

Presidents Report 2020

Saturday, May 30 – to be held on-line using Zoom and inviting members to submit proxy vote forms

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted much of in our everyday lives and AIDA's on-line AGM is just one small piece of evidence of this. While this AGM is being held on-line I would like to acknowledge that our coastal communities are on the traditional lands of the Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar people and pay my respects to their elders' past, present and emerging.

We asked the question "Can the Great Ocean Road Always be Great?" at our very successful Summer Forum this year. Much of the forum explored how the planned Great Ocean Authority might work and what its key policies will be. The forum left many questions for the AIDA committee which we have continued to follow up with the Minister and DEWLP.

The new Authority could bring many positive changes to the Road, but there are no guarantees this will be the case. And our view is that it has not got off to a good start.

We are very concerned about that GOR Standing Advisory Committee which will be charged with providing "independent expert advice on sustainable land development and development proposals". The Action Plan states that the committee "will have an understanding and appreciation of the region and include all of these skills: strategic and statutory land-use planning, architecture, urban design and landscape architecture, marine and coastal environmental science, transport planning, Traditional owner values, heritage values, tourism and economic viability."

The members have been appointed and recently announced. However, the appointed members are **all** planning professionals and are all employed by the Department of Planning – the very department they will be advising. AIDA has raised its concerns with the State Government and other members of Parliament and with communities along the GOR.

The new GOR Authority will be formally established after the legislation passes the Upper House and it will be charged with developing and implementing a new management model and 30-year strategic framework for the whole Road.

We have not been able to understand how the Authority will manage the Government's two expectations of its work: to protect the environment, flora and fauna and local communities along the Road while at the same time increasing tourist numbers.

We have been consistent in our argument that before the Authority can make any decisions there needs to be an independent, professional and comprehensive study

to determine the tourist and traffic capacity of the Road. Only then can informed decisions be made to protect the Road.

The pandemic has had an enormous impact on tourist numbers and many local businesses. While we all need to do what we can to support these businesses it will take many months, maybe years, for an economic recovery but the current downturn in tourist numbers presents a real opportunity to rethink the tourist industry and its impacts.

There are loud calls for a tourism strategy overhaul from overcrowded places around the world where the collapse of tourism has allowed local communities to reclaim their space and fully realise the damage that excessive tourism is doing. The GOR is no different and the current situation provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rethink how tourism is managed along the Road. There will be many who will be appreciating the absence of many buses making the day trip from Melbourne to the Twelve Apostles, the daily mayhem at the Memorial Arch and congestion around the Inlet and lighthouse.

What is needed is to replace the current extractive tourist model - where the local communities and environments bear the impacts of over-tourism with the benefits being largely appreciated elsewhere - with a sustainable and regenerative tourism industry that would strengthen local communities and preserve the environment. The Road should not be promoted as a single destination trip but as a place with many attractions along its length and in its hinterland. What a difference it would make if we had fewer tourists but those who come lingered on their trip enjoying the area's variety of attractions and nature based recreational opportunities.

Following the Summer Forum AIDA reached out to other communities along the Great Ocean Road to form an alliance with them. We believe that with the Great Ocean Road Authority about to be formed that it will be beneficial for the Road's communities to be able to speak with one voice about the various issues facing us. These include the increasing tourist numbers and the promotion of the Road as a single destination, impacts of climate change, new developments such as the Eden Project, the need for greater protection of our flora, fauna and landscapes.

As has become the norm over the past few years the Painkalac Valley has remained a focus of our attention, in particular the proposal for a private bridge over the Painkalac Creek. The AIDA committee has made a lengthy submission to council about the application. Our concerns are largely focused on the many areas where the proposal does not meet the requirements of the Shire's planning scheme, planning and environmental policies as well as wider environmental issues. We also have a major concern about the alienation of public land for a private business and the precedent this could set. We are also aware that many AIDA members, others in the community, local businesses and other organisations also made submissions. There will be a Hearing of Submissions about the bridge sometime soon and Council will make a decision after this.

We have also continued to be concerned about a number of areas where we believe there is non-compliance with the Conservation Management Plan and the Section 173 that applies over the valley land.

The Victorian Electoral Commission recently proposed some changes to the Surf Coast Ward boundaries. One of the changes they suggested was to use the Painakalc Creek as the boundary between the Lorne and Anglesea Wards, thus moving all of Fairhaven into the Lorne Ward. Thanks to AIDA member David Quin, we made a submission arguing that the settlements of Eastern View, Moggs Creek, Fairhaven and Aireys Inlet have a very strong community of interest with shared values, essential infrastructure and services such as the CFA and shops. We were very pleased that the Shire and some community members made a similar submission to VEC and that our arguments were successful.

A very important element of AIDA's ongoing work is to review all planning applications in our area of interest. It has been disappointing this year to have had a number of applications for high, overly large, 'blocky', houses best suited to a suburban environment. We routinely put in objections to applications that do not comply with the Shire's planning policies or neighbourhood character guidelines and go to VCAT when required. We understand our members highly value this aspect of AIDA's work and it is disappointing that our objections are not always successful.

As usual this year we have met with a variety of people at our regular monthly committee meetings. In July, we heard from GORCC about their new strategic plan. We invited our new ward Councillor, Tony Revell, to meet with us in November to brief him about AIDA's policies and aims for the area. In March we met with the General Manager of the Great Ocean Road Regional Tourist group. They are largely funded by the six local councils along the coast as well as State Government. While we didn't agree with everything that was said it was very reassuring to hear that they, like the communities along the Great Ocean Road, would like some limits put on overall tourist numbers with those who come being encouraged to linger and increase the length and diversity of their stay. It was also reassuring to hear there is some support for AIDA's position that the Memorial Arch should no longer be a stopping point for tourists.

Two of our committee are leaving us this year. Ian and Anne Porter have been stalwarts on the committee for a total of 18 years. For many years – and probably more than she cares to remember – Anne has prepared our monthly correspondence report. We extend our thanks to them and wish them well with their move to Geelong.

It is always very gratifying when our members offer us their expertise and this year we have had many who have put their hands up. Chris Ryan spoke at our Summer Forum and has represented AIDA at the Alcoa/Eden Project meetings, David Quin (an election analyst) prepared AIDA's very detailed and comprehensive response to the VEC Ward boundary review. Our thanks once again to Nan McNab for her

expertise in producing out newsletters. We also thank Perry Gaylard for producing our publicity flyers and Lecki Ord for her ongoing work maintaining AIDA's membership database.

Throughout the year we have continued to have a productive and respectful working relationship with the Surf Coast Shire's CEO and officers as well as our Anglesea Ward Councilors Margot Smith and Tony Revell. The committee thanks them all.

The AIDA committee continued to work well together during the year to do what we can to ensure that as our area develops and grows it does not lose its sense of a non-suburban coastal community which is what we all love. My thanks to them all for their work and support.