



**Bellarine  
Bayside**  
Coastal Management

# PLANNING OUR FUTURE COAST

**WHAT WE HEARD**  
Community Engagement Summary



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Custodians of the Bellawiyin, and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

We recognise the unique ability of Wadawurrung People to care for Country and the intrinsic spiritual, cultural, economic, social and environmental connections they share with the land, waters and skies.

We are committed to partnering with Wadawurrung to achieve effective management of Country through self-determination.





# INTRODUCTION

**Located on Wadawurrung Country, the northern Bellarine coastal reserve holds important value to many. It contains sites of cultural significance, natural areas that sustain important coastal and marine vegetation and wildlife, and hosts vibrant events and activities that make up the social fabric for the community.**

Planning Our Future Coast is an integrated engagement project to ensure a collaborative approach to management of the coastal and marine environment on the northern Bellarine Peninsula.

During the project, we are working with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to ensure Traditional Owner aspirations for Country are recognised and incorporated. We are also seeking input and guidance from partner agencies, and undertaking community consultation.

Feedback gathered throughout the project will help inform our planning processes over the next 12 months, including the development of:

- Coastal and Marine Management Plan 2026-2030.
- Coastal Adaptation Plan.
- Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve Management Plan.
- Beach Access Study.

This update summarises engagement outcomes from the community engagement period that ran across eight weeks from 23 November, 2024 until 17 January, 2025.

Thank you to everyone who provided us with feedback.





## HOW WE ENGAGED

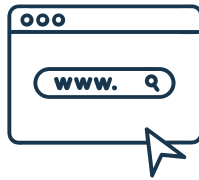
We utilised a range of interactive tools to collect feedback, and promoted the opportunity via different avenues including social media, print media, posters along the coast, emails to key local and coastal stakeholder groups, and pop-up info stalls.



**56 days of engagement**



**6 pop-up info stalls attended by 443 people**



**Over 3000 views and 1000 unique visitors to the Coastal Conversations online platform**



**41 posters along the coast**



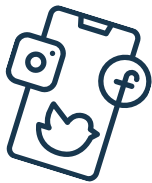
**169 survey responses**



**86 vision statements**



**107 social media interactions (reactions, comments, shares, etc.)**



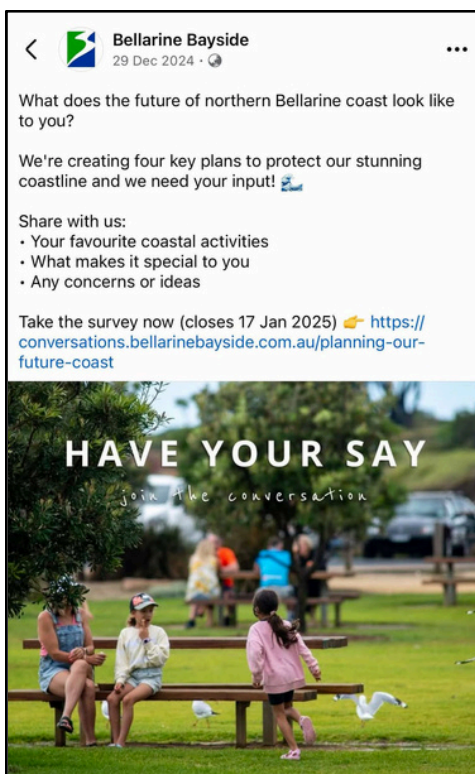
**13,020 social media views**



**95 pins on the map**



**13 children's surveys**





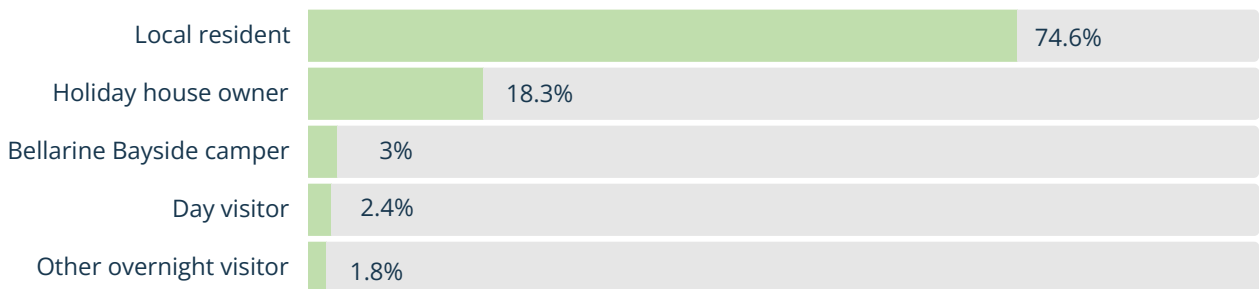
## WHO WE HEARD FROM

The coastal Crown land reserve of the northern Bellarine Peninsula is accessed by a wide range of people, providing cultural, environmental, social and economic benefits for the Victorian community.

In total, 289 people provided 294 online contributions and 69 in-person contributions. Of these contributions, 169 surveys that included demographic questions were completed.

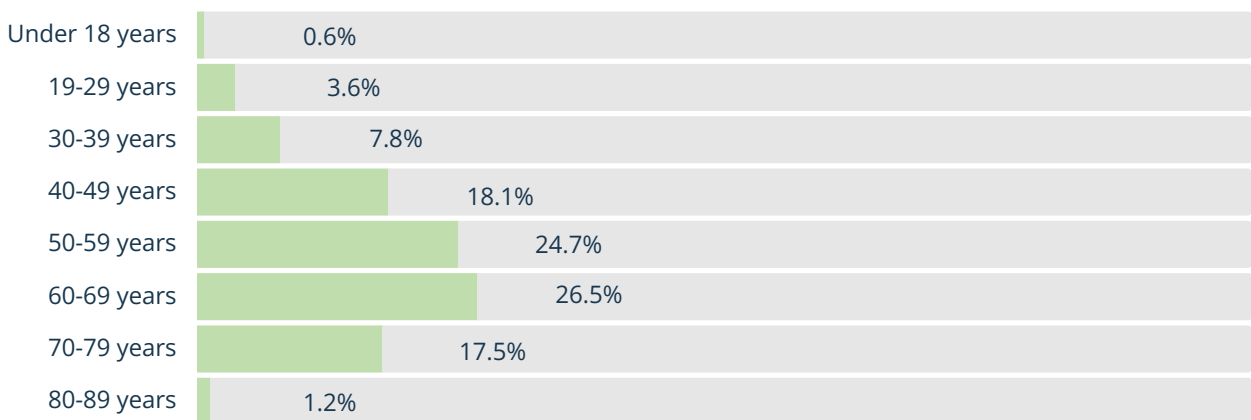
Of 169 survey responses, most respondents were either a local resident or a holiday house owner. Bellarine Bayside campers, other overnight visitors and day visitors made up the remainder.

Additionally, 63 of the 169 survey respondents identified as being a member of one or more of the local Community Associations or groups/clubs that are located on the coastal reserve.



**Figure 1.** Survey respondents connection to the northern Bellarine coast.

The last Census in 2021 listed the median age of Portarlington, Indented Head and St Leonards as 62, 59 and 56 respectively, and majority of survey respondents were aged over 50 (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Survey respondents by age.

## WHAT WE ASKED

We asked respondents to share perspectives across:

- coastal and marine **values, activities and uses**;
- **concerns** for the coast;
- **ideas and aspirations** for the coast;
- knowledge and experiences of **coastal hazards** and **adaptation**;
- use and experience when **accessing beaches**; and
- knowledge and experiences of **Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve**.



# WHAT WE HEARD

## A 15-year Vision for the Coast

Consultation provides an opportunity to develop a shared vision for the coastal and marine environment, to be articulated through the Coastal and Marine Management Plan 2026-2030.

We heard a range of responses for what people want the coast to be in 15 years time, including being a place that:

- **Recognises Indigenous Cultural Values and Knowledge**
- **Has a Protected and Healthy Environment**
- **Is an Accessible and Safe Coastline**
- **Provides Sustainable, Inclusive and Well-maintained Infrastructure**
- **Maintains the existing Natural Beauty**
- **Fosters Community Connections**

*"A clean, healthy place, where everyone can feel safe and happy."*

*"Recognise cultural history, thriving natural environment and great experiences for all!"*

*"Infrastructure that is environmentally aware, sustainable and inclusive to ALL."*

*"Accessible to all, protecting biodiversity, and First Nations co-management.."*

*"Valued for its natural beauty and indigenous biological diversity, to be climate resilience & respectfully, sustainably accessible to all."*

*"An aesthetically pleasing, interesting place for non-invasive pursuits with good access to water and stable coast with indigenous vegetation."*

*"A harmonious and respectful environment for people and all living creatures."*

*"A place that people still want to make memories at!"*

*Diverse, resilient, and natural.*

*"I want the coast to be a clean environment for humans and all wildlife."*

*"Biodiverse and accessible too, and with indigenous involvement and awareness."*



## Values and Coastal Use

The way in which people use, value and enjoy the coastal and marine areas of the northern Bellarine Peninsula helps us understand what is important to people. This informs our planning processes by ensuring we are protecting, enhancing and supporting these values into the future.

The survey asked respondents to select coastal values that are important to them and activities they undertake on the coast. Key themes about what is important to people on the coast included:



**Natural Beauty and Environment** - beaches was the highest rated coastal value, selected by 160 survey respondents, followed by wildlife with 124 responses and wetlands with 105 responses.



**Passive Recreational Activities** - the most popular activities when visiting the coast are walking with 158 responses, swimming with 140 responses, dog walking with 95 responses and cycling with 78 responses.



**Relaxed and Peaceful** - the quiet atmosphere of the region is highly valued with 124 survey respondents enjoying the coast for relaxing and 88 saying they visit to picnic or eat a meal.



**Water Activities** - the coast is valued for a wide range of water activities including 72 responses saying they enjoy the coast for snorkelling/diving, 64 responses for fishing, 52 responses for kayaking/canoeing, 50 responses for boating and 49 responses for stand-up paddleboarding.



**Community and Social Aspects** - many responses gave a strong sense that the coast provides important community connections through shared spaces, social recreation and opportunities to participate in community activities.







*"I love the natural beauty of our foreshore on the Bellarine. It is part of what attracted me to this side of the bay. The access to nature reserves, walking tracks and the coastal vegetation is magnificent. It would be a shame to see the coastline developed and lose the character of the land..."*

*"We love the Bellarine coast for its coastal beauty and peaceful nature and lack of constant crowds."*

*"We love the coastal environment, the wildlife including birds and marine life. The reserves that protect the flora and fauna are especially valued by us."*

*"The best thing about the coast is the nature such as the clean water and the trees."*

*"I love it that there are places where native vegetation and fauna are being given a chance to flourish and the damage of careless past generations is being redressed. I love it that the pre-European history is being incorporated into the planning. I love taking my grandchildren fishing off the jetty's and boat ramps."*

*"I love the dog access area on the north Bellarine coast. Outside of school holiday periods, this is the most prevalent activity. It is highly social and recreational. Excellent for dogs and humans."*



## Concerns for the Coast

By listening to concerns people have for the coast, we gain greater insight into threats to the coastal and marine environment, and can consider ways to strategically address them through our planning process.

The survey asked respondents to select their concerns from a list, and let us know about any others. Key concerns included:



**Erosion** - selected by 114 survey respondents and mentioned frequently in open-ended questions, erosion is of high concern for the northern Bellarine Peninsula.



**Litter and Rubbish** - 104 survey respondents selected littering and rubbish as a concern, and open-ended responses also mentioned Pollution such as stormwater run-off.



**Loss of Native Vegetation and Weeds** - correlating with the high value for the natural environment and wildlife, loss of native vegetation is a concern for 90 respondents, and weeds are a concern for 89 respondents.



**Visitor Conflict** - a key theme for concern was the differing ways in which people enjoy and use the coast, with many responses commenting on the demand this places on the coast by users.



**Facilities and Maintenance** - there was a strong desire to keep coastal maintenance standards high, and concern expressed about limited all-abilities facilities, as well as ageing or damaged public facilities.





*"The on-going demands upon the coast make for numerous challenges. The impact on plants and wildlife, mainly through ignorance but at other times through a sense of entitlement, is becoming harder to ignore. Managing these competing priorities seems to be at a tipping point."*

*"Better all abilities access to the beach to the beach and lack of all abilities parking. The car park at St Leonards pier has one disabled car park in the furthest corner of the car park from the pier. This is very restrictive for people with mobility issues. Not everyone with mobility issues use a wheelchair."*

*"The walk ways to the beach. It is hard to get prams/carts on to the beach, it would be nice to have a ramp instead of wooden boards and steps."*

*"There seems to be lots of run off from streets and farms that end up in the bay, polluting the water. I think run off needs to be more controlled, especially chemicals, to reduce pollution."*

*"I guess over-crowding and the number of jetskis would be concerns in the holiday period but i do understand that the visitors are important to the ongoing viability and economic health of our region in the off season."*





## Ideas and Opportunities

We asked people to provide their ideas for the coast, and what they thought was most important to ensure the coast is protected and enjoyed into the future.

Key themes we heard included:



**Plant more native vegetation** - selected by 100 survey respondents and mentioned frequently in open-ended questions, planting more native vegetation was recognised as highly important to help mitigate a range of concerns including erosion, replacement of ageing trees, wildlife protection and improving the natural beauty.



**More weed management** - 90 survey respondents selected weed management as important, with open ended responses suggesting it is considered valuable to protect the natural environment and preserve the local amenity.



**Improved Facilities** - there were many suggestions for facility additions and improvements, including shared trails, interpretive signage, public amenities and playgrounds. A strong desire was also expressed to incorporate all-abilities options wherever possible.



**Improved rubbish management** - was a key theme with ideas including more rubbish bins, more frequent litter collection, educational opportunities and switching to a take your rubbish home management practice.







*"More seating and picnic tables. More native planting"*

*"Ensure protection of beaches from erosion and development. Be very careful about building groynes and sea walls as they often cause more problems than they solve."*

*"A couple more bins around wouldn't hurt during busy season they are all over flowing sadly visitors refuse to take their rubbish with them and dump it along side bins."*

*"More signage for respectful and responsible visitor behaviour, more signs/info of historical or cultural nature to stop, read, ponder, learn etc."*

*"Re vamp the Portarlington pier toilets... Its a major gateway to the Bellarine and those concrete bunker toilets are awful."*

*"Accessible equipment into bay to allow disabled people to enter water."*

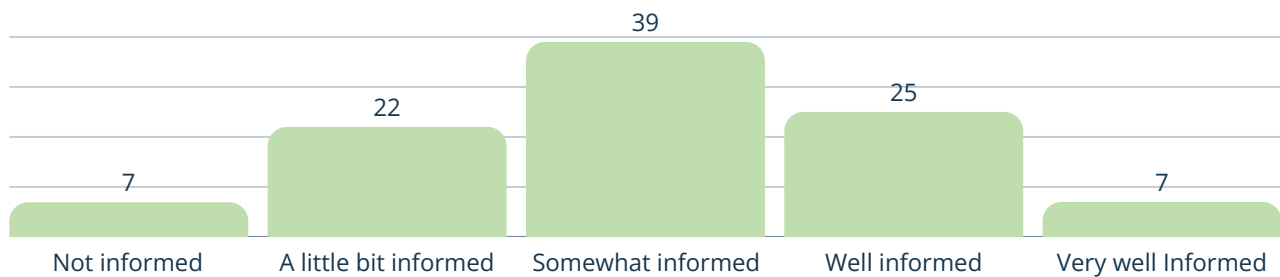
*I believe you should look at the success of the erosion management in front of batman park just south of the ozone. The timber fencing buried in the sand together with the planted salt bush has been very successful and should be considered as a model in other suitable locations.*



## Coastal Hazards and Adaptation

84 survey respondents selected to provide further feedback on the Coastal Adaptation Plan.

We heard that the community feel somewhat informed about the future impacts of a changing climate (Figure 3), and a number of comments indicated that many people have experienced coastal hazards or noticed changes along our coast.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of responses to how well informed people feel they are about the future impacts of a changing climate on our coast.

When asked about areas of concern for coastal hazards, including erosion and flooding, survey respondents appear to be relatively equally concerned about the entire length of the coast. However, the area in front of Salt Lagoon had slightly higher concern, and the areas between Fisher Street in Portarlington to Wrathall Reserve in Indented Head showed slightly less concern.

We heard that people want to understand more about the predicted effects of a changing climate on the northern Bellarine Peninsula. Sentiment is divided on the success of previous intervention measures and people want to understand other options and are interested to see a plan for coastal adaptation.







*"I strongly believe that native vegetation plays a key role in slowing erosion and must be used to far greater effect together with sympathetic modern forms of management."*

*"The lower bluff & St Leonards south are the areas with which I'm most familiar and where I have watched as repeated sand imports have washed away; the Salt Lagoon area is clearly very vulnerable (including when as recently, cars park on top of new plantings & up on the built up embankment)."*

*"I have lived in this area since 1981. I have witnessed and photographed the massive erosion over the years. It pains me to see the little success that has been achieved by the many efforts put in to slow down and elevated the erosion."*

*"Would like to know why groynes were installed as these have only inhibited the natural flow of sand up and down the beach."*

*"Along the Portarlington forshore has ongoing erosion issues. The maintenance work appears very short term. We live in this area and witness the problem regularly. The forshore planting is inadequate and unsightly considering the high patronage. Point Lonsdale appears to have the solution including the wall and revegetation."*

*"I am very keen to learn what adaption and resilience strategies are in place and where erosion is identified understanding how the community can work with Bellarine Bayside."*



Beach Access

93 survey respondents selected to provide further feedback on Beach Access.

We heard mixed opinions among survey respondents about what they think is a reasonable number of beach access points for Bellarine Bayside to manage (Figure 4).

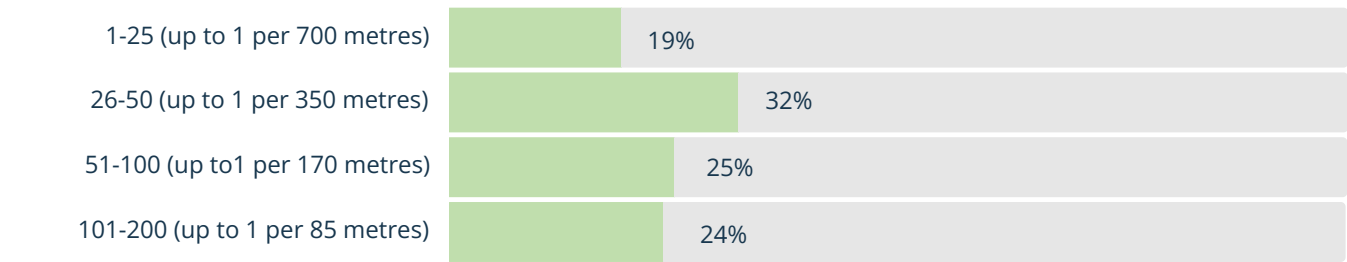


Figure 4. Survey respondents views on what they think is a reasonable number of access points for Bellarine Bayside to formally manage into the future.

We heard that people are more concerned than not about the impact of current beach access on cultural and environmental values (Figure 5), and not very, or only slightly concerned about the safety of current beach access (Figure 6).

Many additional comments about beach access relate to accessibility restrictions with current beach access and a desire to improve access for people with mobility issues and disabilities.

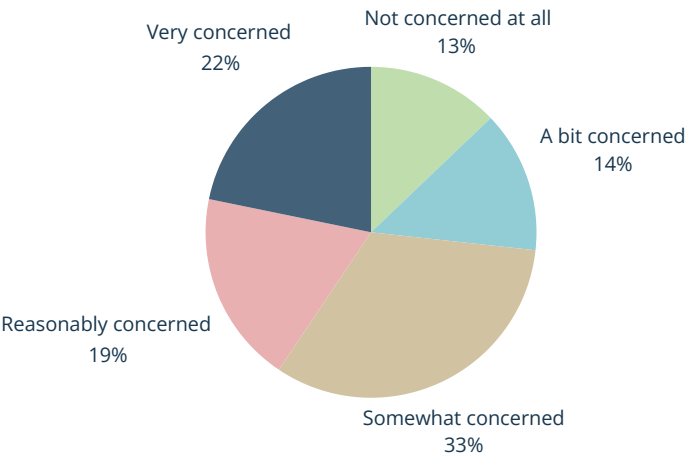


Figure 5. Survey respondents views on how concerned they are about the impact of the current level of beach access on cultural and environmental values.

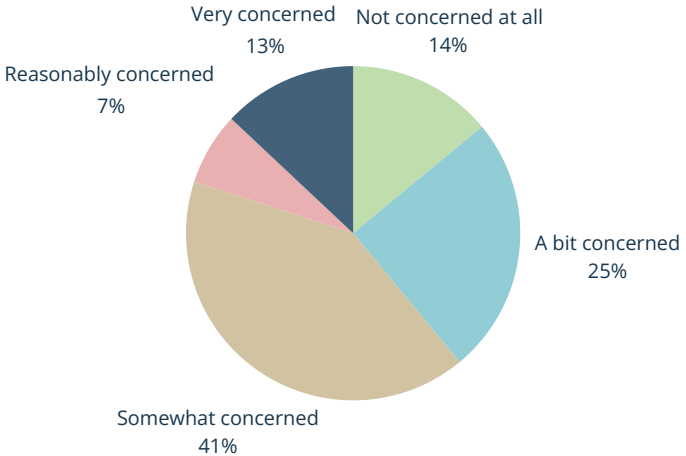


Figure 6. Survey respondents views on how concerned they are about the safety of current beach access.





*"Easier beach access for people with disabilities and the elderly. I take residents from where I work to the beach. They love to get their feet wet. The smiles on their faces make my day. It's a small thing, I'm often told "I never thought I would be in the water at the beach again". It's difficult to get the residents to the water as some of them have walkers. Having proper access to the water would mean even more of the residents could have this experience. More smiles all round."*

*"Select a few locations to create full access for all abilities. Less locations done fantastically is better than more locations done inadequately. Please leave all the access points that are currently available. The wetland/ beach fauna timber/ metal above-land pathways are fantastic - more of this would be fabulous, as it is both giving safer access and allowing regeneration of local indigenous fauna & flora. Please ensure mainly 'ambulant unisex' toilet & change facilities and external showers."*





## Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve

50 survey respondents selected to provide further feedback on Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve.

When asked to rank proposed themes of operational plans, we heard that survey respondents rated wetland health as the highest priority, followed by improving biodiversity, pest animal management and fire management.

Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve experiences relatively low use in comparison to the coastal and marine areas that we manage, but it is highly treasured by those who do use it. Key themes about what people value in Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve included:



**Quiet Retreat** - the peaceful natural setting in the bush where you can get away from it all, especially in the summer months, was the most valued with 16 responses (32%).



**Environmental Protection** - the protection of habitat was highly valued with 11 responses (22%) and, when asked what would they change, 24% of respondents suggested more support to manage weeds and pests.



**Walking Tracks** - the nature trails were highly valued for walking in the bush with 9 responses (18%), and 5 respondents (10%) want better walking tracks.

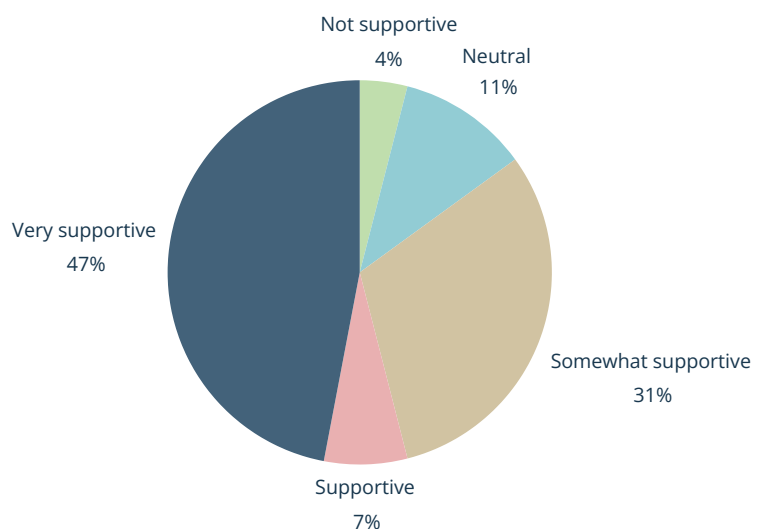


**Wildlife** - seeing and hearing wildlife including the opportunity for birdwatching was highly valued with 8 responses (16%).

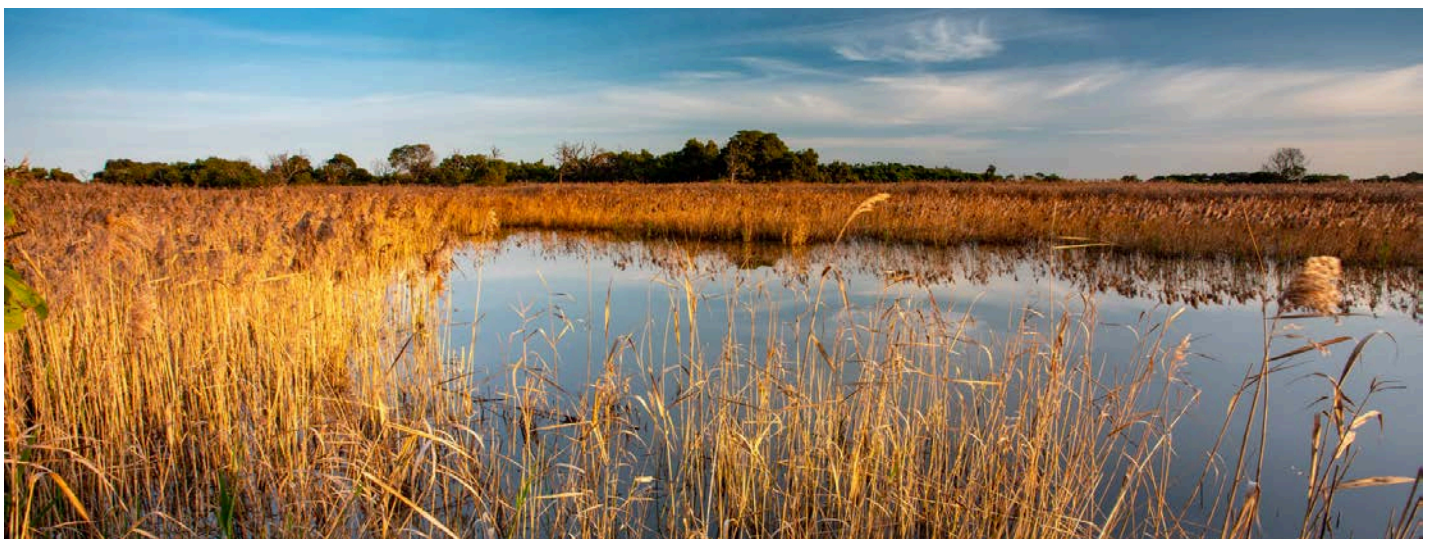
We heard that survey respondents are mostly very supportive of the introduction of new, low-key visitor infrastructure within Point Richards Flora and Fauna Reserve (Figure 7).

When asked for further detail, survey respondents highlighted a desire for improved infrastructure, continued environmental management, increased accessibility, and enhanced community engagement while maintaining the natural and cultural integrity of the reserve.

A number of responses highlighted a desire for no change as they value the current state.



**Figure 7.** Survey respondents level of support for new, low-key visitor infrastructure.







"Access for all eg Mothers with prams (provide some harder paths for this), boardwalks and upgraded paths would benefit all abilities."

"A boardwalk to the wetlands. It would be great to have a chance to see the wetlands."

"More explanation of Wadawurrung cultural practices"

"Just continued improvement, reduction of weeds and management towards improved biodiversity"

"Well placed seating every where in shaded places".

Aged care / wheelchair walks".

"More picnic shelters to attract people from the camping ground"

"Most important is wetlands that need more protection from intrusion of rampant development and poor management of stormwater".





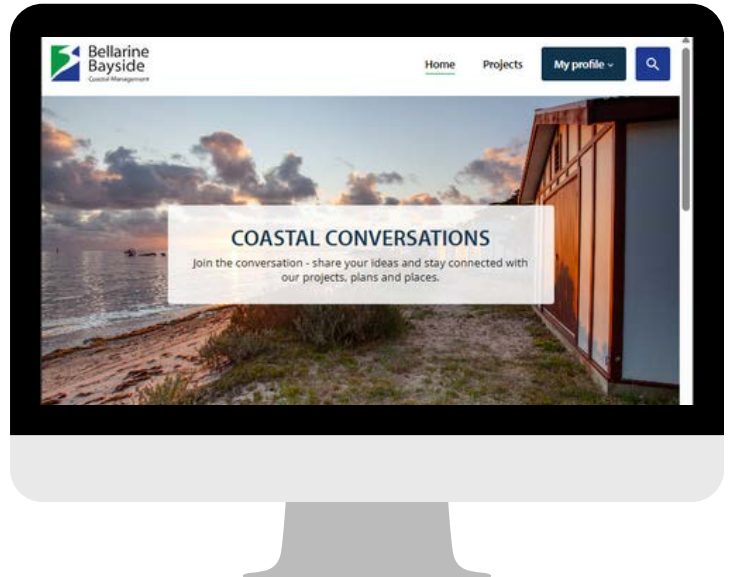
## NEXT STEPS

We are working with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to ensure aspirations for Country are incorporated into our planning processes.

We are also seeking input from partner agencies - the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, the City of Greater Geelong and Parks Victoria - to ensure we incorporate partnership opportunities.

The valuable feedback we heard from community during the 'Planning Our Future Coast' engagement will be considered alongside Traditional Owner aspirations, partner and agency input, policy and legislative requirements, technical work and scientific studies when drafting the four plans, and during other planning projects over the next 12 months.

You can keep up-to-date with the progress of each project, and participate in future feedback opportunities, via Coastal Conversations, our online engagement platform where we are working with the community to make informed decisions for the northern Bellarine coast.



### *How can you get involved?*

Visit Coastal Conversation, our online engagement platform, [www.conversations.bellarinebayside.com.au](http://www.conversations.bellarinebayside.com.au).

There you can:

- Follow the projects to ensure you keep up to date with them and upcoming opportunities to join the conversation
- Keep an eye out for project updates and factsheets
- Email us at: [contactus@bellarinebayside.com.au](mailto:contactus@bellarinebayside.com.au)



SCAN ME



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