



## **AGM Friends of Lorne President's Report for 30 November 2024**

Welcome everyone. We meet today on the traditional lands of the Gadubanud people.

I write this as if it were a speech to be read at the meeting. But in fact, we rely on people to read it in advance, so that I can just speak to a few key points at the meeting itself. Note, that our financial report and your membership subscriptions are for the financial year. But the report on activities (this report) is from the last AGM to this one. If we did not do this, then I'd be reporting here on activities up until June only. We hold AGMs closer to end of the calendar year, because more people are in Lorne to attend.

### **1. Our priorities for the Committee**

Our priorities for the year have been to increase the profile and membership of Friends of Lorne; to increase our (people) capacity to spread the workload and get things done; and to get our systems of administration and information management working efficiently.

More on the membership below. We have been carrying a committee vacancy all year and it has made the workload harder to manage. That said, a fair amount of our work has been done by people *not* on the Committee, which may be just how they like it! Last year we created a new role for a Membership secretary (Deb Burns). This made huge difference to managing our data. We can't thank Deb enough. The extra role allows the Secretary (Mary Rose Yuncken) to focus on "front of shop" issues (governance, policy, liaison etc). Our work with Barwon Water is done by Colin Leitch. Eva Youl writes our Nature Notes section in the Newsletter (Eva took over from Mary Lush). Jane Orr and Graham Brawn have led on planning matters (reviewing policy and looking at how we might develop capacity to systematically review planning applications – more on that later).

Our informational management systems allow us to send bulk emails and newsletters easily (I use the word "easily" in very broad terms). We maintain a common drive with shared documents. Our website also is a source of current and archival information (ie., who we have made submissions to about what.) We established a new section on our website on Volunteering in Lorne recognizing that it is a practical way to make a difference to Lorne's natural environment, even if you only have a few hours occasionally.

Beyond internal organisational matters, our mission or purpose is unchanged (see next section) and we have, so far, not intentionally prioritised one activity over another. But insufficient hands-on-deck means we have been forced into reactive mode. It means we have neglected some things. In effect, a priority was enacted.

For example, we are not spending enough effort following through on GORCAPA's tea tree removal plans (more on that below). We also said that we would compare trees protection

policies among neighbouring councils, and we haven't. Other communities along the coast are actively monitoring and raising concerns about water quality in their estuaries. We are not, but only because there are not enough of us to do so. We have at least one member of Friends of Lorne engaged in the platypus monitoring group. But there are other citizen science projects that we would love to initiate and maintain (eg, coastal habitat monitoring and the impact of tea tree removal). Interested members are much welcome.

## 2. Membership

We have seen a steady increase in membership which is very gratifying. We have almost 140 members now, which is almost double what it was four years ago. This year we also conducted a letterbox membership drive by placing a postcard size photo of the aerial shot of Lorne from our website (by Chris Farrell) with an introduction to Friends of Lorne on the flipside. Many thanks to Marilyn McKenzie and Mike Anderson who did *all the walking*. We also put the postcards in the post boxes at the Post Office.

I was surprised and, I confess, disappointed that we only got 8 or maybe 10 new members this way.

On the upside, the letter box drive put us on the radar of the kids at the school. I think they went to our website and learned about us. They then wrote a school play about environmental threats to Lorne and evil property developers. It was performed to a packed house across 2 nights at Stribling Reserve. It was a delightful satire. They satirised the Aquatic Club, the Op Shop, the "Surf and Turf Coast Council", and pretty much the whole town. We were portrayed as a bunch of bleeding-heart, plover-loving retirees with imagined superpowers. That said, we were the heroes of the narrative. The habitat was saved. So, I will take that as a win.

We will leave the postcards in key places around the town and hope to get into the local psyche a bit more. It may take time. We also ask members to talk us up please.

## 3. The purpose of our organisation

To recap our two purposes are:

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.

**4. Activities in the last year (from last AGM to now)** Note that all submissions are on our website

- 8 committee meetings
- 2 (wide-distribution) Newsletters, plus 14 member-only informative emails (ie., a few items plus photos)

- 4 articles in the *Lorne Independent*, 2 on hooded plovers, 2 on planning application review
- Participation in the Pt Grey Community Reference Group
- Participation in the Great Ocean Rd Communities Network
- Participation in the Committee for Lorne
- Participation in Barwon Water planning for Lorne
- Second submission to Surf Coast Shire Council on the urban futures strategy
- Second submission to National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority and the Federal Minister for Resources, the Hon Madeleine King on proposed seismic blasting in the Otway Basin (we won, proposal has been withdrawn, but to be fair, there were thousands of us thank goodness)

I highlight the main activities below. An \* indicates that you can read more about it at [www.friendsoflorne.org.au](http://www.friendsoflorne.org.au).

#### 4.1 Pt Grey \*

The new Point Grey Community Reference Group had its induction meeting on 28 February 2024 and has met several times since then. The previous co-design group was about the co-op building only. The new group is whole-of-precinct. Friends of Lorne is a member of the group, represented by Mary Rose Yuncken.

The co-design group engaged in collaborative decision making. The current group has less power. They are a group for GORCAPA to refer to and consult with. A frustration is that all community members have had to agree to keep the business confidential and for all public communications to be cleared by DEECA staff/processes.

The main business has been about (all parties) understanding the new policies governing the site. The legislation that will have the greatest influence includes: [Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020](#) – especially its principles. [The Marine and Coastal Act 2018](#) – MACA First Principles and the MACA Policy. And the [siting design guidelines for structures on the Victorian coast](#) and its principles including purpose and need, the footprint of the new design, and climate change and adaptation. Essentially, we are being told that sea level rise will require the buildings to be set further back. Likely inundation also suggests that the building footprint might have to shrink.

On Wednesday 30th October 2024 GORCAPA held a public meeting in Lorne to update the community and explain the point they have reached in the redevelopment process. A lot of time was spent in explaining the expected impact of the projected sea level rise (1.3m by 2100). This is a game changer. Originally, in 2012, when formal planning for Pt Grey began, the projected sea level rise was 0.8m (and we lose the Swing Bridge café). At issue now at Pt Grey is whether occasional inundation can be withstood by the buildings design and construction. Or whether the buildings will have to be set further back. The GORCAPA [project webpage](#) provides opportunity for feedback to GORCAPA and Q and A.

A concern is that the fishing co-op building is described as dilapidated and structurally unsound in the most recent “opportunities and constraints” report. However, a Heritage Architect hired by the co-design group in the year prior produced a comprehensive report declaring that parts were structurally sound and suited for adaptive reuse. The retention of the building in its original (1948) shape is important. The built form conveys our industrial heritage in a way that a modern building

with mere photos of the old one, does not. The phrase the Lorne Historical Society uses in reference to Pt Grey is “history where it happened”.

We have also raised concern that the recently produced “opportunities and constraints” report reads as if no prior agreements or principles for site use (or non-use) have been reached. For example, the possibility of investigating access for large busses is listed, whereas right now the large busses don’t have access. That is because of a prior community planning decision years (and years) ago not to make it accessible to large tour groups (too much pressure on fragile ground and limited toilet facilities). So why raise the prospect now? Also listed as an “opportunity” is the possibility of events like farmers markets. But the VCAT decision made it clear that the Marine and Coastal Act (MACA) applies and all activities at Pt Grey must “coastal dependent.” The point is that farmers markets can be held back in the town. So, the report seems insensitive to the history and context. GORCAPA replied that the report was just listing these as *dot point examples*. They are *not commitments*. Nonetheless to see them in black-and-white so late in the peace was disconcerting and avoidable.

GORCAPA is now undertaking the strategic planning phase. This phase focuses on developing an Urban Design Framework and a Coastal Adaptation Plan. The community gets to see this in early 2025. That is when we get to see if our lobbying to keep the main parts of the building has been heard and implemented. We have also asked for the old crane (our logo!) to be brought back to the site as sculpture. GORCAPA expects to have a plan ready to submit for planning approval in mid-2025. A big thank you to Mary Rose Yuncken. She has been writing updates to members and is happy to answer questions.

#### **4.2 Affordable Housing for key and essential workers \***

Our objective has been to promote community understanding of and engagement with different options and alternatives so that we can collectively, as a community, weigh up pros and cons systematically and choose the best path forward for Lorne. We may end up with a few options and pathways (ie, not just one solution). In 2023 we proposed that the CfL set up a working group to allow work taking place across the different options to be compared. It would also allow us to coordinate and share expertise across different solutions. CfL was reluctant. Eventually a forerunner of the community working group met for the first time in September 2024. It was fortunate that it was attended by all four candidates for the Otway Ward of the Surf Coast Council as well as four members of the CfL, including the hospital CEO.

Friends of Lorne prepared a [report on work](#) we had been doing and our understanding of what was happening with other solutions in place (work being led by others). This included shared equity/financing schemes, regional worker accommodation grants, and planning overlays to limit excessive numbers of short-term rentals. This report appears on our Affordable Housing webpage. We are indebted to a couple of members of the community, David Worth and Peter Lavis, for bringing their extensive experience in finance and property to the investigation of the shared equity option. We are still gathering data, discussing and working out the plusses and minuses of all different options investigated so far. Are they as good as they seem? Are they suited to (a small place like) Lorne? Is there something better? Can we afford them? The next meeting will be on 5 December. The SCSC planning officers will brief us on what the SCSC can do to support our work. \$50,000 of their budget has been set aside to for this purpose. If key and essential worker housing is something you would be interested to help with (to review, discuss or to investigate options) please let us know. Accommodation options for other population groups (eg retirees, down sizers) are also part of the discussion.

### 4.3 Planning Scheme Review \*

The Surf Coast Shire Council (SCSC) has been conducting a Planning Scheme Review which they describe as a “health check” of the planning scheme. It is a legislated requirement for all councils under Section 12B of the Planning and Environment Act 1987. You can find out more [here](#). We have put in two submissions (see our website). A public consultation will be held in early 2025. We have written about this in our information emails, including the impact of second dwellings on housing density in Lorne.

Years of Friends of Lorne advocacy was responsible for the development of the Council’s Lorne Strategy and Neighbour Character Overlay (NCO), with its strong environment-conservation focus. Our main concern is that the overlay is not being implemented by Council Officers and that too much reliance is being placed on neighbours to object to proposals which go against the overlay. More on that later.

Essentially, we have been arguing that, for the sake of the environment, the strategy for future population planning should explore more creative avenues to accommodate people than they do now. At present they rely on new land supply solutions almost totally. We would like to protect the environment as much as possible and so our preference is for solutions that bring the 69% of currently underutilised housing stock into play.<sup>1</sup> That is, if possible, we would prefer to see shared equity schemes to help key and essential workers to purchase a home in Lorne on the private property market. We would also like to see planning overlays that would encourage more long-term rentals. We are not against new builds in principle (subject to conditions). But they are not our first preference. And neither should they be, if our chief focus is to conserve the tree canopy, wildlife corridors and the existing native vegetation of Lorne.

Meanwhile the state government has been announcing a lot of new housing policy, specifically designed to fast-track developments and bypass the usual advertising and approval processes at the local government level.

The Surf Coast CEO, Robyn Seymour, has enabled Kate Sullivan (Manager of Integrated Planning) to hold a special briefing meeting for Friends of Lorne, Aireys Inlet and District Association and groups from Anglesea to explain the new state regulations to us, once local councils are informed. Kate and her team have met with Friends of Lorne twice to brief us on the Urban Futures Strategy and to get our input. We will keep you informed of further opportunities to take part.

### 4.4 Planning applications review\*

*Recessive in the landscape* is not what is on display in recent times with new builds and renovations in Lorne. I said that last year and it is still the case. But what is different is that since the last AGM, we took on board the members’ interest to assess if we have as much capacity as the Aireys Inlet and District Association (available skills and time) to review every planning application in Lorne. We wrote about it in our newsletter and called for comments from members. We also wrote [two articles](#) in the *Lorne Independent* and called for opinions from the community about whether it would be welcome.

We set up a small planning working group. We tested our process on three applications. One of our test applications came to us via concerned neighbours to the application. The main issue

---

<sup>1</sup> At the last census, 69% of houses in Lorne were not occupied. So this is taken to be an estimate of the proportion of ‘holiday homes.’

we focused on there was vegetation removal and lack of landscape plan in a *rural conservation zone*. One application we saw ourselves in the street (*residential zone*). The main issue we focused on there was change to neighbourhood character by the addition of a second storey, close to the street. One application was spotted by the AIDA architect (Ian Laging) on the SCSC planning website. It was in the *tourist zone*. There were a number of issues. But they included excessive height and more than 3 storeys. No decisions have yet been made by the Council on any of the applications.

There was some pushback from the community at first. Some of that was misunderstanding about the process -eg thinking it would be retrospective or thinking we would be hiring lawyers and taking people to court. The answer is no on all counts. The second article in the *Lorne Independent* was written to combat these myths.

The formal feedback from our members (via email) since the last AGM is mostly positive. We have also had extra people put up their hand to do the reviews. We now have two architects, one planner, and three “ordinary” people willing to be engaged. The negative feedback from the members is limited to one comment that we will spoil our good reputation (suggesting that if we still want to do this, we should set up a separate organisation to do it).

Why bother? We know that neighbours are reluctant to object, even if they are opposed to an application, for fear of ruining relationships or creating animosity and workload for themselves. That is why a systematic approach to all applications has worked in Aireys, like a guardian angel. It removes the anxiety. It is objective, based on the planning proposal content and fit with the Neighbourhood Character Overlay, and nothing else. Nonetheless, we have heard that some potential applicants think, *who is AIDA (or Friends of Lorne) to object, if my neighbours do not?* On the other hand, one of our first emails received was from a member saying how welcome Friends of Lorne involvement would be, as she was objecting to a neighbour’s application. With little experience, she felt out of her depth.

The SCSC uses discretion in approving or rejecting planning applications. We have asked SCSC to let us see the results on an internal audit they have conducted of how many approved applications breach set back, height, landscape, materials, coverage of block etc guidelines. The point is that the SCSC know they are not implementing the Neighbourhood Character Overlay. They take the number of objections into account when deciding to push back against over-the-top applications. We have also asked if it would be less combative to have a COMMENT or QUESTION option on planning applications. Right now, we can only OBJECT or SUPPORT. The SCSC encourages applicants to discuss proposals with Council before they invest in a proposal (to offset the chance of being refused further down track). We don’t know how many applicants avail themselves of this.

At this point, we can say that we have the capacity to review planning applications systematically, AIDA-style, although we don’t know if we could handle the volume yet. However, the Committee is reluctant to do so without further discussion among the membership and a vote.

#### **4.5 Great Ocean Road Communities Network (GORCN)**

Friends of Lorne is part of GORCN. GORCN is a grassroots network of 21 community organisations. We range from Port Campbell to Torquay. It formed in 2020 to identify and work on common issues and to create a direct “hotline” of information exchange between the community and GORCAPA. GORCAPA (represented by Jodie Sizer and/or Libby Mears) meets with us four times a year. It’s been a very useful for relationship-building, as a forum to find out

who/what/where for problem-solving, and to discuss Big Picture issues that none of us can tackle alone. We meet for a further 3-4 times a year without GORCAPA.

Thus far, discussion and work with GORCAPA has been largely productive. For example, last year GORCN's submission on GORCAPA's draft community engagement strategy led GORCAPA to commit to develop grievance resolution mechanisms (i.e., to solve issues prior to ending up in VCAT) and to produce case studies of best-case / worst-case problem-solving on the coast so as to encourage accountability, learning and best practice. GORCAPA has offered for us to co-design these guidelines and tools with them. We have not advanced this simply because we, on the community side, are too time poor. Communities are also coordinating action through GORCN on tour bus licensing, water quality monitoring, key worker housing, controlled burns by DEECA and options for how GORCAPA should be funded.

However, at a community level, a number of organisations along the coast are frustrated with GORCAPA. So GORCN is auditing and collating our experiences with a view to giving formal feedback in early 2025.

A major initiative GORCN are conducting, in partnership with GORCAPA, is a 5-part webinar series on tourism on the Great Ocean Rd and what regenerative tourism models can be built that don't wreck to local environment. The series will begin in March 2025 and will be accompanied by a series of articles in *The Age*. A similar successful multi-part webinar series on fire management was hosted by GORCN in 2020.

#### **4.6 Coastal Tea Tree removal from the Foreshore and habitat restoration \***

Friends of Lorne took the lead in explaining to the public the GORCAPA tea tree removal plans on the Foreshore. We put together a photo guide (see website) to what goes and what stays along the 4.2km stretch from Stony Creek to the pier. This was important because many people in the community were upset. Also, people were not aware that not all the tea tree is coming out. There is a different strategy for different zones.

To us, the tea tree plays an important function for traffic screening, shade, privacy and as a windbreak. Dense tall vegetation between the GOR and the beach is what makes Lorne feel like a natural environment, instead of a beach adjacent traffic like in a town. GORCAPA explained that while tea tree was introduced to Lorne to stabilise dunes and prevent erosion, the science had moved on and now they were considered a weed because they spread create (dark) monocultures. We don't dispute that. But we don't wish to see wholesale removal and denuding of the foreshore.

Our document allowed better community engagement/consultation. In response to community concern, GORCAPA held public meetings and elected to follow a more staged/gradual approach and to replant rather than leave denuded spaces to regenerate naturally (ie, more slowly).

GORCAPA removed tea tree from a sentinel site (near the Swing Bride café) and ran a community planting session to put back three storeys of replacement plants (grasses, shrubs and trees). We would dearly like some citizen science type monitoring of growth (or otherwise) and the consequences for animal and plant diversity. But we don't have the people-power to do this. If there are interested members, please make yourselves known.

We wish to see clarity around the removal timetable and types of replacement plantings. Right now, what is probably stopping further tea tree removal is the fact that GORCAPA has limited resources to conduct the work. The field staff are spread thinly.

#### **4.7 AGM process and a proposed constitutional amendment to our Rules**

Due to error we had to postpone the special general meeting we had planned to change our rules. We failed to send out the proxy form at the right time. The meeting will be rescheduled for early 2025.

#### **4.8 Hooded plovers in Lorne**

Last year, our local police sergeant, Steve Parish, spent New Year's eve sitting on the beach in front of the Mantra watching over a hooded plover nest site. "Hoodies" had decided to nest for the first time in Lorne's written history. He protected the eggs in the nest all night, no doubt surprising any party revellers who stumbled down on to the beach.

GORCAPA and DEECA (Dept of Environment, Energy and Climate Action) are responsible for wildlife protection. Once the eggs hatched, a number of residents and visitors rallied to form a roster to continue to protect the site. The volunteers are managed by Birdlife Australia.

Chicks are tiny. They wander the wet sand feeding themselves from day 1. The chicks wander right down to the waterline. They are easily crushed by people who don't see them and dogs who rush about or chase them. If they are disturbed by people or dogs, the chicks hide. They hide for too long and starve. People or dogs are the main cause of mortality.

In the first few days after hatching GORCAPA followed Birdlife Australia recommendations. They put up signs about the chicks, banned dogs, and asked people to stay clear and to keep to the waterline when passing through. But after three days GORCAPA was worried that the chicks were not getting enough to eat. So uniformed DEECA officers (with handcuffs) were brought in, a section of the beach was closed for a few hours, and chicks had their first proper feed. After that GORCAPA set up total exclusion zone (no people, no dogs) on a section of beach. Volunteers were on the ground to explain it and to educate the public. It was the first ever total exclusion zone in Victoria. This was effective even during Pier to Pub with 20,000 people in town.

You know the rest of the story. Against the odds, we raised the chicks over 5 weeks until they fledged (were able to fly off). There were only 12 nesting pairs of hooded plovers along the entire surf coast last season. Only five chicks survived. Lorne raised two of these chicks.

Lorne people caring for their environment was on display in prime time. Most of the volunteers on the beach were Friends of Lorne members. Conversations with the public on the beach also allowed us to "recruit" people to become Friends of Lorne members. Crowds were happy to cooperate and walk around the closed off area, using Cypress Ave, instead of cutting across the beach. We also learned that visitors travelled to Lorne especially to this vulnerable species.

Now the birds are back, and we need more volunteers please. If you looked at number of "likes" for hoodie photos on the Lorne Facebook page, you would have thought we had tons of volunteers. In truth there were about 20 people in total and 10 who were called on almost daily (ie, rotated on the beach in 2-hour shifts, dawn to sunset for 6 weeks). They were exhausted.



Most of us knew very little about hooded plovers until last summer. Way less than the local police. But we learned on the job. And we got to know the police, which was a nice bonus.

Now we are caught up in politics between Birdlife Australia and GORCAPA. GORCAPA wants to do an exclusion zone (EZ) again, because it was effective. Birdlife is hesitant. Because EZs are so rare, Birdlife say they don't have enough evidence that they work. Of course, if they won't try more of them, then they won't be able to gather the evidence. To our dismay, the Birdlife Australia-wide newsletter last year about the success of the Lorne chick raising failed to even mention the presence of the EZ.

As a volunteer on the beach in a popular tourist spot, a clearly marked EZ was much easier to enforce than rushing up to people and asking if they would walk around. So we were *delighted* with GORCAPA's proactivity last season. On a busy day we just can't get to enough people, meaning that groups end up walking through. Our local volunteer Birdlife beach nesting bird coordinator agrees with us. She was on the beach with us. So, our focus this year is on making this reality clearer to the higher-ups in Birdlife Australia. We are reporting daily beach conditions (volume of people and dogs) more diligently into the Birdlife Australia data base. Thankfully, GORCAPA assures us that they will escalate the current protection to a total exclusion zone again, if warranted, when chicks are hatched. In conversations on the beach, the public expect it. They have learned what to do. They are proud of what we collectively accomplished last year. They don't want to fall backwards.

This season Friends of Lorne have taken on the responsibility to managing the roster for the Lorne volunteers, because the local coordinator in Aireys was too stretched. We took advice and purchased rostering software. Thank you to Lesley King, the volunteer coordinator from the Australian National Botanic Gardens, for advice and training.

#### **4.9 Lorne's water supply and community engagement with Barwon Water**

In February 2022, Mary Lush and Janet Beard put together an 8-page briefing document for Friends of Lorne on the precarious nature of Lorne's water supply. It has an extensive number of references and you will find it on our website. One of the big take-aways was that in 2016, water supply was so low, water for Lorne had to be trucked in to the Allen Dam. But it is not just about us. Other species depend on the water, such as the platypus in the St George river. Barwon Water has been drawing up water management plans. They established a Community Working Group to oversee the work. Colin Leitch represents Friends of Lorne on that group. He wrote an update about the work for our Newsletter in December 2023, and he will be doing so again in our upcoming November newsletter.

Some consultants engaged to conduct an environmental flows study have now completed their work. The community working group is now going through the process of preparing a response. Colin is a hydrologist, who thought he was retired. We really appreciate his work.

#### **A special thank you to retiring Councillor Gary Allen**

I documented last year how "Gary's clear and long-range thinking, diligence, persistence, and advocacy for all of Lorne has turned whole problems around (e.g., Pt Grey). He is a champion of keeping our treed and coastal character. He's found ways to address seasonal worker accommodation. He's always available for troubleshooting problems." Once again, all of that skill and care has been evident in the last 12 months of Cr Allen's service to Lorne. Gary has

also been a wise advisor and support to me. He is retiring now after four years as our local Councillor. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

I am delighted to note that Leon Walker has been elected to the Otway Shire ward, along with Libby Stapleton and Mike Bodsworth. Congratulations to Leon, a strong advocate for young families, small businesses and the environment. We look forward to working with him.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Committee does a lot of work. I am immensely grateful to them: Lindy Pearce, StJohn Sutton, and Mary Rose Yuncken.

A big thank you again to Deb Burns, Colin Leitch, Mike Anderson, Marilyn McKenize, Eva Youl, Jane Orr and Graham Brawn whose work has been mentioned in this report.

Friends of Lorne hoodie volunteers are Deb Burns, Sheryl Lewis, Peter Lewis, Penny Hawe, Alan Shiell, Mary Lush, Eva Youl, Karen Pitt, Sophie Buchanan, Liz Quinn, Jo Dunin, Amanda Place, David McCormack, David Harper, Linton Ferguson, Mike Anderson, Helen Clements and John Clements. This season we have been joined by Ross Dimsey and Janine Haddow.

Charles Coates is our IT and computer expert. He looks after our systems and troubleshoots us. His reliable, calm, meditative approach has been brilliant for crisis-solving. Thank you.

Penny Hawe  
30 November 2024