

# President's Report 2017

**Presented to the AIDA AGM on Saturday 28th April 2018:**

I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional lands of the Wadawurrung people and pay my respect to their elders both past and present.

Welcome to our ward councillors, Libby Coker and Margot Smith, and the shire's CEO, Keith Baillie. Once again, we thank you for giving us your Saturday afternoon. We really appreciate the support you give AIDA and the responses we receive from you, and the shire's staff, on the many issues we raise with you each year. Cr Clive Goldsworthy was also invited but again is an apology.

Welcome to all AIDA members. At this time last year we were anxiously waiting for the shire's response to two applications to change the protections over the Painkalac Valley, and we were relieved with the outcomes, which retain all these protections.

However, as usual the valley remains very much the centre of our attention. Many of you will be aware that AIDA and ANGAIR came together a couple of years ago to form 'The Painkalac Project' (TPP) to explore the possibility of public fundraising to purchase the valley blocks that are for sale. Unfortunately, TPP has not yet been able to reach an agreement with the owner, who is now proceeding to put a house on each of the three blocks. TPP is now investigating whether it is possible, and whether we can get agreement, for the majority of the wetlands to be vested in council with a Trust for Nature covenant over it.

In the meantime, the shire has begun investigating the potential for a walking track in the Painkalac Nature Reserve to link to a revitalised area along the creek behind the Bottom Shops. AIDA will be joining TPP on the project working group and will advocate for a comprehensive community consultation program as part of the project. Should the currently privately owned valley wetlands be successfully vested in council this walking track could be extended into the valley. Care will be needed to ensure that any new walking tracks do not impinge on existing flora and fauna and that we keep uppermost in our planning the original goal of regenerating and interpreting the wetlands.

Our newsletters this year reported on the results of the audit of compliance with the Painkalac Valley Conservation Management Plan (CMP) conducted by the shire. One of the requirements of the CMP is that the large ephemeral wetlands

must be fenced before any houses are built. This fencing has been installed and we were looking forward to watching the wetlands regenerate. However, we were concerned to see horses still grazing within the fenced areas. We raised our concerns with the shire's planning department and were surprised to hear that as the CMP doesn't specify that grazing is not allowed it may continue for parts of the year. We are seeking legal advice about the interpretation of the wording in the CMP.

AIDA recently made a submission to the Great Ocean Road Taskforce, which has been asked by the state government to look at governance issues for the Great Ocean Road and consult with the Traditional Owners, responsible public entities, key stakeholders and the community. The taskforce will report within twelve months, making recommendations about boosting tourism expenditure and investment along the Great Ocean Road, better support for local communities to benefit from the tourist economy, and to maintain appropriate environmental and landscape protections.

In my president's report last year I said that communities like ours need to be in the conversation about the increasing numbers of tourists along the Great Ocean Road. Tourism along the road must be environmentally and socially sustainable. There are too many examples from overseas where the sheer number of tourists has severely degraded the place being visited, the experience and lives of the local community.

It is reassuring that the taskforce recognises the need to slow down visitors travelling along the Great Ocean Road and to increase the amount these tourists spend. However, it is disappointing to read that the taskforce seems to accept that visitor numbers will continue to increase and that it is not tasked with seeking mechanisms to limit this increase.

It is unrealistic to imagine that the road, the environment and our communities can continue to accommodate increasing numbers of tourists without diminishing the experience for all. We suggested that the taskforce look at examples from overseas where tolls and booking systems are used as a way of controlling tourist numbers.

In our submission we argued strongly for the focus to be on sustainable tourism and for the encouragement of 'slow tourism'. We need fewer tourists, but for those who do come, to stay longer.

Increasing numbers of tourists do not build a sustainable tourism industry. The UN's Sustainable Tourism Strategy is very clear about this. There is a desperate need for the taskforce to investigate overseas experiences of mass tourism and what is being done to make tourism sustainable in other places, especially environmentally sensitive landscapes.

The Great Ocean Road is certainly a fragile landscape not capable of sustaining mass tourism while maintaining its environmental and social sustainability.

Studies of the impact of tourism the world over demonstrate that uncontrolled short-term visits by large numbers of tourists benefit only a few businesses, impose needs for facilities which are expensive for local councils, and have negative effects on the environment and local residents.

What we don't need is an increase in the numbers making the one-day dash from Melbourne to the Twelve Apostles and back. Our submission also suggested the taskforce should look at increasing the use of the inland route as a viable way to access the attractions along the Great Ocean Road.

We also asked for recommendations to find ways to stop tourists from continuing to pour down the Great Ocean Road on Code Red and Extreme Fire Days when many of us are following the CFA advice and leaving.

The number of tourists along the road has already increased markedly over the past ten years. It is vitally important for our community that tourism is sustainable and a continuing increase in the number of day-tourists is not facilitated by the taskforce's recommendations.

One of the most significant issues we have dealt with this year is the Unsealed Road and Street Network Strategy that has been developed by the shire. This will be used to assist the shire with its decisions about which unsealed roads should be preserved and which could be sealed.

AIDA submitted a comprehensive response with many suggested changes. A few weeks ago we were provided with the final draft and were pleased to see that some of our suggestions and requested changes had been accepted; however, we were troubled to see that our major concern was not addressed. This is that local community perceptions and values, and the preference for unsealed streets in the shire's Planning Scheme, as an important part of local character, should be included in the strategy's multi-criteria decision making assessment tool. Currently they are not.

In our surveys the community consistently tells us that the unmade roads in our area are highly valued by most people and are seen as an integral part of our neighbourhood character. We wrote to the shire with our concerns about this omission and are hopeful of a positive response.

The committee wrote to VicRoads following the release of its first plans for the Moggs Creek Bridge replacement. We were very pleased that VicRoads is consulting with the community about these works and that many of our suggestions were included into the updated plans. Our remaining concern is that VicRoads is still planning a pedestrian refuge, which will require a light and associated degradation of night views for residents, and so we are hoping they will abandon plans for the refuge.

As an aside, when we met with VicRoads recently about the Moggs Creek Bridge, I raised the failed landscaping at the Fairhaven Underpass, where most of the larger plants have died. I was assured that replacement planting will be done over this winter or spring.

During the year the committee continued to review all the planning applications for our area from Urquhart Bluff to Eastern View and was involved in two VCAT appeals. We have also been involved in consultations about the future of the Memorial Arch, the older people's housing proposal for Fraser Drive, and the federal government's Black Spot Program, as well as some continued discussions about the new pedestrian refuge at the Bottom Shops and the repainting and landscaping at the Fairhaven Underpass. We also had meetings with the State Planning Minister, Dick Wynne; Richard Riordan, the State Member for Polwarth; and the new CEO of GORRC, Vanessa Schernickau, as well as several meetings with VicRoads and with the shire and our ward councillors.

It is with great relief that we note that the Aireys area will be getting enhanced mobile phone coverage under the federal government's Black Spot Program. AIDA has been advocating for this for many years and we are very pleased that the new facility will be operating by the end of the year.

We ended last year with 467 members, which was our highest membership for many years. It is our membership that gives AIDA its strength. I hope all of last year's members renew their membership. Please encourage your friends and neighbours to join up if they agree with our aims and objectives.

Our thanks go to the many shire staff with whom we have had dealings during the year. In a small community like ours it is amazing to see how often issues arise which see the AIDA committee writing to or calling the shire.

Our thanks also go to Nan McNab who continues to give her professional touch to our newsletters. Nan has been producing the AIDA newsletter for an extraordinary fifteen years.

I will finish with thanks to all the AIDA committee members for their hard work during the year. We are fortunate to have such a range of expertise among our members. It is with some sadness that I have to report that four of our committee are leaving us for various reasons – Angela Berry, Gretel Lamont, Adam Rudy and Greg Day. Their input and expertise will be missed and I thank them all for what they have given us.

***Charlotte Allen, President***