

President's Report 2024

I acknowledge 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 councillors, Libby Stapleton and Mike Bodsworth as well as the Shire CEO, Robyn Seymour and we thank them for their interest in, and support for AIDA and its activities.

Welcome to all AIDA members. We now have a membership of almost 550 and it is the strength of the membership that gives AIDA a strong voice when advocating for our area.

Among the issues that have occupied the AIDA committee's time this year has been the return of high numbers of tourists with an increasing number of cars and buses.

This has resulted in some challenging problems particularly around the lighthouse precinct, Step Beach Carpark and Eagle Rock Parade. At times the number of cars wanting to park near the lighthouse is causing significant issues with cars parking illegally anywhere they can resulting in traffic chaos and increasing damage to the conservation area on Eagle Rock Parade.

In addition, multiple buses entering, parking and turning in Inlet Crescent has been causing traffic jams and dangerous conditions for community members and visitors accessing the inlet. These buses have been observed taking up all the angle parking spots along the Inlet, at the skatepark and at the Allan Noble Reserve.

AIDA has been raising its concerns about these issues with the Shire and GORCAPA which recently agreed to an AIDA proposal to work together to co-design an acceptable solution. The Shire has increased the number of ranger visits to the area but there is no obvious improvement in the bus driver behaviour and it remains a dangerous situation and a significant issue.

It has been another busy year with some real achievements.

Remembering Ash Wednesday – This project to create an oral and pictorial archive recording the experiences of the Ash Wednesday fires was completed in December and is now live on-line. Local resident and project officer, Alex Watkins, produced a fascinating and, at times challenging, record of the impact of the fires and their aftermath. Our thanks to the Shire and the Corr family for their support. AIDA also contributed funds to ensure the project was completed.

Dark Sky – AIDA's pursuit of accreditation for our area to become a registered Dark Sky Destination has made significant progress this year. The Shire has given its support and has committed to developing a lighting policy that meets

the International Dark Sky Association's requirements. We have also received letters of support from many of our area's community groups and will shortly begin the application to the Dark Sky International Association. If we are successful we will become the second Dark Sky Community in Australia. Achieving accreditation will 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.

Planning – AIDA's review of all planning applications in our area is an significant part of our activities and objections are submitted when a proposal does not comply with the Shire's planning policies or our Neighbourhood Character Overlay. While we have heard there are some in the community who think this is wrong the reason the planning documents are advertised is so they are available for public review and comment. AIDA has a very good working relationship with the Shire's Planning Department and many of AIDA's objections are accepted resulting in improved outcomes for our Neighbourhood Character.

The Shire's review of its Planning Policies and guidelines is continuing and the committee continues to be involved to make sure any changes improve, and not weaken, the policies and guidelines that protect our area.

In December the Victorian Minister for Planning approved a Planning Scheme amendment to allow a second small dwelling on land where there is already a house. This can sometimes be done without the need for a planning permit and with exemptions from many of the planning overlays that protect our Neighbourhood Character.

Earlier this month AIDA wrote to the Minister to raise concerns about the potential impact of these exemptions which would allow the second small dwellings to be built within vegetated setback areas between residential buildings or on a property boundary. Our letter made the point that the greenery in setback areas is a significant and important element in the character of our communities where buildings are seen to be nestled among the trees.

Painkalac Creek and Inlet – The Painkalac has been a focus of the committee this year for two key reasons. In my report last year, I noted that *E.coli* monitoring of the creek at four sites was being done to test for its suitability for recreational activities such as swimming and fishing. The results were released in November and they showed elevated levels of E.coli at the River and Beach Road sites. The Shire put up warning signs at several locations along the creek and at the Inlet to let the community know there is an issue with the water quality at times. The Painkalac is not the only waterbody along the Great Ocean Road with this faecal contamination problem with places such as Wye River,

Kennet River and Lorne reporting similar issues. The Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority has undertaken to convene meetings with all the relevant bodies to try to find the sources of this contamination and identify solutions.

The second issue of concern has been the significant increase in the number of times the mouth of the Inlet has been artificially opened over recent years. From 2021 to 2023 there were 26 artificial openings which was more than a 250% increase from previous three years when there were just 7 openings.

The CCMA has confirmed that each additional estuary opening results in disturbance to the ecosystem and increases the risk of environmental damage. Maintaining and improving the ecological health of the Painkalac Creek and estuary and its water quality is crucial for our community and recently several groups of residents committed to these aims have come together forming the Painkalac Valley Network to combine their knowledge and interests in all aspects of the system's health.

Speed Reduction – For several years AIDA lobbied Regional Roads Victoria to reduce the speed limit through Aireys Inlet and Fairhaven. A trial reduction from 60 to 50 kms p/h was run last year from and in September the reduction was made permanent through Aireys but remains at 60 through Fairhaven which is hard to understand. When the surf is up the area becomes very busy with

surfers in various stages of undress loading or unloading boards and walking along the roadside.

AIDA will continue to lobby for the speed limit on our residential roads to be reduced to 40kms p/h.

Electoral Structure Review – AIDA is very fortunate that one of its members offered his skills and knowledge of electoral issues to help with our submission to the recent electoral structure review. The result was announced in February and our preferred structure, that unites all the coastal communities from Lorne to Jan Juc and the hinterland into the new Otway Range Ward with three councillors, was accepted.

The Council is currently reviewing the maintenance and renewal of unsealed roads throughout the Shire. While we are well aware there are some in the community who don't like unsealed roads the majority community support for unsealed roads is well-documented by AIDA and the Shire. AIDA's surveys of community attitudes over the last thirty years, the Statement of Neighbourhood Character in the Planning Scheme, and the decisions of two council citizens' juries on local road sealing all support the retention of unsealed roads.

The residents of Aireys Inlet and the surrounding district have fought for many years to retain unsealed roads, with no made footpaths or curb and channel

edging. Unsealed roads slow down traffic and, by generating more tyre noise than sealed roads, are safer for the pedestrians and cyclists who share our roads.

Unsealed roads also minimise stormwater run-off, decreasing the potential for the Painkalac to flood. From an aesthetic point of view, they contribute to the coastal village atmosphere of our towns. Unsealed roads are an integral element of the non-urbanised, low key, rural character of our ‘nestled in the bush’ communities. AIDA has been assured that its longitudinal survey results will be included in the review’s considerations and we are hoping it will not result in a push to seal more of our roads.

We have continued to liaise with the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority on a variety of issues and through the Great Ocean Road Communities Network which now has 20 member groups from Geelong to Port Campbell.

The importance of the Authority to our area has continued to grow as it takes over all Crown Land along the Great Ocean Road. On the first of May the Authority will assume responsibility for management of the Split Point Lighthouse precinct from the Surf Coast Shire.

By November 2025 the Authority will have assumed management of about 700 parcels of Crown land along the Great Ocean Road. The Authority was

established to protect, conserve, enhance and manage public land but at the same time it is expected to be self-funding which seems contradictory.

The AIDA committee is still keen to enlist the support of someone to help with our social media. Please get in touch if you want to support and help shape our work in the coming years.

I am not going to continue as AIDA's President but will remain on the committee. I had not realised just how long I have been in the role and it's time for a new president.

I want to give my thanks to Peter McPhee who has been my sounding board and a much appreciated support for me over the years.

I would like to thank all the Council officers, Senior Managers and the past and present CEO's and Ward Councillors who have worked so collaboratively with me and AIDA over the years. AIDA's relationship with the Shire is very important and we value it highly.

Many thanks to Lecki Ord who continues to be the AIDA membership secretary and to Nan McNab for producing our beautiful newsletters. The committee also thanks Rod Brookes who has volunteered to steer the revamp of AIDA's website and manage it for us.

I also want to give my thanks to all the past and present committee members for all the support and assistance they provide. Guy Abrahams resigned from the

committee in December and I thank him for his contribution. Ian Herben joined the committee in January.

I am pleased that all other committee members have renominated for another year. Being on the AIDA committee is very rewarding and it makes a significant contribution to our area. Please consider joining.

AIDA's membership continues to grow as more in the community come to value its work to protect the non-urbanised, coastal village nature of our area which is precious but also very vulnerable to pressures for change. The need for AIDA's activities will only grow and it must remain vigilant.

Thank you.