. The Minister also expressed enthusiasm for attending a potential Great Ocean Road Summit for thought leadership, which pending scheduling opportunities, is aimed to be held early September. Meanwhile, meetings of the Board Chair and CEO with the Minister are scheduled to occur regularly.



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## COASTAL EROSION

Coastal erosion continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing beaches along the Great Ocean Road. While it is a naturally occurring coastal process, climate change is altering the severity and frequency of storms which is driving increased erosion in hot spots, placing ecological, cultural and community values at risk.

The Authority is actively implementing mitigation strategies to address immediate risks, however it is evident there is a need for further government initiatives to tackle this problem, including a best practice community engagement model.

## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT – FIRE DANGERS

An elevated fire danger at Kennett River on 18 March saw a successful emergency management response. Authority staff worked closely with Parks Victoria and emergency authorities to ensure a coordinated approach to prioritise the health and safety of nearby people, and address incident risks, safety issues, and requirements for the ecosystem, infrastructure, roads and commercial operations.

The Authority has since met with government departments to ensure that our future involvement in broader emergency management functions is informed by our legislative obligations, resource, capacity and capability considerations.

## ANGLESEA RIVER

Board Directors endorsed a statement for public release on the Authority's website regarding leadership and evidence-based decision making to maintain the ecological integrity of Anglesea River. The Board viewed the statement as being in alignment with the organisation's values and principles.

The statement outlines that future groundwater extraction in Anglesea at the former Alcoa mine

operations site will only be supported when there is sufficient evidence that such activities do not impact the health of the river and catchment.

The Board encouraged senior staff to maintain connection with stakeholders and the community to confirm the future trajectory of the project and the Authority's involvement.

## LAND TRANSFERS

The successful transfer of approximately 1,300ha of Crown land from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to the Authority occurred as scheduled on 1 April 2023, consisting of:

- three coastal water reserves (intertidal and subtidal land) spanning Anglesea, Eastern View and Lorne
- the Eumeralla camp site (Anglesea) with the leasing arrangement to continue as it was prior
- three telecommunications tower parcels (Marengo)

This tranche is the Authority's first step into the marine domain and is representative of the organisation's trajectory with the management of three nautical miles of marine coastal water reserves to be transferred to the Authority between now and the end of 2025.

Significant work, project management and planning is underway for successfully transferring all other proposed parcels of Crown land to the Authority by 2025 as the appointed body authorised under the *Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020*.

Matters requiring active consideration include the land transfer schedule, process, financial costs, sustainability modelling, resourcing requirements, emergency management responses, legacy land issues and the role of DEECA and the Government's Great Ocean Road Management Reform team in supporting the Authority.



## OHS STRATEGY

A core responsibility for the Board is to oversee the occupational health and safety (OHS) of the Authority. This includes supporting the CEO to build and maintain a positive risk culture to effectively manage OHS, and the wellbeing of staff and impacted stakeholders (where practicable).

Input was provided to suggestions for a 5-year OHS strategic plan including the need for a review of current key performance indicators, action planning and proactive mitigation strategies and timely reporting to address any emerging or high-risk issues.

## BOARD EVALUATION

As a public entity the Authority must ensure that adequate procedures are in place for assessing the performance of individual Directors and the performance of the Board as a whole. Guiding principles are outlined via the Victorian Public Sector Commission to help strengthen the efficiency, effectiveness and capability of Boards to meet existing and emerging needs and to deliver high quality services to the community.

Accordingly, the Board undertook a comprehensive evaluation comprising of a survey and interviews to objectively:

- identify areas of improvement
- identify needs for additional capabilities
- examine processes, culture and governance arrangements
- consider any requirements for professional development
- meet standards of good practice, including abiding by the Victorian public sector's Code of Conduct.

The evaluation results are being considered in detail and action planning will be implemented to enable continual improvement opportunities.

I look forward to continuing to bring you updates from the Board and the Authority team as we work relentlessly to achieve our vision of a Great Ocean Road region thriving as one, integrated, living entity.

Sincerely,



**Libby Mears**

Board Chair, Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority.