

To the members of the Environment and Planning Committee,

My submission is for the Ramsar Wetlands particularly those of the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula, and Western Port Bay.

As you may be aware the Ramsar Wetlands particularly those of the Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula site is recognised for supporting:

- international migratory shorebirds, flying from as far away as Russia and Alaska;
- very large numbers of waterbirds, on both its natural and artificial wetlands, with annual numbers likely to be in excess of 300,000;
- 12 threatened fauna species and one threatened vegetation community;
- breeding colonies of several species including royal spoonbills (*Platalea regia*); pied cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*) and white-faced storm petrels (*Pelagodroma marina*); and
- important habitat for over 50 fish species.

The site also provides:

- Winter feeding habitat for the nationally listed critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*); and
- An important drought refuge through its wetlands for waterbirds when inland lakes and wetlands dry out.

Notable vegetation includes saltmarsh, seagrass and mangroves.

Key threats to these sites are the following:

- **Habitat fragmentation** – caused by centuries of land clearing, and still occurring. We need corridors of indigenous vegetation left intact to allow the movement of wildlife. Particularly birds need a safe corridor of passage through to nesting and feeding areas.
- **Climate change** – this is multiplying impacts of other drivers, changing rainfall patterns (drought/flood), weather, shifting of seasons and also increased risk of fire.
- **Population growth** – the population has exploded on the Bellarine Peninsula within the last 5 years. Precious wetlands and salt marshes have been developed on within Point Lonsdale and also along the edges of these endangered wetlands and saltmarshes. Also, other important remanet vegetation such as the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve which contains the only significant remnant of native woodland on the Bellarine Peninsula as it was prior to European settlement. Is surrounded by agricultural land and a huge housing estate. The housing estate across the road is now impacting on the woodland. The vegetation closest to the road is now becoming quite wet due to the excessive runoff of water now coming from all the hard surfaces (cement) from the housing estate. This is causing the vegetation in this area to die off.
- **Inadequate public resources for ecosystem management** – increased investment required to not only manage these Ramsar site but also educate the public. The public who have moved into these new housing estates are completely unaware that they are living right next to a Ramsar site and the significance of it. They need to be educated on how to look after these areas and appreciate them. They have moved to these areas because of the natural beauty but do not understand how to protect them.
- **Land-use intensification** – including increased grazing pressure or changing from grazing to cropping or irrigation and **also industrial development.**

- **1)** The proposed AGL Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Import Terminal Facility in Westernport Bay. I along with VNPA, other statewide and local conservation groups, are opposed the project from the start, due to serious concerns of the potential impacts on marine life. Chlorine release into the bay, increase in shipping, and fuel spills could have flow on effects on migratory birds, marine mammals, and important fish habitat such as seagrass and mangroves. Not to mention the climate pollution that would be released at a time when we should be transitioning away from fossil fuels.
- **2)** Avalon Corridor Strategy, I am concerned for plans for new State transport links and plans for the development of Avalon Airport. Development along this area may damage the significant wetlands and salt marshes of the Western Treatment Plant, The Spit Nature Conservation Reserve; Avalon Airfield, Point Wilson to Limeburners Bay. These areas are used by international migratory shorebirds, flying from as far away as Russia and Alaska; as well as very large numbers of waterbirds, with annual numbers likely to be in excess of 300,000.

I would like the Environment and Planning Committee to consider the recommendations of the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee parliamentary inquiry, particularly:

- Establish long-term funding for Ramsar site management so that monitoring programs can be maintained, to protect our international reputation as well as migratory birds and other species.
- Stopping large scale development in Ramsar wetlands, such as proposed AGL Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Import Terminal Facility in Westernport Bay and review the Avalon corridor strategy.
- To ensure that the population increase on the Bellarine Peninsula doesn't allow developers to build inappropriate housing estates on these environmentally significant areas (Ramsar wetlands).
- Education of the public on the significance of wetlands and the importance of ecosystem services they provide to humans.

Yours Sincerely

Christine Rees

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