

## President's Report 2023

AIDA acknowledges the traditional owners of these lands, the Wadawurrung People of the Kulin nation, and the Gadubanud People of the Eastern Maar nation. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Welcome to our Ward councillor, Libby Stapleton and Surf Coast Shire CEO, Robyn Seymour. Our other Ward Councillors Mike Bodsworth and Gary Allen are apologies.

Welcome AIDA members. AIDA has had a very busy and productive year with much to celebrate, and we still have a busy agenda.

As you will be aware we are pursuing accreditation from the International Dark Sky Association to have our area registered as a Dark Sky Destination. This would have significant environmental, economic and reputational benefits as it would encourage a reduction in light pollution, help birds, insects and animals that need the night sky to breed and thrive as well as increasing the number of people staying overnight in the area. At the moment there are only two Dark Sky Destinations in Australia, neither of them in Victoria and gaining accreditation would give our area a big positive tick.

The committee will continue to work towards achieving accreditation, but we recognise this is likely to be a long journey as there are several hoops to go through and we need support from the community and the Surf Coast Shire.

Last September AIDA organised a Dark Sky Event with a limit of 150 people. It was fully subscribed and a great success with many AIDA and local community members attending as well as those from further afield. The event was supported by Surf Coast Events and AIDA's insurance company. This financial support, plus some of our own funds, allowed AIDA run the night free of charge.

We are planning another for September 16 after many requests for a repeat event. However, this year there will need to be a modest charge to cover costs. More details will be available soon and we hope many of you will be able to attend.

We also organised a January meeting to look at the health of the Painkalac Creek and Inlet with about 100 people attending. The creek and its valley are the most highly valued part of our landscape according to our surveys over the years. We were very fortunate to have agreement from the various groups and

authorities with an interest in the issue speaking at the event and we thank Barwon Water, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Estuary Watch, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, the Surf Coast Shire and the University of Melbourne for participating.

*E.Coli* monitoring of the creek at four sites is continuing to test for its suitability for recreational activities and we look forward to sharing the analysis of the results later in the year.

AIDA received a Surf Coast Shire grant for another of our current projects – creating an oral and visual record of the disastrous Ash Wednesday fires.

There is no recorded oral history of the experiences of people from our district who lived through Ash Wednesday and visual imagery is scattered between households. The \$2,500 grant from the Surf Coast Shire for the preparation of a record of the disaster that will be publicly available on AIDA's website. A generous donation from AIDA member Chris Corr doubled the sum available for the project and the AIDA committee agreed to provide an additional \$2,500 taking the total for the project to \$7,500.

Alex Watkins, a local community member who has his own video and audio production company, has been engaged to interview and record people who were in the area at the time of the fires and to gather photos for the website. He is hard at work now. The project will be completed and launched this year. It is anticipated that further material will be able to be added.

AIDA also received a grant from the Shire to have Wi-Fi installed in the hall which is providing a tangible community benefit and being used by many of the hall users. Our thanks to the Shire and hall committee for their support.

One of the items on today's agenda is the committee's proposed updating of AIDA's Aims and Objectives. The suggested changes are not major, but we think are more clearly stated and more accurately reflect our activities.

For some years the AIDA committee has been advocating for a reduced speed limit through Aireys and Fairhaven and we were very pleased when the Department of Transport announced a trial reduction from 60 to 50 kms p/h would be run from December to April. We are hopeful that it will be a permanent change.

Our communities are promoted as "walking villages" and to support this we would also like to see the speed limits on all our residential streets reduced from 50 to 40. AIDA is lobbying council to support the change. Bambra Road is of particular concern as it is a busy shared road with lots of pedestrians, cyclists,

horse riders, dog walkers and wildlife but it seems to encourage vehicles to speed. The lighthouse precinct already has a 40 kms p/h limit and extending it to the rest of our residential areas seems to be a logical and sensible move.

Following a change to the *Local Government Act* the Surf Coast Shire needs to change its electoral structure. The reforms are looking at whether the Shire should be divided into Wards or not, if it is to have Wards how many there should be, the total number of councillors and how many per Ward.

AIDA put in a detailed submission and responded to the first recommendations from the Victorian Electoral Commission. One issue that the reforms don't address is voter registration.

We are aware that there are many property owners in the Shire who are unaware they have voting rights in the Surf Coast Shire council elections. If you have a holiday home in the Surf Coast Shire but your principal place of residence is elsewhere you are able to apply to the Surf Coast Shire to register to vote here.

We will continue to represent our area's interests as we liaise with the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority or GORCAPA. The extent of its interests and influence over the Great Ocean Road will continue to grow as it takes over all Crown Land along the Road.

We have three areas of immediate interest. One is its tourism strategy which is under development. We are advocating for an emphasis on 'slow tourism' with fewer tourists but people who will linger on their journey, spending longer and contributing to the local economy and community while exploring all the area has to offer.

One other immediate issue is the Authority's funding model. It has been set up to be self-funding while at the same time it is charged with protecting the Road's environment, marine and coastal areas, flora and fauna. There is an inherent contradiction in the Authority needing to raise significant funds for its operation while protecting the very area it is raising funds from. With suggestions of charging for car parking and access to some areas AIDA will continue to advocate for the interests of the local community while welcoming visitors. We work closely with eighteen other community groups in the GOR Community Network.

AIDA is also very interested in the Authority's response to coastal erosion which will become an increasing problem with the impacts of climate change. To date, the common fix is to build revetment or rock walls. Is there a danger this will lead to the Road becoming the Great Ocean Wall? It also seems that the actions being taken are primarily aimed at protecting assets such as car

parcs, power poles and the road itself rather than our beaches and coastline. We have raised this as an issue and asked for managed retreat to be included in considerations for the most vulnerable sections of the road.

An application to construct a private bridge over the Painkalac Creek was first raised in 2019. The bridge would have needed to be built on Crown Land on the western bank and council managed, public land on the eastern bank. From the outset AIDA was concerned about the alienation of public land for a private business. Our other significant concern was that the land needed to construct the bridge was set aside for environmental conservation. AIDA's objections to the bridge were largely on these grounds. Council decided to reject the planning application. This decision was reviewed by VCAT following an appeal with a decision that a planning permit be granted.

Before the planning permit could be granted VCAT noted that the Shire would need to grant a lease over the public land. The application for this lease was on Council's March agenda with an officer recommendation that a lease should not be granted. This recommendation was accepted by council which means that this long running issue, which has occupied a lot of the committee's time, is now over.

Planning issues have continued to be firmly on the committee's agenda and we continue to object to applications that don't conform to Council's planning policies or to the Neighbourhood Character Guidelines. Much of this work is being done by Ian Laging and our thanks to him for his dedication to the task.

One of the issues that has concerned us this year is the increasing number of planning applications that are not compliant with the Neighbourhood Guidelines setback requirements. This has been raised with council and we will continue to ask that planning officers are more vigilant about this issue.

The Shire is reviewing its Planning Policies and guidelines. AIDA committee members have already attended a coastal planning workshop and will continue to be involved in the review to make sure any changes improve, and not weaken, the policies and guidelines that protect our area.

I would like to finish by thanking the AIDA committee. It has been a busy year, and everyone has worked on our many successes. A special thanks to Peter McPhee for his support. I would like to thank Frieda Waschmann in particular for singlehandedly organising the Dark Sky Event.

I am pleased that all committee members have renominated for another year and Annette Comte who resigned last year has nominated to re-join the committee. We do have vacancies and would welcome new faces if anyone is interested in joining us.

Our thanks too to Keith Bremner who always happily sets up the audio for our meetings and to Nan McNab for her expertise in producing out newsletters.

And lastly a special thanks to all AIDA members. Last year we had over 500 on our list and it is the strength of our membership that gives AIDA a strong voice to advocate for our area. Each and every one of you provide a valuable contribution to maintaining our low-key coastal village nature as the area continues to change and grow.

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