

Response to Surf Coast Shire Economic Development Strategy 2021–2031



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Purpose of the Friends of Lorne (FoL)

To encourage and contribute to the planning and development of the environment within Lorne and its environs consistent with the need for preservation of the natural features, flora and fauna of the district.

To encourage and contribute to the planning, development and maintenance of community services and activities within Lorne and its environs consistent with the balanced needs of permanent residents, holidaying residents, campers and tourists.

Our organisation has been active since 1966 (formerly known as the Lorne Planning and Preservation League).

Summary

While we acknowledge that a great deal of work has gone into producing the Economic Development Strategy, and we appreciate the presentation of the results of the People, Place Future Project, FoL is disappointed by this report. It presents highly conventional approaches to planning (e.g. anticipating a need to rezone land to attract new industries) and ignores the public sector and its role in the economy. The approach does not engage in a substantial way with valuing our natural resources, or addressing issues associated with mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The strategies do not fully embrace the workforce innovation possible post-COVID. The evidence base for the planning is not cited. Accountability for the strategy is to be contained within internal Council reporting. As ratepayers and citizens, we believe that reporting against progress and insights from practice should be public.

We don't believe this economic development strategy will drive the sort of societal change needed for a prosperous future. The SCSC needs to adopt a broader economic development strategy - one that takes a multi-dimensional view of our natural, human, material and social resources, and acts to preserve and increase them.

We outline areas of concern in more detail below.

Definitions, terminology and assumptions

Economic development, capacity	It is inappropriate to apply the World Bank statement (p5, ' <i>Local economic development is a way to build up the economic capacity of an area in order to improve quality of life</i> ') to the Surf Coast. The World Bank was created to develop 'Third World' countries into sustainable economies and markets. The World Bank becomes the major lender for those countries. The Bank uses indicators such as the percentage of people lifted out of poverty and the extent to which they create social capital and markets. Australia is a 'first world country' where economic development can come at a massive cost, e.g. loss of the natural environment and inequality in the distribution of wealth. ¹ We suggest other economic thinking might lead to more appropriate foundation messages. ²
Jobs	Where is the public sector? Deakin University? Hospitals? It is misleading to imply that the economy of the Surf Coast Shire is entirely dependent on business and business wealth production.
Prosperity	Not defined precisely enough to be measurable.
Sustainable	Sustainability is not defined. It is used in conjunction with environment, agribusiness, tourism, economy, events, business, behaviours, urban design, building design, event delivery and economic leadership. In at least some of these instances sustainable apparently means 'viable' or 'profitable'.

Strategy scope, logic and evidence base

Missing evidence	The results of the People, Place, Future project are presented, but readers are disadvantaged by the absence of summaries from the other two sources of information on which the report is based, i.e. the skills reference group and the economic situation analysis.
Natural environment, climate change, tourism	The results of the People, Place, Future project established overwhelming support for conservation of the natural environment, but the economic development strategy fails to deal <u>explicitly</u> with critical issues, one of which is climate change. The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was released after the SCSC report was written, but the IPCC findings are not new. The SCSC declared a climate emergency in 2019. Its responsibilities go beyond its corporate response plan. This economic strategy report, however, has little to say about fundamental conflicts of interest raised by action on climate change. At the heart of this conflict is the fact that to preserve our number one priority, the natural environment, we must mitigate climate change by reducing emissions. But tourism, which underpins our

¹ We acknowledge that these unwanted impacts also occur in developing countries

² For example, *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review* (2021) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>)

economy, is an extravagant generator of emissions. It is not constructive to bury this issue by attaching the word ‘sustainable’ to ‘tourism’.

Risks and hazards

Climate change is increasing the likelihood of bush fire and accelerating coastal erosion. Closures of parts of the Great Ocean Road are not precluded by recent road and vegetation works. Evacuations and periods when people may be excluded from the region are environmentally sensible ways of dealing with fire. It seems likely that these sorts of restrictions will be a part of disaster planning in the future. The economic implications of natural events and planning for them are not addressed in the report.

Connectivity

We support safe passage for bicycles, walkers and motor vehicles, but it is not clear to us that the SCSC report values these things in quite the way we do.

Creation of separate walking/cycling tracks in many parts of Lorne, for example, would come at the expense of native vegetation including canopy and habitat trees. Connectivity may therefore come at the expense of things that the community values more highly.

The development of pathways may also threaten the highly-valued, rural/small town feel. For example, right now the argument is being made that the Doug Stirling walking track connecting the surf club and the pier should be lit and the surface made hard. If we lose gravel paths in favour of concrete and bitumen and walking to the pier at night with the aid of a torch, then we lose one element of our small town, rural character.

At present the roads in many parts of Lorne are multiuser pathways. We favour this sort of multi-user friendly connectivity.

Tourist attractions (built forms)

Events

Achieving ‘slow and purposeful’ tourism appears, according to the report, to rest in large part upon increasing attendances at ‘major events.’ This is not necessarily consistent with placing the natural environment first. Consider, for example, the woeful increases in traffic congestion, increased waste, and increased need for services such as rubbish removal and traffic control. We are also aware that some events in Lorne (e.g. Gran Fondo in which the main street is closed for days and pop-up alcohol sales outlets appear) are a disbenefit to some businesses. The value of increasing events and/or attendances in Lorne is not clear to us. Such strategies require a multidimensional cost benefit analysis and social and environmental impact assessment, not simply evidence of increased spending.

Stories

Also mentioned as a way of retaining visitors to the area is the promotion of ‘our nationally significant stories – the Australian National Surfing Museum (Torquay) and Great Ocean Road Heritage Centre (Lorne)’, neither of which make the most of

their opportunities to educate about the natural environment (e.g. marine science and geology).

A more obvious candidate for education about the natural world is the Anglesea coalmine, where there are stories to be told about evolution, energy, mining and climate change. The brown coal story of Anglesea links to the black coal stories of many sites further south. It relates to readily observable things such as the black coal in rocks along the foreshore at Lorne.

Other topics for stories include First Peoples' history, fishing and the timber industry. The last two could be told using the Fishermen's Co-op at the Lorne pier, if it is preserved.

The Surf Coast should honour its history. In doing so we should be open to providing a full picture of the good and the bad actions taken in the name of economic development, as seen from the perspectives of both the past and the present. We should note and learn from the lessons of history.

Expansion of
business,
ownership,
types of
business

No evidence is cited to support the argument that increasing economic capacity improves quality of life (see Definitions, terminology and assumptions above). Quality of life improvement depends on how the new money attracted is used locally (and who benefits). Local, independent business-ownership is an important part of the valued small-town feel. Does the SCSC have explicit regulations prohibiting the expansion of multinational franchises? For example, hamburgers, chicken, donuts, coffee? FoL believe such regulations would help retain the character of the Surf Coast

The report foreshadows rezoning to accommodate business expansion. FoL has historically viewed rezoning with great caution, given that it carries considerable implications for the natural environment both within the rezoned area itself and in the forest surrounding the rezoned area. This is an example of narrow thinking in the report. It is conventional to anticipate that attracting industry or jobs/workers (simply) means rezoning land. In Lorne, however, a SCSC-commissioned report pointed out that expansion (if needed, that point was not well made) could be achieved by filling vacant retail space and extending opening hours.³ FoL also wants to see more creative attention paid to expanding other infrastructure in order to support and sustain our economy. For example, high speed internet to accommodate the COVID and post-COVID trend towards working-from-home; and better public transport between towns to support workers from further afield.

Jobs

It is not obvious to FoL that *'if we don't find ways to create new jobs in the future, more people will need to travel outside of [sic] Surf Coast for work, which reduces their quality of life...'* (p16). Where is the evidence for this? What percentage of people right now travel outside the Surf Coast to work? Do they see themselves as

³ Economic Assessment for the Lorne Structure Plan 2018

unfortunate? Is it necessarily a societal good if people spend their entire working lives in a relatively small community?

One of the great strengths of the region is often miscast as a problem. Recent retirees make up a higher than usual proportion of the Lorne population. They have financial assets. They are actively engaged in the community. They generate social, cultural and environmental assets and consume goods and services. Workforce survey data (census) and evidence on spending by part time residents (available through Spendmap) should be interrogated to develop a more sophisticated and differentiated economic development strategy.

Measuring prosperity

We agree with statements in the report about the need for robust measures of prosperity that are sensitive to different locations and strategies. We appreciate that more work is to be done on methods of measurement. We prefer comprehensive economic evaluation methods rather than the tracking of income generation or jobs alone. Furthermore, given that quality of life on the Surf Coast probably also depends on non-paid (volunteer) jobs, some economic assessment of social capital and its role would be appropriate. It may be that developing the quality of life in the SCS depends on preserving and nurturing natural (natural environment) and social (rather than simply material) capital.

Measuring 'sustainability', accreditation

We support accreditation in principle. Unfortunately, many accreditation schemes are little more than marketing tools ('greenwash'), used to attract environmentally aware consumers. The schemes are expensive to establish and audit. They are usually voluntary. The type of scheme envisaged by the SCSC is not named or outlined. As proposed, it will cover social matters first and environment last. Yet environment was consistently the main concern of the survey respondents.

Measuring environmental impact

Environment is listed as the greatest asset of the Surf Coast, assigned a priority level of 'high', and said to have *'intrinsic value that cannot be replaced by economic development.'* Yet in the end it is reduced to the status of drawcard for economic development. It is not clear to us if, or how, assessment of the environmental impacts of proposed developments will be done.

Conclusion

The SCSC has established that the natural environment is the aspect of the Surf Coast that is most highly valued by the community. It is disappointing, therefore, to see what is essentially a 'business case' to support the attraction of more businesses mislabelled as an economic development strategy. A (true) economic development strategy would outline a means to assess the diversity of resources on the SCSC (natural, cultural, social, material etc) and outline a strategy to preserve and increase their value. We are also dismayed to note that all reporting/accountability is to be managed as an internal Council document only.