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## **Position Paper**

On the

## **Point Nepean Master Plan**

By

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## *Executive Summary*

This submission is based on the guiding four pillars as identified in the January 2016 discussion paper, Conservation, Inspiration, Sustainability, Accessibility.

The current review of the 2010 Master Plan must be the last review before Government commits to action at Point Nepean.

To facilitate this, I will work with the Government in a bipartisan fashion to bury the partisan politics of the past, for the benefit of our local community and the State of Victoria more broadly.

While this paper was not formally submitted to the current review process, subject to the first draft produced by Government in the next few weeks, this paper will form the basis of my review response and I welcome further community feedback and input.

The opportunities for development of visitation at Point Nepean are many and varied and this paper seeks to present some of these perspectives, many of which have been brought to me by my constituents over recent years.

## *Conservation*

### *Natural Values*

Conservation of the natural values of the National Park by necessity needs to be treated very differently to other National Parks as it has had a long history as both a Military base, Quarantine Station and Military training complex, none of which were particularly concerned with environmental conservation.

Consequently, there are vast tracts of land which have been significantly denuded of natural vegetation in the past and are now under intense pressure from regrowth of woody weeds, in particular, polygala. It is fair to say that the bushland of the park is infested with woody weeds and clearly Parks Vic do not have enough current resources to manage this infestation.

Added to which, there are still large areas of the Park which are unable to be utilised due to the existence of real or suspected unexploded ordnance. In fact, the previously cancelled Point Leisure Group lease was expanded mainly to include bushland near the oval in order for the leaseholder to take the clean-up responsibilities away from Parks Vic.

It is important therefore, to take the conservation of the natural environment in context of how denuded these natural systems have been since European settlement.

Consequently, the revised Master Plan should have a clear, well-funded plan to systematically eradicate all woody weeds from the National Park. One option, which would assist would be to empower local Friends groups, volunteers and student rangers to work on site with minimal supervision. While I can appreciate the OH & S issues involved, a solution can surely be found if the will is there.

### *Cultural Values*

#### *Indigenous perspective*

One of the difficulties in assigning indigenous values to the site has been an unfortunate schism within the Boon Wurrung/Bunurong communities over the last few years.

While the stories and ancient history of the site have never really been in dispute, this schism has meant that any Government was unable to properly assess and determine the site from an indigenous cultural heritage perspective.

Fortunately, by a combination of good will and legal process, these issues are beginning to fade and this is very positive for the future interpretation of the site, which in my view, is crucial in order to provide respect to those who have been the traditional custodians of this significant site.

Key to providing respect to this site, is for us to share as one community how this land was utilised and used for thousands of years before European settlement. Areas of significance within the Park, eg: natural mineral springs, are currently out of bounds for any interpretation or visitation due to a degree of unexploded ordnance in the vicinity.

This therefore, becomes a most important funding issue for us to be able to seriously and respectfully assist the indigenous interpretation of the National Park.

In the broader perspective, I would like to see a complete indigenous interpretative tourist trail extending from Melbourne to the tip of Point Nepean where locals and international anthropological tourists can visit, learn and experience how the first humans lived.

Such an integrated tourism trail, utilising the work already done on the Baytrail and Mornington Peninsula Walk would also provide genuine employment opportunities for indigenous people, particularly younger ones, who are descendent from our local Boon Wurrung/Bunurong people.

### European Settlement perspective

European settlement has affected the landscape of Point Nepean from the mid-nineteenth century and as such the stories that are contained in this place are significant and also deserve to be preserved and retold.

The discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851 created the need for security and by 1880 the first fortifications and coastal defence guns had been installed.

This installation was crucial to our defence and as such played a key role in the development and security of the colony into one of the jewels of the British Empire.

Then, as people started to arrive in massive numbers, it was clear that there was a need to quarantine the new colony from highly infectious and deadly diseases being carried on board ships from Europe.

The arrival of the *Ticonderoga* in 1852, with hundreds on board infected and ill with fever, caused these plans to be fast tracked and the start of the Quarantine Station precinct as we now see it had begun.

Again, this significant development assisted the colony to survive and prosper and together with the military fortifications have a marvellous story to tell, being of great importance to all Victorians.

These stories can only be told if the sites are preserved and should never be allowed to simply age in place and disintegrate over time.

Further, at it's peak the Quarantine Station provided accommodation and respite for up to 800 people, as well as the staff to look after them.

It is fair to say that while the main buildings are described as hospitals, the old records also refer to them as reception houses as many people staying there were merely quarantined, and were not actually sick.

As such, a fitting tribute to these early migrants would be to enable these buildings to once again be used for the accommodation of visitors – just as the site has been designed for, as it can clearly cope with significant visitation on a permanent basis.

### Military Establishment perspective

In addition to the military fortifications and barracks, the site has also enjoyed a rich culture of training our elite officers from the 1950's to the mid 1980's.

The Officer Cadet School had utilised many of the original buildings and transformed the quarantine station precinct into a vibrant township supporting the accommodation needs of hundreds of people.

Unfortunately, many of the more recent barracks buildings are quite dilapidated and could be removed as part of a broader plan to open up that part of the site to picnic areas and general open space.

At the same time, the Point Nepean hinterland was utilised for live fire training and the remnants of which still exist today, rendering much of the Park off limits due to remaining unexploded ordnance.

To fully restore and preserve the natural bushland of Point Nepean, it is crucial that the highest priority be given to making all areas safe for pedestrian movement, exploration and interpretation.

Some of the most significant indigenous sites are trapped in these areas, for example the natural water springs, which sustained travelling communities for thousands of years are currently unsafe to visit due to the risk of unexploded ordnance.

Clearing of this ordnance would allow for a significant upgrading to the interpretation of indigenous culture and work to create the foundation for a peninsula wide indigenous tourist/education trail.

## Inspiration

### Overview

Point Nepean is a naturally inspiring place, and has been for thousands of years. The interpretation of these inspiring places need to be carefully considered as they mean different things to different people, all with equally valid and important connections to this place.

These connections need to be told with stories and those stories, rightly, need to be in context with each geographical part of the National Park.

It is crucial to avoid the mistake of trying to treat all parts of the park as a single entity with a singular inspiration and interpretation as a one size fits all concept.

Point Nepean National Park is unique among most National Parks due the extensive military and quarantine station development that has occurred since European settlement. Most National Parks have no such places and as such, the issues of biodiversity etc are simply not relevant to these parts of the Point Nepean National Park.

The natural woodland and breathtaking beaches are inspiring to anyone who takes the time to explore these areas. The natural fit of the quarantine station precinct is to provide a range of accommodation and permanent visitor support from which to explore those places and their natural historic serenity.

### Interpretation

#### Signage and technology

In order to interpret the various areas of the park, it is again crucial to consult and be sympathetic to those who have a direct interest on each of these individual, and equally significant places.

While signage is a typical means of interpretation, I believe that in the modern era combined with availability of internet and mobile phone coverage within the Point Nepean National Park, then a more technologically savvy, and environmentally sensitive approach should be taken.

For example, an interpretative tour could be linked to a GPS to describe, direct and explain the various sites as visitors simply walk or drive through the park. These interpretative and educational recordings can be as simple or as detailed as required and as the entire experience is encapsulated within a smart phone, the Park will not be polluted with an over abundance of unnecessary signage.

This also keeps the likes of the Quarantine Station site more sympathetic to how it originally appeared. Of course, there needs to be many more overnight visitors to truly attain a sense of place for this precinct but it is clear that an over abundance of stand alone signage would not be ideal.

#### Military

The military installations and gun emplacements need careful consideration from the various Naval and Artillery historical groups who all have a detailed understanding of exactly how life and service was conducted at the site. To simply allow these sites of international significance to merely 'age in place' and crumble away would be the worst type of interpretation imaginable.

The stories of these military barracks and installations is indeed a story of the earliest beginnings of our colony and the need for an adequate and significant defence. These are stories that extend far beyond the geography of the Mornington Peninsula.

#### Museum

As part of the overall interpretive view of the Quarantine Station precinct, the existing Museum could and should be expanded.

Some of the great early post war migrations to Melbourne were managed through this facility and, in conjunction with the immigration museum in the CBD, there would be countless opportunities for families to tell their stories.

## Sustainability

### Environmental

I, and many local community groups share a common view of the financial sustainability for the site, and to quote the Nepean Conservation Group:

*“Parks Victoria as Manager for the Point Nepean will obtain sufficient resources to carry out its responsibilities, particularly for the fulfilment of the special demands of maintenance and interpretation of unique built and cultural heritage at the site.”*

Financial sustainability is crucial to the new and revised management plan as it is unrealistic to expect Government to fund any additional demands of the site, let alone the preservation of the significant military, indigenous and immigration heritage.

In addition, there is a legacy issue of feral weed control, which Parks Vic have inherited from the earliest days of military establishment and as a National Park, there are scant resources available for Parks Vic to control these weeds, let alone eradicate them.

While much has been done in recent years, Parks Vic have concentrated on providing improved habitat in critical areas, which may not necessarily be seen along roadside verges as visitors drive through the Park.

Funds derived from tourism and other operations at Point Nepean should be returned to the Park as a priority and only distributed to consolidated revenue once all priorities for Point Nepean National Park are fulfilled.

### Financial

In order to ensure that the site is financially sustainable and viable on an ongoing basis, there have been a number of submissions made to me over the years, which could assist in the financial viability of the site.

Generally, I am supportive of these concepts and in no particular order, these submissions are as follows:

#### Tag For Life

The [Tag for Life](#) organisation is a Mornington Peninsula based organisation that is committed to the conservation and preservation of sharks. In their words, one of our truly iconic marine species.

Tag for Life is raising funds for science and education, and would seem to be a reasonable fit on site within the Quarantine Station precinct as operators of a café/information centre where they can continue to raise funds for this cause.

From their website:

*“The aim of Tag For Life is to communicate scientifically supported information that will lead to the establishment of a safer coastal environment for board riding, swimming, diving and fishing communities.*

*It draws upon the science of research projects such as that of the CSIRO white shark tagging program. This program acts as a delivery mechanism providing educational learning through its partnering institutions including, CSIRO, The Melbourne Aquarium, Zoos Victoria, Melbourne museum and the Phillip Island Nature Park.”*

#### Hatchery

The existing aquaculture industry in both Port Phillip and Westernport Bays rely heavily on the research, development and science undertaken at the existing hatchery that has been established near Queenscliff, which supplies both Mussel and Oyster spat for current licence holders.

The aquaculture industry operates well outside the National Park, however as the hatchery will need to relocate within the next few years, the search has been on to find a suitable site for relocation.

Research has identified that the best site for a hatchery would be at Point Nepean due to its clean tides in both directions and as such I support this location to support the future of aquaculture in our region.

It is my understanding that a new building would need to be constructed at the southern or lower end of the quarantine station precinct and would in itself be unobtrusive and even a feature for tourists to view and inspect this important scientific endeavour for the sustainability of our aquaculture industry.

## Dive Museum

There is a request to establish an Australian National Diving Museum (ANDM) within the former military area at Point Nepean, either within existing buildings or in new purpose-designed buildings. It is envisaged that this museum will display and conserve both our military, recreational and commercial diving historical assets.

Historical Diving Society (HDS) in Australia is very active and well organised and keen to proceed with planning for such a museum.

Our nation has contributed much to the development of diving equipment ie. first single hose regulator (the Porpoise regulator ) was designed and built in Australia by Ted Eldred and later sold to Jacques Cousteau; in 1953, Ted ran training courses on it at the Melbourne City Baths.

This is a great story and the National Diving Museum could become one of Australia's great museums and an important local tourism attraction on the Mornington Peninsula

There is security/space at Portsea and perhaps existing buildings can be modified to this purpose.

Port Phillip Bay and the local Bass Strait area are both great diving destinations for local and visiting divers. This initiative would energise the local dive industry, attract large numbers of divers from many countries and help underscore Portsea, Mornington Peninsula and the Bellarine Peninsula as desirable international diving precincts.

*HMAS Canberra* is submerged in the vicinity, further establishing Victoria as a temperate water diving destination; the Museum could add to the attraction for visiting divers from overseas.

## Jetty

There has been some concern about re-constructing a jetty at Point Nepean to serve the tourism destination encompassing the Quarantine Station precinct, however, I believe that a jetty would be entirely appropriate for the site and would also recreate the historical connection where the main approach and entry to the site was always by boat.

A jetty would therefore pay tribute to those early immigrants to replay and respect the first steps they took in their new life in Australia.

Importantly, a jetty would also service nearby maritime visitor destinations such as the *HMAS Canberra* dive site and the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park.

Further, there is opportunity for visitors to arrive to this special place by boat instead of by car or bus. For the Mornington Peninsula, such mode of travel would be much preferred as we already have unbearable traffic congestion in peak times on our local roads.

Allowing larger boats to dock at Point Nepean with large quantities of day visitors will breathe fresh life into the precinct and provide a glimpse of what this site was once like with hundreds of people milling around on a daily basis.

Also, many of these visitors need not be day visitors, as with appropriate accommodation they can stay on site for as long as they choose and take the time to enjoy and appreciate the quieter and more remote aspects of the Point Nepean National Park and the broader Mornington Peninsula

## Accommodation

One of the key challenges for the Mornington Peninsula is the lack of affordable overnight accommodation for visitors.

The tourism industry is our largest employer and our operators require venues and operations that can operate all year round and attract visitors to stay overnight.

The Quarantine Station precinct at Point Nepean was constructed purely for accommodation and it is entirely fitting that we encourage overnight accommodation to this site – it has always been a site where hundreds of people have lived and worked, we should respect and enhance this heritage feature of the site without any hesitation.

It is also entirely appropriate to incorporate various levels of accommodation ranging from 5 star hotel style, through to economy motel style and all the way to backpacker hostel and camping accommodation.

In addition, I have had submissions from local community groups concerned about the pressure brought to bear on foreshore camping on the Peninsula and that the designation of caravan camping spaces at Point Nepean could alleviate this burden, while also providing a sustainable cash flow for the Park. Caravan tourism is a growing market for us on the Peninsula and it would make some sense to offer this form of accommodation in future master plans.

The existing hospital buildings provide enormous opportunities for a range of budget accommodation, albeit there will need to be significant funds invested to convert and upgrade these buildings accordingly. Many of the upstairs existing accommodation rooms are more recent additions and while within a Heritage building, it is likely that internal alterations can be made without compromising the Heritage values of the structure.

This is where those investors who want to invest in accommodation options can be encouraged to be brought into the National Park.

Adaptive re-use of these buildings is of paramount importance to ensure that there are sufficient funds to ensure these buildings are preserved well into the future.

## Hot Springs

The former Bracks Government in 2007 released their report 'Victoria's Geothermal and Natural Mineral Water Tourism Investment Opportunities'.

From the Minister's forward, "These springs and water reserves present Victoria with a fantastic opportunity to further develop as an international destination for natural spa tourism."

I agree with this assessment and there is potential for significant geothermal tourism on the Quarantine Station Precinct site and from my discussions with indigenous land managers, there are brilliant sites that would offer no disturbance to sensitive Aboriginal areas and I would expect the new master plan to acknowledge this potential and opportunity.

## Military Tourism

On the tip of Point Nepean, Gun Emplacement 6 was where the first allied shot of World War 1 was fired as a means of preventing the German freighter *Pfalz* from escaping Port Phillip Bay to the open sea, some 2.75 hours after war was declared in London.

The First Shot Committee are currently working to have the gun and emplacement restored to it's WW1 condition in time for the Armistice Day 2018 commemorations.

The site is nationally listed and the project is likely to be funded by the Federal Government under a specific heritage grant program, in fact \$60,000 has already been granted to assist with a detailed heritage and scoping study for this project.

In any event, the site offers enormous potential for future military tourism as the significance of the site increases with the passage of time.

## Restaurants

In order to capitalise on the opportunities presented by increased visitation to the National Park, I would expect a range of food/eating options would be made available.

Some of these can be high end, some can be basic take away but the focus should be on utilising and showcasing our local produce as much as possible.

We have some of the best aquaculture holdings right on our doorstep and it would make perfect sense if seafood from our near region were also showcased as part of a high end dining experience.

Being able to make a day trip to the National Park, and to enjoy a lunch and dinner to whatever taste and price range we prefer would be another key drawcard to the site and assist to keep people on site for as long as possible in order to get the most from their visit.

## Events

The site lends itself as one providing for a range of performance and event options both indoor and outdoor.

Parks Vic have demonstrated their capacity in this area over recent years and with sensible investment then some of the existing spaces, again indoor and outdoor, could be improved to create world class performance spaces on an ongoing basis.

The concept of Artist in Residence has broad support and if the model was expanded to include musical artists, then this could transform sections of the precinct into a dynamic hub for the Arts on the Peninsula.

## Accessibility

### All Abilities

With the imminent completion of the Arthurs Seat Skylift project, there is a renewed impetus on the Mornington Peninsula to move our tourism operators towards more accessible and disabled friendly operations.

The Skylift is an all-weather, all-ages, all-abilities attraction and this is an important precedent that I would like to see set, where possible, for all new and existing tourism operations on the Mornington Peninsula, including Point Nepean.

This will present particular challenges for access to all levels of the Heritage listed hospital buildings as none of these currently cater for all abilities access.

These costs need to be incorporated into the Master Plan as well as a detailed disability access audit, if not already completed.

### Entry by Road

Currently, entry and access to the Park, and in particular the quarantine station is limited due to the nature of single lane roads in and out of the precinct.

The predominant mode of access to the park is by private car, whereas there is opportunity for a shuttle service to also connect to the 788 Bus, which currently stops just outside the gate.

This service could then take visitors through the Police Point area, itself a significant part of the Quarantine Station precinct, which is unfortunately missed by many visitors as they are directed through the main entry.

Added to which, the coded boom gate prevents vehicle access past the magnificent heritage buildings between Police Point and the main Quarantine Station building cluster.

While it is likely impractical for private vehicle access to take this path, a Parks Vic shuttle could easily take this route on a regular basis and connect back to the bus stop and/or car park, which would enable visitors to leave their cars behind and relieve congestion and vehicle pressure within the grounds of the Park itself.

This concept is currently activated beyond Gunners Cottage and while relatively successful, the cost of the shuttle is quite prohibitive.

This is an issue for people of limited mobility who simply are unable to walk the long distances to the end of Point Nepean, but who otherwise would love to participate in the experience of Fort Nepean along the way.

### Entry by Water

This has already been discussed previously but suffice to say I support access to the Quarantine Station precinct by water as this is entirely in keeping with preserving the sense of place and how our first immigrants also arrived to this site.

The added advantage is that water taxi/tourist vessels can also take visitors to enjoy and understand the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, which currently has minimal interpretation and in fact, many people would be completely unaware of the significance and existence of this public asset.

There are legitimate concerns by many that water access will turn the Quarantine Station precinct into an

overcrowded marina, however these concerns can likely be allayed by the way that berthing is managed and charged. For example, berthing fees could be set quite high for day visitors but discounted for those who also choose to stay overnight or participate in other organised tours on land.

It would be important therefore to ensure that the integration of an internal shuttle service be accessible for visitors by water to ensure they can easily and seamlessly enjoy the hinterland and more distant areas of the National Park.

Bicycle hire would also be another means of assisting people to explore the National Park and again, if we encourage increased bicycle use then it would make sense in the interests of public safety to, at the same time, try to reduce the number of private vehicles in the Park.

In addition, and due to the distance to Point Nepean National Park, I would also like to see refuelling available at the jetty. This is something that is very common around the country, particularly in South Australia where refuelling is commonly available at major boat ramps and jettys.

## Education

One of the great opportunities for Point Nepean is in relation to formal Marine Education.

Together with other environmental research projects such as Tag For Life, it makes perfect sense to continue with the Melbourne University National Centre for Coasts and Climate for which the university have already committed \$10 million.

The site has ready access to Bass Strait and with the construction of a jetty will allow safe and regular access to those waters as well as Port Phillip Bay.