

AIDA President's Report 2021

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

Welcome to our Ward Councillor and Mayor, Libby Stapleton, and Lorne Ward Councillor Gary Allen whose ward includes Eastern View and Moggs Creek. Our other Ward Councillor, Mike Bodsworth, and acting CEO Anne Howard are apologies.

Welcome AIDA members. Where do I start after the challenging year 2020 was for everyone?

When the pandemic first hit the Surf Coast Shire set up a number of on-line community meetings to identify areas where there was community need and they could assist. The Aireys Inlet and district group met every two weeks with Ward Councillors, Shire staff and community contacts such as AIDA, the school, Community Garden, the church, and representatives from our traders and real estate agents. The value of these meetings for the Shire and the community was significant and they will continue on a monthly basis into the future even when the pandemic is behind us. They provide an excellent forum to raise issues and share ideas directly with the Shire, our Ward Councillors and with others in the community. A lasting positive from a horrible year. It was through this forum that we heard about the establishment of the wonderful Rubbish Rangers who are doing so much to keep our area free of litter. When we heard that they were looking for some funding the AIDA committee was pleased to be able to provide this.

Covid-19 meant that the AIDA committee meeting last night was the first we had met in person all year and it was good to see the new committee members elected at the last AGM in person.

Our Zoom meetings were productive and we have had a busy year.

The committee followed the establishment of the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority with interest given the important role it will play in the future of our communities, the road's environment and the future of tourism. It is very pleasing to have the Authority's Chair with us today to tell us something of its initial plans.

One of the noticeable impacts of the pandemic has been the significant reduction in tourist numbers and traffic in our area. We believe this has presented a once in a lifetime opportunity for a tourism strategy reset.

We need to encourage fewer tourists, spread throughout the year, and hope that those who do come linger on their trip to enjoy all the coast and its hinterland have to offer. It would be a lost opportunity if there is a return of the convoys of large buses making the one-day dash to the Twelve Apostles and back. They contribute nothing to the community and are an impost on our resources and environment.

This year AIDA initiated the formation of the Great Ocean Road Communities Network so that all communities along the road can work together and present a united voice to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, local government and government agencies. The network has been warmly welcomed and it is exciting to think about what it might achieve. So far 20 community groups have joined.

We have also initiated quarterly meetings with senior DWELP staff to discuss common issues of interest and these meetings have been very helpful in keeping us informed about their plans and programs. It was here that we first heard about the strategic fire break program for Anglesea, Aireys and Lorne. From the feedback we have received it is obvious opinions are divided about this program. There are many who have welcomed it but there are those who question it. While the scale of the strategic fire break works is confronting we are assured that the regrowth will repair much of the visual damage. However, there are continuing discussions about the removal of vegetation at Bristlebird Reserve in Moggs Creek.

We were very pleased to be able to work with the Friends of Lorne on their 3-part on-line series “Fire Unplanned” as well as our own session looking at a scenario ‘What If’ there is a fire in the Aireys area. If you didn’t join these very well attended sessions you can still find them on the websites of Friends of Lorne and AIDA.

The committee has begun the process of applying for our area to be recognised by the International Dark Sky Association as a dark sky community. This will have many far-reaching benefits for the community, and the environment. Other communities that have received this accreditation have used it to promote events and tours of the night sky, astrophotography and astronomy. Environmental benefits include the encouragement of species that depend on a level of darkness for their food source.

To achieve accreditation AIDA will need the buy-in of the local community and council. Our recent survey of community attitudes had almost 84% of respondents wanting protection of the night sky against light pollution so we’re off to a good start. It is also very positive that

the Shire's Planning Scheme's Local Planning Policy is highly unusual in that it includes three clauses to protect the night sky from artificial lighting.

Our community attitude survey results were released in March and provide an excellent insight into what the community appreciates and loves about our area as well as concerns for the future. About half of the respondents were not AIDA members and one of the important and striking things about the results is the consistency of views between AIDA members and others in the community. The results have been shared widely and we hope that the Shire, GORCAPA and other government agencies will use the data when developing their plans and strategies for the Great Ocean Road and our communities. I encourage you to look at the results if you haven't already done so.

The application for a private bridge over the Painkalac Creek has continued as an issue during the year. Council refused the application but it has been appealed to VCAT and a two-day hearing is set down for the end of June. Many thanks to the AIDA members who provided their views on the bridge proposal to Council and VCAT. AIDA will be represented at the hearing by its lawyers and we will keep you informed.

The Moggs Creek bridge replacement finished this year and, thanks to much lobbying by AIDA and the community, it is in the same position as the old one. VicRoads is to be commended for responding to community concerns about its original plans for the bridge and its intrusive lighting.

I would like to thank committee members Suzanne Cavanagh and Chris Ryan for the hours they put into analysing the community attitude survey results. And a thank you to Ian Godfrey for completing the longitudinal analysis – and for always being willing to share his knowledge and history of AIDA's work.

Once again thanks to Lecki Ord for all she does as membership secretary and to Nan McNab for presenting AIDA so professionally with the production of our newsletters and the survey results.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone on the committee for their contributions during what was an extraordinary year.

Barb Fletcher is not renominating for the committee this year and we're very sorry to see her go. Barb has been on the committee for 14 years – 7 as president. For most of that time she has been involved in the important role of checking all planning applications and where

necessary submitting objections and appearing at VCAT on AIDA's behalf. She will be missed.