



*Chairperson: Duncan Malcolm
Executive Officer: Natasha Vasey-Ellis
Executive Assistant/Project Officer: David Morton
Gippsland Lakes Project Officer: Chris Barry*

Climate Change Summit
Office of Climate Change - Department of Premier and Cabinet
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne
Victoria 3000

August 11, 2008

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Submission in response to the Climate Change Summit paper

The Gippsland Coastal Board appreciates the opportunity to respond to this important paper addressing the future directions of the Victorian government in response to climate change. Our interests and work on climate change and coastal impacts extend back several years and we are eager to collaborate with state authorities to plan and prepare our coastal communities for adverse climate change effects.

Our Board advises the Minister for Planning and Environment on important regional coastal matters and maintains working relationships with four local councils, two catchment management authorities, various departments of the state government, water authorities, regional development groups, academic institutions, recreational associations, and numerous other community organisations around Gippsland.

The draft Victorian Coastal Strategy (VCS) – and soon the final VCS – highlights key threats to the coast from climate change, including storm surges, erosion and inundation. Our Board supports the VCS and the government's Future Coasts project and the high visibility these policies and programs are bringing to the issues associated with coastal climate change impacts.

The Gippsland Coastal Board, with funding assistance from the National Heritage Trust, commissioned the CSIRO to undertake three reports on the effects of climate change on weather patterns, storm surges, and extreme sea levels in Gippsland, Victoria, between 2005-6. These studies are assisting communities and coastal managers in understanding and preparing for more extreme storm events which are likely to affect the coastal zone in years to come. Such studies are important for our future; research and information access, we argue, increases the adaptive capacity of coastal communities.

More recently we have published a report 'Climate change, sea-level rise and coastal subsidence along the Gippsland coast' which describes how much of the Gippsland coast is classified as highly erodible (June 2008). The report also lists physical assets and which are likely to be threatened by adverse climate conditions and provides an overview

of natural values likely to be affected by geomorphological changes in our coasts and climate.

All of this information makes it clear that Gippsland coastal towns such as Lakes Entrance, Loch Sport and Seaspray which already experience the adverse impacts of flooding on a regular basis (e.g. June 2007) are likely to be inundated more often, with more devastating effects.

Climate Change and Social Equity

In the Summit paper, page 19 describes concerns about social disadvantage and the actions and directions needed by government to address unfair impacts of climate change from programs such as the National ETS. We assert that another important social equity issue includes the impacts of climate changes, sea-level rise and coastal subsidence on coastal communities. The Victorian government, in cooperation with local government and organisations like coastal boards, needs to consider potential adverse climate change effects on the well-being of coastal communities. For instance, what indigenous cultural assets are threatened by sea level rise inundation?

Another component of this includes the impacts of climate change responses, such as 'planned retreat,' on these communities. Will socially disadvantaged groups in coastal communities be disproportionately affected by climate change and its associated responses? We certainly think that is possible, and those needs should be assessed and planned for in future years.

Regional Levels of Government

Page 21 of the paper describes the important levels of responses and action areas for these levels. An important regional component is missing in this table. We believe that many issues can be addressed more effectively on a regional scale, and coastal climate change management is one of those issues. We have found that Gippslanders have a great deal of common ground (or common beach) to stand on; we have a highly erodible coastline along which many communities will be under threat from storm surges and inundation. It is in all of our interests to understand and tackle these threats in a collective manner.

We are looking forward to engaging a range of Gippsland coastal stakeholders (e.g. regional coastal managers, emergency management personnel, local government practitioners and councillors) in coastal climate change adaptation issues in an interactive forum on September 11-12, 2008, in Lakes Entrance, Victoria. One of our key messages will be that we are all in this together and that regional collaboration is a way forward.

Victoria's Role in Fostering Adaptation to Climate Change

The Gippsland Coastal Board acknowledges that adaptation is one of the key issues associated with integrated coastal zone management in years to come. Subsequent papers on climate change should address this important management concern for Victoria, recognising that the marine and coastal environments are already showing significant adverse impacts from climate change. The coastal and estuarine environments will be first – and perhaps even hardest hit – by sea level rise, higher temperatures, more severe

storms, and population pressures (from both up-catchment populations and coastal ones).

How do we recommend that the Victorian government should foster adaptation to climate change? A consistent message from our regional stakeholders is that they want high-level leadership on climate change and sea-level rise, particularly with regard to planning. A climate change development control which is not discretionary for local governments to enforce may be the answer. We Gippslanders may also need to start thinking seriously about 'planned retreat' in some areas. Perhaps we have suitable towns for certain 'pilot' response strategies? Local governments will need high-level assistance and advice for exploring some of these options, in partnership with a range of experts and associated agencies.

Coastal Climate Change and Planning

The Board recently won a Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) review of decisions by South Gippsland Shire to grant several permits for residential housing in a farm-zoned coastal floodplain protected by a seawall. A mandatory coastal climate change overlay on that land, for instance, may have prevented the Shire from going against their own planners' recommendations not to develop that area. If another recent decision by a court in South Australia (*Walker v Minister for Planning* [2007] NSWLEC 741) is any indication, governments are going to be held to task for not accepting the adverse impacts of climate change as a threat to ecologically sustainable development. However, it is in all of our interests to build the capacity in governments for them to control development in inappropriate coastal zones.

We consider that our position as proponents for sustainable coastal development in coastal zones could underscore a role for us as overseers of a coastal climate change overlay. Our strategic focus and ability to work across agencies could be a real benefit in planning for and implementing such a planning tool. While we do recognise that this is a service role of some description, it is also a role that requires strategic understanding and unbiased implementation. We believe that we are the logical organisation – if provided the resources – to deliver such a tool if the state government decides that it is necessary for the future management of coastal development.

Increasing Awareness through Visual Tools

Fear of a political backlash may prevent local governments from instituting unpopular planning controls. Community understanding can therefore be a critical driver in planning and management. The Board is partnering with the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to fund several visual models of low-lying Gippsland coastal towns.

Monash University researchers have already developed such a model for Lakes Entrance using photogrammetry to produce a highly accurate, *user-friendly*, visual tool of flood impacts. These tools, if presented effectively, can be used to educate and inform communities about potential flood risks. They may even create the political will for governments to prepare for threats to assets, health and well-being.

Such tools for the Gippsland coast would complement the digital elevation work currently being undertaken by Future Coasts and will add to our understanding of coastal

vulnerabilities, not just in coastal settlements but also in biodiverse coastal ecosystems. These unpopulated coastal environments are also at risk and must not be forgotten; we in Gippsland value our pristine coastal, estuarine and marine assets which may be threatened by climate change.

As our Business Plan states, the Gippsland Coastal Board values our independence and our objectivity in providing advice to the Minister for the Environment. We have a proven ability to leverage a modest resource base to work towards improving the environmental quality of areas such as the Ramsar-listed Gippsland Lakes. We know there is still a great deal to be done in our region with respect to protection of our coastal values and we look forward to working with the state government and other coastal stakeholders towards this aim.

It is our sincerest hope that we will be able to equip some of the state's most vulnerable areas to climate change with the knowledge and tools they need to plan for adverse impacts. However, there is a critical need to continue strategic partnerships with agencies and organisations that can help to understand those effects and work together in responding to coastal hazards.

Please contact Ms. Natasha Vasey-Ellis, Executive Officer of the Gippsland Coastal Board, with any questions or comments on our submission. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Malcolm', written in a cursive style.

Mr. Duncan Malcolm
Chair