

Submission on Draft GORCAPA Community Engagement Framework

SUMMARY: We welcome the development of this framework and the opportunity to comment on it. We appreciate that, from GORCAPA's perspective, the document represents success in bringing together a commitment to the values, principles and practices of a variety of GOR agencies. We appreciate that the document is intended to design and to track what community engagement is being done. From the GORCN perspective, however, we would like the framework to go further and track how well it is being done and how well GORCAPA objectives are being met, along with clear measures designed for this. So, we are looking forward to partnering with GORCAPA to move to the next step. For example, while GORCAPA is committed to transparency, we would like to see elucidation of how GORCAPA is accountable (i.e., to whom in what ways). The Great Ocean Road is not amenable to incremental change solutions. So, we are concerned that the framework does not address how long-term visioning and planning happens, in contrast to daily, place-by-place problem solving, or how engagement resources would be apportioned across these responsibilities. While acknowledging community and collective knowledge, the framework does not commit to mapping community assets and outlining how these would be harnessed. The framework engages us in a discussion on "what should be" (i.e., future best practice). But it should also audit practice in relation to existing community projects in various stages of proposal, planning and execution. In essence, we are keen to move to a discussion of how the framework is *operationalised* and a discussion of the role of community in GORCAPA planning and governance. Our own network is willing to be further engaged. We also encourage a range of means and structures to tap a diversity of voices along the coast.

WHO WE ARE: THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD COMMUNITIES NETWORK (GORCN)

GORCN is a growing network of groups along the Great Ocean Road. We aim to be a strong advocate for communities along the road whilst protecting and enhancing their diverse, distinctive natures. Currently, we are comprised of 17 groups from Geelong and Torquay through to Port Campbell.¹ The network aims to work collaboratively with the GORCAPA to look after the Great Ocean Road's environment, communities, economy and hinterland.

¹ Geelong Environment Association, Greater Torquay Alliance, * 3228 Residents Association Inc, * Anglesea Community Network, * Save Anglesea, * Friends of Anglesea River, Aireys Inlet and District Association, * Friends of Lorne, * Friends of Pt Grey, * Wye and Separation Creek Community Association, * Kennett River Association, * Otway Forum, * Skenes Creek Progress Association, * Southern Otways Landcare, * Southern Otways Sustainable, Princetown Wetlands and Estuary Preservation Inc, Port Campbell Community Group Inc

Groups in the network share common ground, in that all are committed to:

- coastal and bush protection and regeneration
- thriving, diverse local communities
- limitations on tourist numbers
- community involvement with relevant decision- making
- recognition of climate change, the need to act to mitigate its causes and to address its risks
- protection of local character
- nature-based and regenerative tourism
- analysis and communication of tourism's invisible costs
- evidence-based research to establish the carrying capacity of the Great Ocean Road
- an agreed set of indicators to monitor Great Ocean Road conditions
- appropriate infrastructure provision consistent with the above.

COMMENTS ON THE FRAMEWORK

Values and Principles: what is there and what is missing

The framework lists *leading by example, collaboration, connectedness, evidence-based decision making and trust* as key GORCAPA values and principles. We applaud these. However, complex challenges invariably involve a *contest* of views. So, while there should be a commitment to work together, inevitably there will be times when community groups will be in disagreement with GORCAPA's actions or views. Or even engaged in a legal case on different sides of an issue. Our intention would be for there to be sufficient relationship and respect to allow these differences to be navigated. Hence it would be helpful, in addition, to develop guidance and assistance in situations of *conflict*. Specifically, it would help if grievance and mediation mechanisms were outlined and made freely available, for parties and agencies unhappy with how a problem is being handled. This would help to avoid escalation of conflict and well as promote more literacy in managing conflict.

Connectedness also prompts consideration of flow-on effects. We recognise that the communities and places of the GOR have unique local conditions that have to be addressed in any planning and development. But they are also part of a connected system of the road itself. This implies that developments at any point in the road will have impact for communities at other points along the road. Large scale developments could for example, have significant effects (economic, social, environmental) that could be detrimental to the sustainability of other connected communities.

It is a shared value of the communities represented by GORCN that any proposed investment, planning and development should be guided by a principle of supporting and enhancing the viability of established local community facilities within the *whole* GOR region (including small scale businesses servicing their communities). This will be important to ensure that the whole GOR region maintains its *diversity* as visitation grows.

Objectives or “elements” in the community engagement framework

| | | GORCN comments |
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| 1 | To strengthen capacity and enable strategic leadership | <p>Skills-based community representatives are mentioned, so we would like to see some asset mapping of community knowledge and skills to make this expertise apparent. Also, there would be many community representatives who don’t see themselves as having skills, per se, but they have talent, long-standing knowledge, experience and energy. So perhaps a better way to frame this is needed, rather than simply “skills.” Not sure that an ongoing “group” is needed. It is more that this capacity needs to be developed along the coast in multidimensional ways.</p> <p>We want to see more whole-of-GOR citizenry. The GOR tends to have episodic engagement from communities on local or narrow/specific issues only. While that is entirely necessary, it possibly limits the development of a larger view of how GORCAPA should manage any conflicts between priorities.</p> |
| 2 | To increase community participation and build collective knowledge | <p>Good idea to have open deliberative forums, either place-based or subject based. Summit is also a good idea.</p> <p>At the moment the only official record of GOR problem solving lies in extreme examples (VCAT) which are impenetrable to the lay reader.</p> <p>We therefore suggest that GORCAPA creates a formal template-for-learning derived from real-world GOR case examples of best ways/worst ways to protect and manage the coast from different perspectives. The case studies would also consider how to navigate when communities are of divided opinion. These case studies would become a community resource (held on the GORCAPA website). The learning should be synthesized and packaged e.g., while there was agreement that X, Y and Z, there was disagreement about Q. In the end (the agency) chose to do T for (reason). We also encourage retrospective review of cases – how things turned out as time passed. GORCN has compiled five draft case studies which we plan to offer as a follow up to this submission. These outline diverse experiences from which best practice could be co-produced in further dialogue with GORCAPA.</p> <p>Also, given the multiple interconnected challenges for the protection of the GOR, such as climate-change impacts, climate mitigation strategies (transport, energy supply, etc), tourism patterns, local workforce accommodation, and so on, it is essential that community participation involves future thinking. Part of the ‘collective knowledge’ that needs to be built is the process of future scenario visioning under conditions of uncertainty. GORCN has expertise to contribute to that process.</p> |

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| 3 | To connect and learn from our communities and knowledge holders | <p>Same comment as above. We also ask, how will information data platforms be designed to support greater and easier community understanding of and engagement with GORCAPA's management of the coast? Information release is currently being managed on a case-by-case basis. GORCN members believe there is a significant opportunity to greatly improve the way in which we facilitate 'learnings' from the various GOR projects – what worked, what didn't, learnings from similar projects, resources that underpinned that project, who to contact, profiles - expertise, who to contact on a similar project, media take-outs etc, etc. This is in the interests of not continually reinventing the wheel and in order to build knowledge, skills and take quicker action on projects along the Coast and to build local capacity. This may help facilitate better co-design, participation and voice on projects.</p> |
| 4 | To be transparent and keep our communities informed | <p>In addition to what is stated here, we need data platforms that retain and organise knowledge in easily navigable ways (as suggested above).</p> <p>Slide 4 of your draft framework says that trust is created through transparency and consistency. We suggest that it is more than that. If we agree with the principles/values that GORCAPA espouses <i>and the priority order or preference in which they would be followed</i>, then we can (in theory) trust that decisions would be made in certain ways without need for a lot of community oversight of many decisions. For example, if of the three GORCAPA responsibilities (natural environment protection, visitation and liveability), we knew that environment is first and foremost, then GORCAPA could be trusted to enact that. Concern for GORCN is created when preference for environment protection is not explicitly stated, but merely "balanced" against visitation and liveability. Therefore, the degree of trade-off GORCAPA engages in requires almost constant surveillance (for want of a better word) <i>unless</i> GORCAPA states that the environment and its protection has primacy, and that other goals follow from it.</p> |
| 5 | To receive and respond to feedback from our communities | <p>GORCAPA has a unique challenge in increasing the scale of the organisation's operations, the scope of work, and a change to the culture (to be more outward facing and community accountable) <i>all at the same time</i>. There is a high risk of dropping the ball as the organisation makes this transition. Having a navigable guide on the public interface is vital so that the organisation can quickly self-correct as needed.</p> <p>We need a who-to-call directory for "first-aid" type problem-solving along the GOR, to avoid getting "the run around" in response to particular scenarios/events.</p> <p>We also need to know who to connect with in terms of long-term visioning and planning. And then, we need assurance that past actions and ways-of-working will not naturally transition into the present, because the organisation is so distracted with planning a better future, that here-and-now management is not being improved.</p> |

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| | | <p>Right now, for example, we see a strong need for GORCAPA to assess and report on the “state of play” on GORCAPA projects along the coast eg., the Geelong City Deal projects, so that communities easily can see what is happening, where, with what implications. A town-by-town navigation tool could allow the public to see how all major assets and projects are being managed.</p> |
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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Greater awareness of GORCAPA operations, finances and constraints

To improve community engagement with GORCAPA we need to better understand how GORCAPA operates and what key agenda and issues you are navigating. This allows the community to be more proactive, instead of only engaging with GORCAPA on an issue-by-issue or place-by-place basis as directed by different proposals or developments. We see the Board as a mechanism for community engagement, for example, yet there are no avenues for the community to engage with Board members.

The previous GORCC had to raise revenue to protect and manage the coast from developments on the coast – an inherently contradictory position. The new GORCAPA Act changes this and yet, as a community, we are not aware of the avenues and mechanisms that will be used to increase the flow of finance. Being aware of this will bring a greater perspective to the discussion of what is or is not possible along the coast. It will also potentially create a greater community voice for more resources for marine and coastal protection. Put another way, the present community engagement framework seems to assume that most engagement will be specific to local projects, when we are arguing that community engagement can be more macro, strategic and far reaching. We want to know what types of decisions we can influence as well as how we can be an advocate for the work GORCAPA can do.

Triggers for community engagement and the intensity of work

At present, the community engagement framework outlines channels, forums and mechanisms for communication, dialogue and problem-solving, but work is needed on what type of strategy is needed where and when. There needs to be work on triggers and thresholds for more intense work and, as indicated earlier, when mediation might be needed for resolution of conflict. The criterion for triggering more intense work needs to be clearly spelled out.

Evaluation and performance monitoring

GORCN would like to see how GORCAPA performance as a whole is to be evaluated - the performance monitoring framework. We are not simply saying that we want to see how community engagement is evaluated, although we include that. We are saying that we are engaged with GORCAPA because we want to see good results for the coast, so we would like to say on what those indicators might be and how data might be collected. Our concern, from experience with *Engage Victoria*, is that many survey based approaches have become less useful because questions asked are leading or not appropriate for other reasons, key dimensions are missed, and results do not report on sample sizes or the representativeness of the samples.

Substantial resources for community engagement must be committed

Community engagement by GORCAPA must become central to GORCAPA's way of working and not simply an ancillary process that can be outsourced to consultants or other sections of government. In-house community engagement professionals are not simply "the comms team." GORCAPA needs in-house people who can build relationships, foster problem solving, navigate complex change processes, upkeep and manage large data bases and conduct reflective case studies that build learning.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

GORCN believes that GOR communities hold considerable intellectual capacities and experiences which can be leveraged as a critical resource for the GOR region. An engagement and communications process that taps into these assets at the outset - through processes of early and ongoing consultation, and proactive and iterative engagement - will help entrench a culture of trust between GORCAPA and these communities. It will also assist government strategy formulation in the context of the complex and disruptive changes that future policy and management of the GOR must take into account in order to be effective and to meet the objectives for the protection of the region. Around the world, the value of the creative engagement of citizens in the exploration of new future possibilities is being recognised and supported. The GOR should be leading in the exploration and development of processes to generate future visions through community engagement. We welcome the chance to make input at this early stage.