

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Point Bunbury Beach Access – Apollo Bay



FEBRUARY 2023

The Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (the Authority) was established on 1 December 2020 to deliver better protection and management of the iconic coast and parks of Victoria's Great Ocean Road.

In partnership with the Traditional Owners, our role is to manage, protect and foster resilience of the natural, cultural and heritage values of coastal Crown land and marine waters along the Great Ocean Road.

Simplifying the complex and fragmented governance of the Great Ocean Road was a key priority issue for establishing the Authority to deliver on a shared vision for the future of the entire region, including:

- Guiding sustainable tourism, supporting local employment, and enhancing the visitor experience
- Strengthening the protection of land and seascapes from the impacts of climate change
- Improving economic development for a prosperous and liveable region.
- The following principles set out in the [Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020](#) form our framework and drive our work:
 - Social
 - Environmental
 - Aboriginal inclusion
 - General and economic

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When was access to a section of the informal walking track closed?

Access to a section of the informal walking track was closed in September 2022 as part of works undertaken to formalise a beach access point through the construction of a boardwalk from Barham River to Point Bunbury.

This work was permitted under a [Marine and Coastal Act 2018](#) consent issued by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA, formerly DELWP).

What were the reasons for formalising the access point and closing the current track alignment?

The three considerations that informed the project works were:

1. Environmental
2. Public safety
3. Aboriginal cultural heritage

We are obligated under the [Marine and Coastal Policy](#) to provide well designed and safe access to marine and coastal Crown land that minimises public safety risk, protects cultural values, protects nature values and avoids exacerbating erosion.

In response to this obligation, we successfully obtaining a Coastal Public Access and Risk Grant to develop a safe beach access point at Point Bunbury. This application was supported by an action identified in our [Coastal Marine Management Plan](#) (CMMP) to investigate dune stability and erosion risks and access issues for the foreshore south of the Apollo Bay Golf Club.

Why were the new boardwalk and stairs permitted under the Marine and Coastal Act?

The formalisation of the popular Barham River beach access point aimed to address evident user safety, environment and cultural heritage protection concerns. Prior to installation, the proposal received approval under the Marine and Coastal Act and other statutory instruments based on the following justifications:

1. Access points and stairs are supported under the Marine and Coastal policy as coastally dependent infrastructure.
2. The project was strategically aligned with the Authority's Coastal and Marine Management Plan.
3. The design addressed safety concerns through smart design.
4. The design reflects requirements specific to the protection of Cultural Heritage and environmental values.

Did the Authority engage community to inform them of the upcoming works?

The Authority missed an opportunity to engage community to inform them of the planning and delivery of the project works. We acknowledge we should have informed the local community of the rationale and evidence for constructing the beach access and subsequently closing a section of the informal walking track before commencing works.

Further information on our Community Engagement approach and commitment is outlined later in this document.

ENVIRONMENTAL

What are the environmental reasons for closing the current track alignment?

The informal walking track sits on a primary dune, which is a sensitive ecological system that the Authority is obliged to protect under the [Marine and Coastal Act 2018](#) with policy guiding best practice management outcomes.

Cumulative damage through walking on and over the dune and natural landslips impact the site's ecological values. This was one of the reasons why beach access was formalised to the beach and the informal trail closed off.

Coastal dune scrub is the dominant vegetation in the area where the track is located. This Ecological Vegetation Class is listed as depleted (NatureKit – Bioregional Conservation Status) and the area is identified as a [Biodiversity 2037](#) priority area.

What role did erosion and the impacts of climate change play in this decision?

Mounts Bay has been the subject of numerous coastal assessments which collectively demonstrate the dynamic nature of this coastal area due to factors such as storms (causing erosion), riverine influences, the nearshore environment and sediment stock and transport etc.

We have considered the following factors when assessing the coastal hazards and risks specific to this location:

- This section of the coastline has been identified as having a medium risk of erosion through [Coastkit](#), a State Government decision-making tool, and the 2017 Barwon Southwest Local Coastal Hazard Assessment (LCHA).
- Short term (storm bites) erosion events have changed the morphology of the dune (see images 1 and 2 below). This has been confirmed through analysis of the [Victorian Coastal Monitoring Program](#) (VCMP) data which illustrates movement of a section of the dune between May 2022 and August 2022 (see image 3 below).
- This coastline is susceptible to sea level rises over various planning horizons (to 2100), which will continue to influence the site's dynamics. Together with coastal hazards, this suggests a progressive retreat of the shoreline will occur over time. The VCMP will continue to refine this analysis.
- Under the local planning scheme, the area is subject to an Erosion Management Overlay (EMO) and a Land Subject to Inundation Overlay (LSIO). Estuary/riverine systems can have

significant influence on the stability of coastal dune systems, as seen in Wye River, and the proximity of this site to the Barham River estuary is a consideration.

As such, the closure of this informal walking track is in accordance with the [Marine and Coastal Policy](#) which places increased emphasis on best practice coastal management through proactive planning for climate change adaptation.



Images 1 & 2: the impact of erosion events on the dune

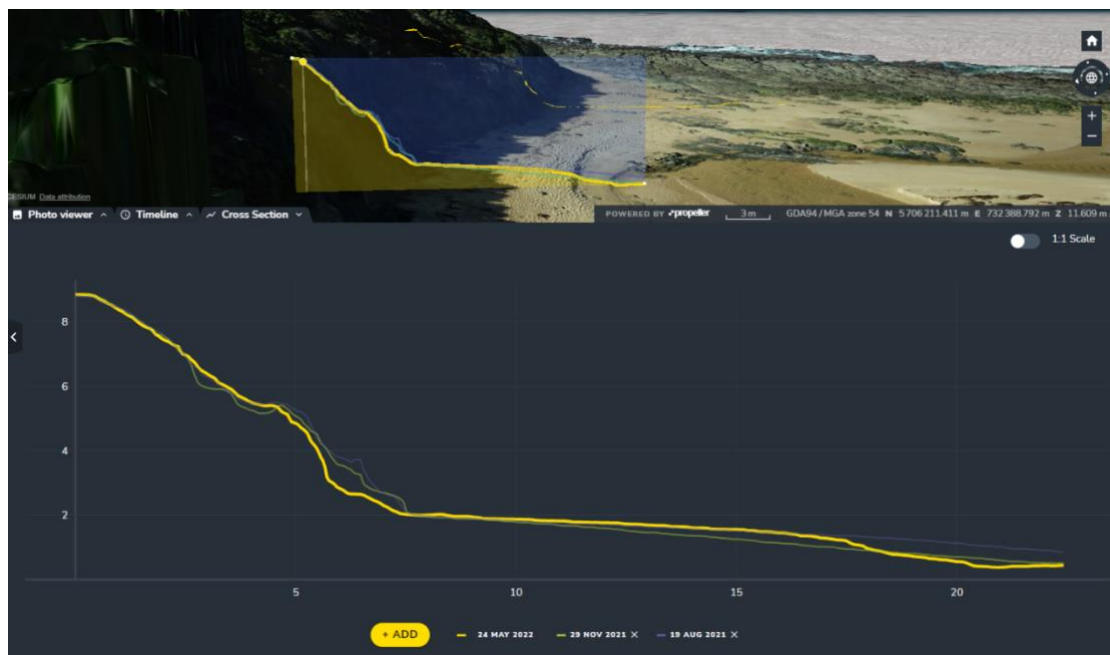


Image 3: VCMP data analysis of movement in a section of the dune between May 2022 and August 2022

To address the issues identified as part of our public safety risk assessment of the informal walking track, there would need to be a significant investment into hard infrastructure to bring it up to a standard that aligns with our organisational risk tolerances. Hard infrastructure such as boardwalks and stairs to formalise the track would not be supported under the [Marine and Coastal Policy](#) due to several reasons, including avoiding building infrastructure on primary dunes and areas of coastal hazards that may require fortifying the coast in the future in order to save the infrastructure.

What conservation works are being undertaken in the area?

We are undertaking conservation works in accordance with our [Coastal Vegetation Strategy](#) to improve the ecological health and integrity of the Barham River estuarine and dune environment.

Beach fencing has been completed from the Apollo Bay Port through to the Surf Life Saving Club to mitigate human and coastal-induced erosion, protect important Aboriginal cultural heritage values and give refuge to the Hooded Plover. Fencing along Marengo Beach will be complete in coming weeks.

The reintroduction of dune species such as *Carpobrotus rossii* (Pigface), *Ficinia nodosa* (Knobby Club-rush) and *Spinifex sericeus* (Hairy Spinifex) into the foredune during winter will further assist to establish a gently sloped incipient dune, increasing the Hooded Plover breeding habitat.

Broader revegetation of the dune will focus on reintroducing coastal dune scrub species with final selection informed through consultation with environmental groups and Eastern Maar Aboriginal Association (EMAC).

Weed management has been completed along the dunes from the Barham River to Marengo Caravan Park. These works have seen the removal of all woody weeds and the treatment of sea spurge, cape ivy, pampus grass and purple groundsel. Further weed management will occur in coming months around the Barham boardwalk through to the Apollo Bay Surf Lifesaving Club.

PUBLIC SAFETY

What are the public safety reasons for closing the current track alignment?

A Risk Assessment conducted by an Authority Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) representative identified several risks posed using the informal track:

- Unreasonably uneven ground / trip hazards
- Informal and unmaintained paths
- Land slip risk
- Erosion risk
- Tree fall risk

This assessment focused on the current trail alignment on our managed land, noting we do acknowledge walkers deviate from this track and traverse the golf course at certain locations.

The location of the track puts walkers at risk of being hit by golf balls from the Apollo Bay Golf Course. Although the OHS audit does not identify this risk as it is a matter for the Golf Club to manage, as a public land manager, this represents a conflict in land use.

To address the issues identified as part of our risk assessment, there would need to be a significant investment into hard infrastructure to bring the track up to standard which, as stated above, would not be supported under the [Marine and Coastal Policy](#).

Note: Given the current trail alignment straddles the golf course which is leased coastal Crown land, we are unable to automatically acquire any land to support any infrastructure required to address OHS concerns or retreat the trail from the dune.

Have there been incidents of members of the public injuring themselves on the track?

There have been no incidents reported in the Authority's health and safety system.

ABORIGINAL CULTURE HERITAGE

What are the Aboriginal cultural heritage reasons for closing the current track alignment?

Under the [Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006](#) and the [Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020](#) the Authority is obligated to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage, values, practices and knowledges.

We are unable to detail cultural heritage information regarding the track closure because we recognise that cultural heritage and its associated knowledge is not ours to share. We acknowledge that Traditional Owners are keepers of their own knowledge, and we continue to support and respect their right to self-determination.

Any action undertaken to avoid or minimise damage to cultural heritage values at this site would require a Cultural Heritage Permit, issued by EMAC and consent under the [Marine and Coast Act 2018](#). It is unlikely that any infrastructure would be supported under the *Act* given the informal track sits on a primary dune.

Was EMAC engaged?

EMAC was engaged in issuing the Cultural Heritage permit for the access ramp. The boardwalk design was developed with their input and the closure is consistent with their site management expectations.

This is a prudent approach to ensure we are meeting our obligations and commitments under both the [Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006](#) and the [Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020](#) and ensuring Traditional Owners have the support to assert their rights and interest over land management practices.

THE TRAIL

Could the access point have been constructed differently to enable continued use of the track?

No. The beach access point was created, and the current informal walking track alignment was subsequently closed due to the environmental, public safety and Aboriginal cultural heritage considerations outlined above.

Why were stairs put in as opposed to a ramp?

Whilst we strive to implement infrastructure options that meet the needs of people with varied levels of physical ability or capability where practicable, the engineering required for a ramp would have had a larger impact on the dune system, including the vegetation and Aboriginal cultural heritage, that we are working to protect. As these stairs are within a primary dune system, we are obligated under the [Marine and Coastal Policy](#) to minimise impacts of the installation.

Is that section of the informal walking path permanently closed or is there opportunity for reopening?

The closure of that section of the informal walking track in its current alignment is permanent due to the environmental, public safety and Aboriginal cultural heritage considerations stated above.

How will the closure be enforced?

Site signs will be installed, providing the community with the relevant information.

Is the informal walking track considered an Authority asset?

Whilst we acknowledge the informal track was identified in the 1991 Coastal Management Plan, the informal track was not included as a defined walking track in our most recent [Coastal and Marine Management Plan](#) (CMMP).

This CMMP was developed with significant community input and represents a public document that has been approved by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. It establishes an agreement between the Victorian Government, the land manager and the community as to how an area of coastal Victoria will be managed. The CMMP implements the long-term policy guidance in the [Marine and Coastal Policy](#) by translating them to on-ground actions.

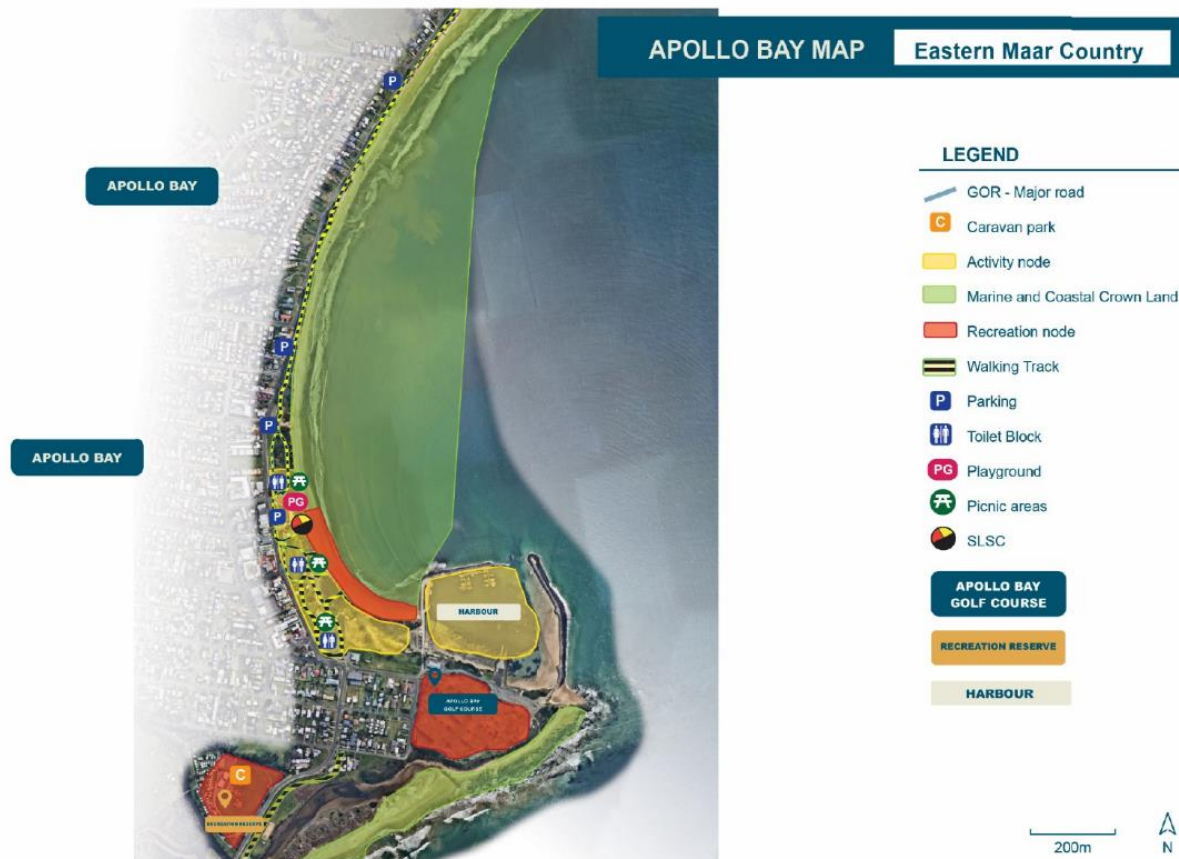


Image – except from Coastal and Marine Management Plan 2020-2025.

Does the Authority understand the importance of trails to local communities?

The Authority believes that trails represent an important part of the Great Ocean Road landscape, providing an accessible and healthy recreational activity for all ages in the community.

We are in the process of developing a Regional Trails Management Strategy for the entire region in conjunction with DEECA, Traditional Owners and several local governments, to provide an overarching guide for the coordinated planning, development, management and marketing of world class trail experiences.

This process will help support future conservations around trail management in this region. Read more [here](#).

Are there plans for local walking tracks into the future?

We are committed to working with the community, Colac Otway Shire Council (COS), Traditional Owners and stakeholders on future opportunities to increase active transport options in and around Apollo Bay as highlighted in the draft Apollo Bay, Skenes Creek and Marengo Community Infrastructure Plan (draft CIP).

The draft CIP presents a long-term vision and concept plans for key infrastructure within Apollo Bay, Skenes Creek and Marengo over the next 20-30 years.

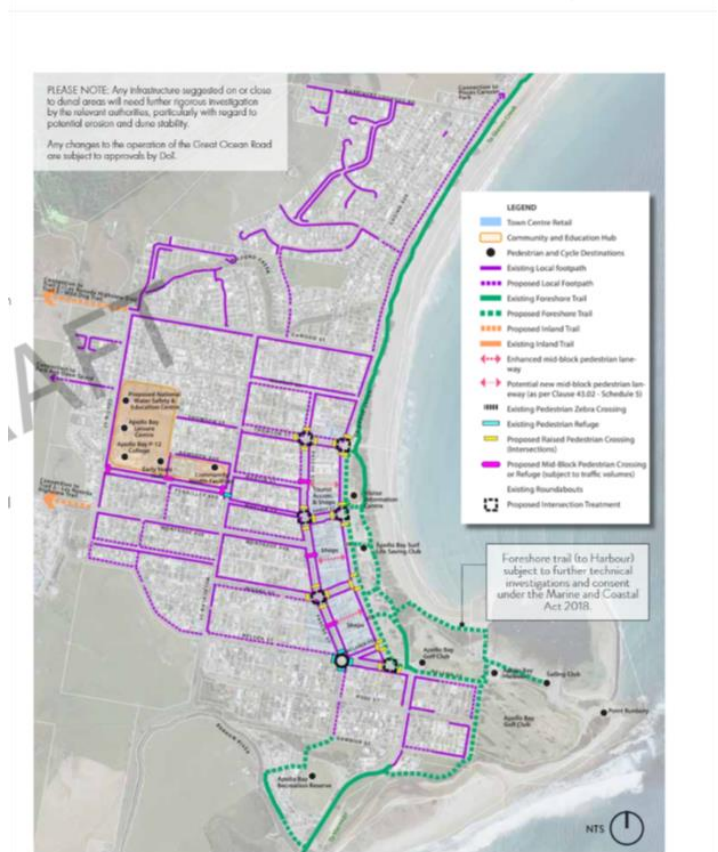
A key feature of the draft CIP is a district plan that outlines primary linkages between town activity nodes and destinations such as recreational trails, walking and cycling connections. As identified in the [Marine and Coastal Policy](#), shared trails and boardwalks are considered supportive infrastructure that may be appropriate in some marine and coastal environments.

The excerpt below from the draft district plan, released to the community in the last round of engagement (June 2022), illustrates a proposed foreshore trail along Trafalgar Street, with a linkage to Nelson Street and the Harbour precinct.

The draft CIP can be used by the Authority and COS to apply for money to support implementation or advocate internally for capital funding allocations.

The draft CIP has been informed by:

- significant community and stakeholder suggestions and comments
- background technical studies including consideration of coastal process and hazards, a community infrastructure audit and assessment and a civil infrastructure audit
- a review of other relevant State and local legislation, strategies and policies which inform, govern or influence infrastructure provision



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Was the community engaged in the planning and delivery of the project works?

The community was not engaged in the planning and delivery of the project works. We acknowledge we should have informed the local community and provided the rationale and evidence for restricting access before commencing works.

EMAC were engaged during the planning stages and in obtaining the [Marine and Coastal Act 2018](#) consent. An EMAC representative was present onsite for all construction.

Signs advising of the track closure due to construction were put in place during project works.

What steps will the Authority take to better engage community in the future?

Our establishing legislation sets out that ‘community consultation and participation should play an essential and effective role in the protection, improvement and promotion of the Great Ocean Road coast and parks.’ (Part 3 – Great Ocean Road coast and parks protection principles).

Our organisational values identify that we will ‘actively work with our communities and partners, including the Traditional Owners, in their self-determination’.

We are also guided by the [Victorian Public Engagement Framework](#) which outlines the Government’s approach to working with communities to make better decisions and improve the lives of all Victorians.

The Framework provides six principles that underpin the design and delivery of all Victorian Government public engagement: meaningful, inclusive, transparent, informed, accountable and valuable.

We recently released our [Community Engagement Strategy](#) outlining five core elements of engagement to support us consistently strengthening our connection with the community.

In the future we will be transparent about the level of influence the community has in the decision-making process, share background information about projects and outline a clear process for engagement. We will also provide a clear explanation for why some decisions can be influenced by engagement, while others cannot.

We will ensure the community is given timely and relevant information through any engagement process and the opportunity to share their opinion or feedback.