

31 August 2020

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Environment and Planning
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002

Dear Committee,

RE: Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria – Mornington Peninsula National Park

Thankyou for the opportunity to raise an important concern with the Victorian Government.

I am a qualified and practicing urban planner with a good foundation of environmental knowledge which includes subjects such as Coastal Geomorphology which I studied at school and university.

I am deeply concerned about the environmental condition of the Mornington Peninsula National Park which I have visited regularly over the last 50 years.

This Park is very important to Victorians. It is a highly accessible natural area which is valued for its beauty, its natural and cultural heritage and the recreational, leisure and educational opportunities it provides. It is also an extremely valuable tourism asset.

Due to its accessibility and proximity to urban development, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems in the Park is very challenging. In addition to this, the Park is under increasing pressure as Melbourne's population grows, tourism increases and climate change causes more severe coastal conditions.

In the 1970's and 1980's a great deal of work was undertaken by governments (and volunteers) to reduce human impacts on the coastline within this Park. Signage and fencing were erected and maintained to control human access to protect fragile coastal vegetation and landforms as well as for public safety. However, over recent decades these have not been maintained and erosion of dunes and cliffs has been exacerbated by visitors.

The Dog Ban (introduced in 2016) is potentially a significant benefit for the wildlife in the Park, however there is a lack of enforcement and many serial offenders.

The Hooded Plover is possibly the best known species which is struggling to survive in this National Park. Poorly maintained fencing and signage and lack of dog enforcement are factors which threaten this species in addition to intense wave action on the ocean beaches which may have increased due to climate change.

The natural ecosystems of this park are seriously degraded. Environmental weeds have taken over much of the Park. Introduced animal species are out-competing, or preying on,

native wildlife, and helping to spread weeds. Walking through the Park, Blackbirds are one of the most common birds seen. There are also frequent signs of rabbits and foxes.

The visible effects of the CoVid restrictions highlight what could happen in the future due to increased visitation. During CoVid, a greater number of visitors with little or no familiarity with this environment have been causing damage to plants and landforms by failing to keep to the formal trails, climbing dangerous cliffs and sliding down dune faces, further destabilising the landforms, thus making it difficult for plants to survive and provide habitat for wildlife.

Government funding is clearly inadequate for this National Park. There has been no significant review of the Park Management Plan since it was published in 1998. More funding is required for signage, fencing, track maintenance, dog enforcement, pest control and restoration. More Rangers are required to do environmental work rather than clean toilet blocks. More effort is needed to enlist the help of volunteers.

Public education about how to care for the coast is needed as well as a greater emphasis upon environmental education in schools. Careers in the environment should be promoted.

Environmental restoration work in this National Park could be a focus for job creation schemes boosting our economic recovery after CoVid. These would need to be well-planned and professionally supervised to ensure they have positive, rather than negative impacts on the environment.

Yours Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Sally Eldridge.

Sally Eldridge