

# CORRECTED VERSION ONLY

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND DEVELOPMENT

Geelong — 18 March 2008

### Members

Mr D. Davis

Mr P. Hall

Mr P. Kavanagh

Mr E. O'Donohue

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr B. Tee

Mr E. Thornley

Chair: Mr D. Davis

Deputy Chair: Mr B. Tee

### Staff

Secretary: Mr R. Willis

Research Officer: Mr A. Walsh

### Witness

Ms E. Mears, chair, Victorian Coastal Council.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome, Cr Mears, and thank you for appearing. Could you perhaps make a brief submission at the start and then we will ask a few questions?

**Ms MEARS** — Sure. I am a councillor although I understand today I am appearing as the chair of the Victorian Coastal Council. I was appointed to that role in July. I had four months off immediately after I was appointed due to family illness so have really been functioning, I guess, as chair since November last year.

The Victorian Coastal Council, as you may know, was established under the Coastal Management Act 1995 and within this act the role and function of the council is described in quite a lot of detail. Our role really is to provide advice to the minister around the planning and management of the coast, in particular the development and implementation of the Victorian coastal strategy. The coastal council is a skills-based appointed council, and we also have representation from each of the three regional coastal boards. The chairs of each of the coastal boards sit on the coastal council. Representation from a range of areas includes planning expertise, marine science, environmental geology, tourism and a range of those sorts of skill sets. That is the make-up of the council.

We meet around five to seven times a year. Currently our work since I have been chair has been very much around the revision of the Victorian coastal strategy. I spent the last two to three months meeting with every coastal council across Victoria, talking to them about the draft strategy, trying to understand their perspective and their issues. We have currently finished that process and are up to now looking at our submissions. We have 172 submissions on the coastal strategy, which we are now analysing and working our way through. Over the next 10 weeks we will hopefully be putting together — —

**The CHAIR** — Are they all public?

**Ms MEARS** — Absolutely. Yes. They are actually just being uploaded now but will be on the Victorian Coastal Council website and available for public viewing. We are hoping to present the final draft to the minister by mid to end-May, all going well.

**The CHAIR** — Can I ask you first of all about the advice you provide to the minister? Is that done as a formal coastal council position or is it done by the officers? How does that operate?

**Ms MEARS** — I am fairly new in my role but I have had a couple of briefings with the minister to date. It certainly has been in a formal capacity where we have provided him with a written briefing note and then have had a discussion. That has been the mechanism to date. The coastal council has been in operation for over 10 years, and I suspect the former chair worked in a similar way. We have a new minister as well as a new chair so I guess we are all trying to work out the best mechanism for support and advice. That has been the process. I suspect if there were issues that I felt we should brief the minister on, we might also work through the minister's adviser to gain an idea of the best process.

**The CHAIR** — The mechanism for those briefings: is this a sit down sort of approach with a slide show or something like that?

**Ms MEARS** — It certainly is a sit down and it is really I guess how — —

**The CHAIR** — Or is there written advice?

**Ms MEARS** — Yes. There would be some written material provided to the minister prior to our meeting. That is how it has worked in the past.

**The CHAIR** — We have had a number of hearings around the state, as you will be aware, where we have had submissions made to our committee on public land or other pieces of land around the coast. I would certainly be interested in copies of any advice that you have given to the minister on those pieces of land, and there is a significant list of them. I wonder if you would provide that?

**Ms MEARS** — I have not in my time provided the minister with any advice on any site-specific issues at this stage. I am quite comfortable to talk in generalities. I have read your transcripts and seen the issues that are coming up and are bubbling away across the coast, as coastal issues are quite prominent at the moment. There has not been any advice specifically on any of the sites discussed to this date.

**The CHAIR** — So the advice is then more of a general — —

**Ms MEARS** — At the moment, particularly since I am new in my role, we have really been focusing on the coastal strategy and our role around developing the policy framework for the coast.

**The CHAIR** — And prior to that, you think there were examples of specific advice?

**Ms MEARS** — I am sure over the last 10 years there would have been information provided to the minister, whether it has been sought or whether it has been offered, around particular issues. The role of the council is very much at a policy level — developing the policy — and the regional implementation of the policy sits with the regional boards. It is very likely that the regional boards, who have a direct role in relation to the minister, would also have had an opportunity or a role in providing advice.

**The CHAIR** — Would advice, for example, have been given on the Stockland site that we were talking about before?

**Ms MEARS** — Through the coastal council?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Ms MEARS** — Not that I am aware of, no. I cannot say it categorically, it was before my time, but I do not think council has been sought to provide advice on that development. I think it really quite important that we actually sit at the policy level. We are looking at where policy needs to be tightened. We would certainly be looking at advice. If a development comes up that there is a policy vacuum for, then obviously there is that critical issue and some work needs to be done. Our role is really around the strategic implementation of the policy, not necessarily a response to individual site-specific issues.

**The CHAIR** — But you must in some way audit or stocktake or examine the way in which this, the policy, is being implemented at certain spots?

**Ms MEARS** — The challenge, I guess, is how the state policy works with the local policy frameworks: how have, at the local government level, the principles of the Victorian coastal strategy been embedded and used when they are making decisions?

**The CHAIR** — I frankly put it to you there are a number of places around the coast where it has not worked. I am highly interested to see what advice has gone to the minister, either general or specific, over the last three or four years to draw his attention to either individual failings or systemic failings.

**Ms MEARS** — I guess you could ask the minister that question.

**The CHAIR** — I am asking you first, since you are here.

**Mr TEE** — It might be something you would want to take on notice, too.

**Ms MEARS** — Absolutely.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have any objection to providing that advice?

**Ms MEARS** — What was the question specifically?

**The CHAIR** — To ask about advice, specific or general, to the minister over the last perhaps three years that has been provided about coastal policy or individual coastal sites.

**Ms MEARS** — Maybe looking at the terms of reference, is it in terms of the sale or alienation of public land?

**The CHAIR** — Exactly.

**Ms MEARS** — If that is within your terms of reference, I am happy to take that on advice.

**The CHAIR** — You have no objection?

**Ms MEARS** — No.

**Mr TEE** — It is hard to have an objection if the Chair has asked you to.

**Ms MEARS** — I am really interested, as you are, in how useful the Victorian coastal strategy is in guiding policy for the coast.

**The CHAIR** — Let me be quite specific, then: somewhere like the Stockland development down there, I think that there was a hole in the coastal strategy and — —

**Mr TEE** — An issue which is on private land.

**The CHAIR** — No, but it impacts directly on a whole series of public pieces of land around it, including, as was pointed out earlier, a Ramsar site. I would be very surprised if the coastal council did not give some advice to the minister on that matter.

**Ms MEARS** — I guess my first comment would be — —

**The CHAIR** — Can you take that on notice?

**Ms MEARS** — Sure. My first comment, though, in response to that would be around the planning framework of the City of Greater Geelong and how that has responded to that development. The coastal strategy is critical, absolutely, but it can only work at a particular level and needs to be supported by the local government frameworks that sit below it. VCAT will go first to local policy, second to this.

**The CHAIR** — As we have heard.

**Ms MEARS** — Yes, that is the nature of statewide policy, which is generic and not site-specific. This can only work if local councils get their act together, put the money in and do the strategic planning to ensure they have really strong planning frameworks. That is, I guess, part of the message I have been saying to local government.

**The CHAIR** — My message to you, I guess, is that I do not think it is working well at all.

**Ms MEARS** — What is not?

**The CHAIR** — The coastal strategy — I think there are number of spots around the coast. I could give you a long list, but I have just chosen one example now. I think you need to brief the minister more heavily, if you are not now, and I think that you need to ensure that there are proper protections in place, because I do not think it is providing sufficient strength to the protections that are needed.

**Ms MEARS** — I would agree that there is some definite improvement in the feedback we have received with our consultation processes, how to strengthen it within a planning sense. I agree with you that there is — —

**The CHAIR** — Have you had advice on that, how you can do that?

**Ms MEARS** — Yes, and we are certainly working with the re-work.

**The CHAIR** — Can you make that available to us?

**Ms MEARS** — Okay. It is discussions with planning staff from DPCD — working with them in the re-work, re-draft of that.

**The CHAIR** — That is what we are interested in. That would be helpful.

**Ms MEARS** — I will tell you where that would be useful — their commentary back, the response. Their submission back certainly provides that outline, and I am happy to make that available to you.

**The CHAIR** — Have there been other discussions beyond their submission?

**Ms MEARS** — With DPCD?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Ms MEARS** — There were certainly discussions with senior officers at DPCD around how we might look at rewriting the final draft; that is right.

**The CHAIR** — So they have got some input on your final draft?

**Ms MEARS** — Yes. We are certainly working with them around the planning component, because I guess the change within the strategy from the previous one to this one is that we have a different departmental structure. Previously we had planning sitting within the minister's portfolio.

**The CHAIR** — Sure, I understand.

**Ms MEARS** — We now have two departments, so there are the logistics around gaining full departmental support in what, essentially, has been an environmentally focused strategy. I guess we are needing to look at that slightly differently. We have certainly briefed them.

**The CHAIR** — So you are discussing it with the DPCD. Is it the case that it will have some vetting role on your report before it goes forward?

**Ms MEARS** — The coastal council will have final say on what draft is presented to the minister. But the feedback has been quite clear that the planning frameworks around coastal management need to be strengthened; there needs to be some within this coastal strategy. The work to do that has to occur in conjunction with DPCD. We would be putting up collaborative work, but it certainly will be the coastal council's document presented to the minister.

**Mr TEE** — Congratulations on the work that you are doing and that the council has done. I think it is a very difficult task of trying to balance the needs and concerns of existing communities with the needs of people who want to move into those communities, and we have seen a lot of that sea change and now the tree change. I think it is important role that you play, and good luck in terms of trying to work through some of those issues. I am wondering whether, as part of that package of considerations and part of your package of consultation and advice to the minister, you have had a look at the impact of climate change on the coast. Can you give us a sense as to what your findings or expectations are around that issue?

**Ms MEARS** — The coastal strategy identifies two critical challenges for the future — climate change is one of them, and population growth and development is the other. They are the two things that we really have to get ourselves on top of. In terms of climate change, it is quite clear that the way our climate is changing will have an impact on normal coastal processes. The considerations that are important from a coastal perspective are the level of sea rise and what that means in relation to events such as storm surges and king tides. We need to understand, when we are making decisions about infrastructure or developments on the coast over the over the next 50 to 70 years, water will move forward and there will be a greater level of erosion and impact on infrastructure.

The actual detailed knowledge about where water might move along the Victorian coast is work in progress through DSE under their Future Coasts project. Again, we are working really closely with them to ensure that that information is available. It certainly will not be finalised by the time our coastal strategy comes out. The principles we are putting forward are that, in understanding what might happen in the coast, we need to have a cautious approach; we need to apply the precautionary principle around development and infrastructure in low-lying coastal areas. It is not only the water moving in, we also have to understand the relationship to catchments and estuaries. We have 86 settlements across the coast of Victoria, excluding the metropolitan area. Around 50 to 60 per cent of those settlements are within an estuary area, so they sit within a river. When water moves in and water comes down from the estuary, it has to flood over land. It is understanding those relationships as well; that is important. Our relationship with the catchment management authorities is quite critical in that.

**Mr TEE** — Thank you.

**Ms MEARS** — There are a few other issues around climate change that are interesting.

**Mr TEE** — Please; it is something that I am interested in.

**Ms MEARS** — Just in terms, again, of pressure on the coast, this summer we noticed a really large influx of fishermen coming down to the coast. Marine Safety Victoria suggested that there were actually even a higher level of incidents because of boaties who are used to inland waterways and not necessarily open coasts. As water

dries up inland, people move to the coast, whether it is just to be there or whether to use it in a fishing or boating capacity. Climate change is actually again creating pressure from that perspective on the coastal environment as well.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Thank you for your submission. I note your comments that you are basically sitting at a macro level looking at overarching policy, and it is the work of local government to invest in local planning. I suppose that really highlights one of the problems we have heard repeatedly and we heard again this morning about the cost shifting from state government to local government and the cost of implementing some of these planning policies. I think many local government authorities — many councils — just do not have the funds to develop their policies after the macro picture is established. As Mr Davis said, there are real holes there. I suppose if I can offer a suggestion, I think it is a real challenge and I think it is something that needs to be fed back through to the government. Cost shifting is affecting local councils, and that means councils are having trouble implementing some of these strategies and macro policies that the government is coming up with.

**Ms MEARS** — Can I respond to that?

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Please.

**Ms MEARS** — In terms of cost shifting, I am not — certainly being a councillor in local government — quite comfortable with that terminology for a whole range of issues. In terms of planning, though, I am not so sure it is about cost shifting; it is certainly about lack of resources in coastal communities, particularly high-growth coastal local government areas, which are having to get ahead of the demand. The critical issue for me around local government planning is that the community has involvement in it, that the community actually develops the vision around what it wants. I heard before a comment around coastal character. That can only be developed through local community involvement and engagement. I guess I would suggest that yes, more resources absolutely could be made available for local government to ensure that it has the strategic planning ahead of the demands that it is having to respond to, but I would always say that it is critical that local government planning involves the community and therefore it sits rightly within that sector.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I think the idea of a coastal strategy is a good thing, but I have listened to what you have said and given that you are saying that it is the broad policy that is your job — and I accept that — there are a couple of things that perhaps feed into that. You mentioned the regional coastal councils. I would assume that they are more focused on local things than the whole big picture even though they are probably not as local as the local councils, if you see what I am saying. But they must be getting feedback about issues. You just mentioned community involvement and the community vision, so I think where we are having a bit of a problem coming against each other — a policy vision at the high level and communities perhaps having their vision, which may correspond with the overarching vision — is that somehow that vision is not actually being carried out on the ground. My question is: are regional coastal councils feeding this back to the wider process in terms of where there is a clash between —

**Ms MEARS** — Yes, where there is an issue around development that does not seem to meet the principles of the strategy. I would expect, certainly from my time, in the last six months there have been discussions with the regional chairs concerned around certain developments. Whether they fit within the local planning framework is another level of analysis that needs to be undertaken, but certainly at a regional level the implementation of the coastal strategy is challenged in some cases.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — So you are getting that feedback? You are aware of that? It is there in the mix —

**Ms MEARS** — Yes, I am not wanting to indicate that we are not responsive or concerned about certain developments that in some cases do fit within the local planning framework but which you may think are challenges.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Okay, so you mentioned climate change and storm surges. I am not sure whether you are looking at all CSIRO work, but some of those areas are very well identified —

**Ms MEARS** — Yes, certainly in the Gippsland area they have been.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — And in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

**Ms MEARS** — Yes, that is true.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — You do not have to reinvent that wheel yourself.

**Ms MEARS** — We are not, and I am not; it is DSE.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — And you said you have looked at some of our Hansard transcript so you know the sorts of things we have been looking at. So you know that some of the developments, which are proposed around the coast and which have been brought to us here by community groups which are not happy, do not fit within the coastal strategy in terms of having not coastal-specific buildings proposed for development of perhaps flood-prone land, and you have mentioned storm surges et cetera. I suppose it would seem to me that you have a duty, whether it is necessarily in your remit to actually bring this to the attention of the government. I am wondering whether in terms of your final strategy that you are going to present to the minister in May you are thinking about recommendations on how local councils can be better resourced, how there can be better state coordination to make sure these mistakes are not happening?

**Ms MEARS** — Absolutely, particularly around climate change. The issue is that there is a policy vacuum around climate change at the moment, so there is not really any guidance for decision-makers which has a climate change lean. So we have certainly been pushing that that is needed very soon. That is something that will be — policy will not necessarily be within the final strategy, but some principles around how we need to make decisions, which will then be elevated with the work coming out of DSE.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — So in terms of your strategy that will be presented in May it would seem to me that where you can see there are gaps in the strategy and things are falling down, and there are clashes with local activities and local proposals with the policy framework, you are happy to point that out?

**Ms MEARS** — Yes, as I said, the two key challenges are population growth and development and climate change. If we do not get head around how to manage that, our coast is going to be seriously affected. Most of the issues that seem to be coming up around the coast really come back to those two elements.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Okay, that is all for now. I might have another one in a moment.

**Mr HALL** — Libby, thanks for coming in and talking to us today. It is helpful. In terms of helping me with my education, could you explain to me again the position that the Victorian coastal strategy plays in the hierarchy of planning processes in the state, how it relates to councils doing structural plans for their municipalities and how it relates to planning applications for developments along the coast?

**Ms MEARS** — Sure. Within the Victorian planning provisions, the Victorian coastal strategy is referenced, so it is referenced actually within the environmental clause. I think this is correct. So that is where it sits within the state planning framework. Every local government also should give reference to the Victorian coastal strategy within its MSS, its local strategic statement. So there is reference to it at that level and at the local level. How it is used: we expect that when local councils or committees of management — there are a range of agencies that have responsibility for making decisions on the coast — receive an application which requires planning approval they should give regard to in particular the four principles, and I know they have been mentioned by other submitters. So these are the four principles essentially that should guide the thinking around whether the development is appropriate or not, or whether the action is appropriate or not. It starts with the protection of the environment and cultural features as principle 1, and moving down — they are in a hierarchy. Local councils will have their own planning framework but will give regard to these principles within the strategy. That is one element.

The other element that is being introduced into the strategy, which is a piece of work that has been done since the last strategy and this one, is called the coastal spaces work. I am not sure whether you are familiar with that, but that was a bit of work done — a really significant piece of work actually — which was again for the non-metropolitan areas, but it is really about indicating across the coast that settlements should have clear boundaries. There should be space between settlements. It indicates that local councils, for each of the 86 settlements across the coast, need to undertake structure plans or urban growth — whatever they are called; structure plans essentially — for each of those settlements using the coastal settlement framework, which tells us that along the coast there are towns that can accommodate growth, there are towns that have moderate capacity to accommodate growth and there are some towns that actually will have limited capacity to grow because of a whole range of reasons but predominantly the fact they are sort of ringed by state national park. Again, this policy will

guide the work at the local level. We have done a bit of an audit. I cannot think off the top of my head how many urban design frameworks or structure plans have been done for the 86 settlements, but certainly it is moving through.

**Mr HALL** — The coastal strategy as such does not provide an automatic right of veto. It purely provides an instrument whereby people might argue for or against their particular case?

**Ms MEARS** — Certainly it has been used in that way. I think because of the level of the principles within it the feedback over the last consultation process I was involved in is that there is frustration that it can be used in both a for and against argument at VCAT, for example, and that really challenges local people in particular who want to use the coastal strategy and want to be able to enshrine these principles, but then they see, maybe, a developer picking them out and using them to support their case. That is certainly the difficulty.

**Mr HALL** — One of the local issues we heard this morning was the City of Greater Geelong looking at the structure plan for Barwon Heads — —

**Ms MEARS** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — And the issue about whether or not that town boundary should be moved or not.

**Ms MEARS** — Yes.

**Mr HALL** — Does the strategy itself go to, or have a say in those particular issues? Does the council itself have a say in those issues? I know you said you are providing an overall framework, and each of the three regional coastal councils may have some specific views, but in regard to say that, for example, what role would either the coastal council or the local coastal regional council play in respect to that?

**Ms MEARS** — Certainly the coastal board would have a closer role in making a comment around that; the coastal council would not necessarily. We would say that there is a settlement framework. It is really clear. You should have done the settlement planning around it. You should have got your strategic arguments there to understand where your town boundaries are, and that is what your town boundaries are. This is the tool that we would be saying needs to be considered, but then the work at the local level around what the strategic justification for either moving or not moving the town boundary is, that is certainly local government's bailiwick.

**Mr HALL** — And I guess your review of the strategy, which is currently under way at the moment, would take into account those views being expressed by local councils being part of the 170-something submissions you have received?

**Ms MEARS** — Around specific issues, or — —

**Mr HALL** — Around specific issues like that — town boundary-type issues, development-type issues.

**Ms MEARS** — Certainly when talking to the local councils — and I have not yet read the submissions, but when I had my meetings with all the mayors and the CEOs — there was a strong sense of commitment to using this framework. It seemed to be generally able to support the decision and the rationale where there may be a council which is less supportive, for example. It provided direction and confidence in many cases for local government to say, 'This is the work that needs to be done. We need to be clear around our boundaries and we need to have the strategic work behind to set it up'. I guess it pushed some councils into a direction that they may have sat back on and not necessarily seen as a priority. Does that answer your question?

**Mr HALL** — Yes, sure. That is fine.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Thank you for coming. I want to ask you if you have an opinion, or if council has an opinion, on the proposed development at Port Campbell?

**Ms MEARS** — I have not had a briefing at all on that issue, but obviously I have read your transcripts; I have had a bit of a look. From what I could gain I certainly do not understand the complexities around it. It looks like an issue, though, of private land around and the use of that private land for parking. I guess I go back to the principles around the strategy, which is really about the fact that 96 per cent of the coast is in public ownership and it is critical that we ensure that it is, and that generally private land for development on the coast would need to be

considered from a public amenity and public benefit perspective. I would need to understand the discussion. I actually found it a bit hard to follow, but it looked like there was a bit of a discussion around offsets of car parking at other locations, and council argued that it could say there was public benefit. The principles would not really necessarily support the use of Crown land for private exclusive use where you lock out the public. That is certainly not what the coastal strategy would support, understanding again though about site-specific issues the challenge is also to understand that the discussion within the local government and the local community context around what public benefit might be. I cannot really give you any more information on that one.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Okay. Thank you.

**Mr TEE** — Can I just make sure I have got it right. Essentially what you are saying is that what government has decided is that there is an acknowledgement that there needs to be development along the coast and that people want to move in, but it is trying to constrain that development so it occurs within existing town boundaries rather than creating new developments along the coast, and in determining what those town boundaries are it is then really a matter for the local council and the local community.

**Ms MEARS** — Absolutely.

**Mr TEE** — Is that really a snapshot of the policy?

**Ms MEARS** — You said it better than I did, obviously, but that is quite true. And I guess it is not constraining growth, but it is directing growth.

**Mr TEE** — Yes.

**Ms MEARS** — It is actually saying that in certain towns there are infrastructure services. I can use my local council as an example. Clearly Torquay is a growth town. It is growing, it is projected to grow, we have the services and we are investing in the infrastructure in that particular township, so that makes sense. In other towns you do not have that same capacity to invest in infrastructure and services.

**Mr TEE** — Thank you.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Just following up from Mr Kavanagh's point regarding Apollo Bay, there are a couple of issues there. One is the geotechnical aspect of the coast along there. I wonder how much the coastal council involves itself in getting that sort of information and feeding it through to the strategies in terms of sensitive geotechnical areas. You are talking about storm surges and erosion in that area, and part of the issue is that the development on the private land will impact on the public land right next to it.

**Ms MEARS** — Because of the erection, yes.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — They will impact on each other. There is a question there about whether you are including that type of advice in the strategy.

**Ms MEARS** — That is a really good point, actually, because I think the council would certainly have a role in advocating for research to be undertaken to understand that information around the coast. I am not completely on top of where Future Coasts is at, but I would hope that some of the work coming out of that would help us to understand it and maybe flag some further works and geotechnical work there.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — And perhaps some key sensitive areas that need to be looked at.

**Ms MEARS** — Yes.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — The other part of it is that there are quite a few examples of where development is on private land right next to public land on the coast. It is not feasible to believe that that has no impact on the adjoining public land, and in the coastal strategy, have you turned your mind to that as well?

**Ms MEARS** — Within the strategy we do make comment around public land. I have to say I think it can be strengthened and can be improved, because I think you are quite right. The developments on private land are critical to the way we enjoy the coast. You even need to think of the coast not as a strip but also as the township that sits behind the coast. If you have a township that changes in its nature and becomes something like Kew on the

coast, then you actually lose your enjoyment of the coast itself because the character is lost. I think that is a challenge, and particularly I guess it sits within the planning framework at the local government level. The feedback is that some stronger direction around public development would be valued.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I have two more questions.

**Ms MEARS** — Sure.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Can you tell us just briefly what might be themes that are coming out of the submissions to your strategy?

**Ms MEARS** — I wish I had my thing. Climate change and population growth and development are absolutely two stand-out and highlighted issues. I guess that is after a fairly high scan at the top level. What are some of the other things? There is concern around character and a sense that character is changing and becoming more urbanised. We undertook social research — we do it every year, every time we do a strategy — and it matches really comfortably with Victorians' attitudes to the coast, so it is about a concern of over-urbanisation. Generally people want a coast that is somewhere you can get away to, so there are issues in terms of the crowding and just the busyness. People think of the coast and think of being isolated or of being somewhere that is a little less urban. The other things that are coming out are concerns — absolutely — around the planning frameworks and how we need to rely on our planning frameworks. As I said earlier, we have a whole range of agencies that have responsibility for managing the coast.

The strategy is about trying to coordinate how those agencies work together in what we call integrated coastal zone management. It is actually saying the water catchment management authorities need to work very closely with local government, which also needs to work closely with a range of other committees of management. That has come out of an issue that is seen as complex and not necessarily working in the most effective way. The one thing that continues to have strong support is the four principles — the hierarchy of principles. That has been seen and continues to be seen as sort of a bedrock. People feel that they are important principles, but again they would like to see them — these words are used often — have more teeth, particularly within a VCAT sense. The challenge is how we do that.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Just one more question about when you present your strategy. Obviously a strategy is a document that looks like a strategy; is there another document underpinning that that is sort of feeding all that information back in?

**Ms MEARS** — Another thing that has come out is that within this there is almost a wish list of things. There is a wish list of actions, really: how do councils or agencies responsible for making decisions on the coast prioritise? The discussion has been around some kind of implementation document or plan being used to support this, and certainly there has been some talk around how it might be used, again, within planning. It is not a planning document. I think planners want it to be a planning document, but it is not. Is there a tool that could go along with it to support the translation of the principles in a planning sense to embed them more firmly within local government's planning frameworks? We are working on that.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I just have one more question. This has all been very anthropocentric, if I can use that term. I wonder how much the Victorian Coastal Council looks at flora and fauna guarantees and the effects on indigenous plants.

**Ms MEARS** — You are quite right, and we have a chapter in here particularly around the terrestrial environment and the marine environment because you are quite right. We have talked very much about how people live on the coast. I think that is creating the pressure. When I talked about climate change I did not talk about how that will really challenge biodiversity and habitats for flora and fauna on the coast. There is a chapter within here —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — And population?

**Ms MEARS** — And population, certainly. We talked about that, but certainly about the marine environment. One of the critical threats for us is that Victoria has one of the richest and most diverse marine environments, more so than the Great Barrier Reef, but no-one know about it. How do you get under it, and how do you share the joy and the wonder of what is in the marine environment with people when you cannot actually get to

it? The coastal strategy is the only place where we really talk about the marine environment, and we are talking about how we might develop better marine frameworks for those areas outside marine national parks so that we can manage, understand and protect those areas as well.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. We will be in touch to follow up a couple of those points.

**Ms MEARS** — Great. Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**