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VC37**MORNINGTON PENINSULA - REGIONAL ROLE AND LOCAL VISION**

This section of the Municipal Strategic Statement is intended to highlight the policy context of the Peninsula, from both a regional and local perspective. In effect, this provides a statement of community values. This enables an evaluation of the challenges and opportunities that face the Peninsula and provides the basis for setting strategic objectives.

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VC37**The regional role of the Mornington Peninsula****Introduction**

The unique resources of the Mornington Peninsula and its proximity to metropolitan Melbourne have shaped the Peninsula's regional role over a long period.

Planning policies since the 1970s have emphasised the need to strike a balance between local interests and those of the wider Victorian community. In this context, regional planning has focused on managing and preserving the State significance of the Mornington Peninsula for conservation, recreation and port development purposes. This has been expressed in both Statements of Planning Policy 1 (Western Port) and 2 (the Southern Mornington Peninsula), as well through the preparation, by the former Western Port Regional Planning Authority, of the Conservation Plan for the Southern Mornington Peninsula and the Hastings Port Industrial Area Planning Scheme.

These priorities continue to be expressed in the State Planning Policy Framework, confirming that the role of the Peninsula, in a regional context, is very different from that of the metropolitan growth areas.

The key policies, which outline the strategic values of the Mornington Peninsula from a regional perspective, may be summarised as follows:

Settlement pattern and population growth

The State Planning Policy Framework requires that outward metropolitan growth must be confined to designated growth areas in accordance with the Minister's Directions under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. The consolidation of residential and employment activities within existing urban areas and designated growth areas is also encouraged. Planning for Melbourne's future growth is therefore predicated on specifying areas for urban development and avoiding dispersed development and sprawl outside these areas. The Mornington Peninsula is not a designated growth area and a different set of priorities must guide planning decisions.

The commitment by successive State governments to preventing the expansion of metropolitan Melbourne onto the Peninsula has had a critical bearing on planning in the area. This commitment was reaffirmed in 1994 when the entire Peninsula was brought under one local government authority, the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, with boundaries which explicitly separated the new municipality from the established urban areas of Frankston and the urban growth areas of Casey.

Living Suburbs, Melbourne Metropolitan Policy, and 1995 notes that Melbourne has an abundant supply of undeveloped but easily serviceable urban land, that there is no need to earmark extra land for urban purposes in the foreseeable future. The policy states that Melbourne's highly regarded tourism and conservation areas, including the Mornington Peninsula and Westernport, will continue to be protected.

Despite this, the Peninsula's proximity to Melbourne, and the Melbourne land market, continues to generate pressures for urban expansion and the fragmentation of rural land. These pressures are felt to varying degrees throughout the municipality, but they are strongest around the edges of existing townships.

The Urban Fringe Advisory Committee Report, 1997 noted that these pressures tend to create a "zone of impermanence", where expectations regarding future residential conversion, fuelled by ad hoc planning decisions, tend to destabilise existing land use patterns and compound the pressure

for change. In this context the Advisory Committee recommended the development of a strong strategic framework and the creation of “hard edge” boundaries between urban and non-urban areas.

In this context, there is a strong commitment to maintaining the established growth boundaries of townships on the Peninsula, including those that define the edge of the Mt Eliza and Baxter townships and which create the “green break” between the Peninsula and metropolitan Melbourne.

Environmental values

The Mornington Peninsula contains many environmentally significant areas, including conservation reserves of international, national and state significance. It also accounts for a substantial section of the catchment and coastline of both Western Port and Port Phillip Bay. It is State Planning Policy that environmentally sensitive areas which play an important recreational role, including Western Port and the Mornington Peninsula, Western Port and Port Phillip Bays and their foreshores should be protected from development which would diminish their environmental, conservation or recreational value.

Recreation and tourism

Living Suburbs, Melbourne Metropolitan Policy, 1995 specifies that Melburnians should continue to have ready access to green spaces and non-urban land offering recreational and related opportunities. Similarly, State Planning Policy also requires that planning decisions should assist the creation of linked parklands and open space systems and the protection of important open landscapes. These policies focus attention on the current and future value of the Peninsula.

The Peninsula is already the major destination for informal recreation in Melbourne. Proximity to Frankston, Dandenong and the South Eastern Growth Area (SEGA) increases the value of Peninsula as a recreation area. The population of the SEGA is anticipated to increase by approximately 240,000 people over the next twenty years, requiring careful management of the Peninsula’s recreational resources.

The Bays and Peninsulas Regional Tourism Development Plan, 1997 states that local government must be aware of the importance of the semi rural experience to the overall tourism development and sustainability. The Plan emphasises the need to maintain both an actual and perceived green break between suburban Melbourne and the regions attractions and destinations and suggests that this will only be achieved by resisting urban sprawl and the perceptions this brings with it.

The Peninsula’s coastal and foreshore areas are also of special recreational significance and the Victorian Coastal Strategy sets a number of key directions. These include the designation of Mornington, Rosebud, Sorrento and Hastings as activity nodes, with Rosebud identified as a location for larger tourism facilities.

Agriculture

The State government is committed to protecting high quality agricultural areas from unplanned changes of land use. Living Suburbs, Melbourne Metropolitan Policy, 1995 notes that the value per hectare of agricultural production in the Port Phillip and Western Port Region (which incorporates the Mornington Peninsula) is the highest in State and that it is essential that these areas retain their value to the State’s economy as a source of clean and green produce. Living Suburbs also comments that valuable agricultural assets in and around Melbourne include the vineyards of the Mornington Peninsula, and that the value of agricultural areas lies not only in their capacity to generate produce, but also in their attraction to tourists.

Port activity

Western Port boasts major deep-water port facilities, including Victoria’s largest bulk liquid cargo port. The State Planning Policy Framework directs that:

- Land resources adjacent to ports should be protected to preserve their value for uses which are dependent upon or gain substantial economic advantage from proximity to the port's particular shipping operations.
- Planning for the use of land should aim to achieve and maintain a high standard of environmental quality, be integrated with policies for the protection of the environment generally and of marine environments in particular and take into account planning for adjacent areas and the relevant catchment.
- Port and industrial development should be physically separated from sensitive urban development by the establishment of appropriate buffers, which reduce the impact of vibration, intrusive lighting, noise and air emissions from port activities.

State policy requires that planning for the Hastings port area should have regard to the Statement of Planning Policy No 1 - Western Port and is to be undertaken in accordance with the Hastings Port Industrial Area Land Use Structure Plan.

Economic development

The Western Port Regional Economic Development Strategy emphasises the comparative economic advantages of the region, including agriculture and tourism, and the potential that exists to develop Western Port as a gateway to the economic activity in the South Eastern Growth Area.

Transport

The upgraded South Eastern Arterial and the new Melbourne City Link, together with the possible construction of the Eastern Ring Road and Scoresby Transport Corridor, will provide more effective arterial road links between the Peninsula and Melbourne. This will include improved access to Melbourne Airport for tourism and airfreight. Improved access will tend to reinforce the Peninsula's regional recreation role but may also increase development pressures on the fringe.

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A shared vision— Council's Corporate Plan

The previous sections have highlighted that the Peninsula is an area of great diversity. However, the variety of interests and opportunities that focus on the Peninsula also produces competing demands and pressures.

One of the key roles of Council as planning authority is to develop a shared community vision that reflects a wide range of views and values, while also having a clear direction. Following an extensive process of consultation, Council has included the following community vision in its corporate plan:

The Mornington Peninsula's unique characteristics and community lifestyles will be maintained and enhanced by continuing to be:

- A place where diverse communities can enjoy a quality lifestyle.
- A place where environmental sustainability is applied as a guiding principle.
- A place where social needs, ecological care and economic development are balanced and integrated.
- A place where high landscape quality is promoted and enhanced.

In support of this vision, the corporate plan identifies a number of key commitments, including:

- Servicing and developing communities - Council is totally committed to its community and will encourage citizen participation and promote equity of access to a broad range of quality services and programs that foster physical, social and cultural wellbeing.
- Enhancing our environment - Council will work in partnership with the community in responsibly managing the distinctive natural and built environment.

- Facilitating a robust economy - Council will actively support economic development in the agricultural, rural and commercial sectors which encourages employment opportunities and which are compatible with the special character of the Peninsula.

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Summary of strategic challenges and opportunities

The combined consideration of current trends and characteristics (outlined in the municipal profile), regional role and local vision provides a basis on which to identify the challenges and opportunities facing the Peninsula. The development of this statement, and the Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme as a whole, has been guided by Council's understanding of these challenges and opportunities. A brief summary is outlined below, while the objectives and strategies that follow in subsequent sections respond in more detail.

The need for a strategic framework

The very diversity of values and interests that focus on the Peninsula, and the potential for incompatibility and unsustainable use of the Peninsula's resources, emphasises the need for long term strategies and stewardship. This combines with Council's commitment to environmental sustainability as a guiding principle applicable to all forms of land use. The Strategic Framework plan, which follows in section 21.04, therefore provides a considered response, a vision for a sustainable future land use pattern on the Peninsula. This plan seeks to build on the Peninsula's strengths while addressing potential threats. Alternative patterns, such as broadscale rural residential development, may result in more immediate benefits for some landowners, but the proposed framework, and the equitable use of planning controls, is seen to achieve the best long-term outcomes.

A key element of the Strategic Framework Plan is to reinforce the Peninsula's boundary, and the "green break" between the Peninsula and metropolitan Melbourne. It is also important to establish clear boundaries for all townships and settlements on the Peninsula – directing future growth to selected centres, while containing other townships and villages in order to maintain their environmental values and community life styles. Decisions regarding the distribution and level of future population on the Peninsula are seen as central to achieving Council's vision. In this context, the existing hierarchy of towns and villages, each with a distinctive character and capable of meeting the needs of residents and visitors is considered to be one of the Peninsula's main strengths.

The framework plan also reflects Council's economic objectives, encouraging development and employment through the Peninsula's comparative advantages. Further population growth could widen the job gap unless it is accompanied by effective economic development measures. On present population growth trends, the number of jobs available to Peninsula residents (both within and outside the Shire) will have to increase by 1.3 per cent a year to maintain current employment levels. The framework plan recognises the Peninsula's comparative advantages in agriculture, including viticulture, horticulture, floriculture, orcharding and rural industry, value-added tourism and port-related development.

Future township growth

The Peninsula continues to experience strong residential growth and increasing population. There are substantial areas set aside for new development, as well as the pool of vacant lots and holiday houses, that may be developed and redeveloped for permanent occupancy. The increasing population builds the economic base to support town centres and other economic activity, but also brings with it demands for services, facilities and infrastructure. Increasing development also increases pressures on local environments and green spaces.

There is a need for coordinated planning in the development of new growth areas, and in the improvement of established areas. This may be achieved through integrated local area planning, which encompasses social, economic and environmental dimensions, and aims to create new communities rather than residential estates.

Local area character

The need to facilitate greater housing diversity in response to changing housing needs has raised key questions in the Peninsula community. This is particularly the case where new housing proposals impact on the existing residential fabric. These questions relate to:

- Identifying and evaluating the factors which contribute to the character of different residential areas within the Shire.
- The ability to establish an equitable planning framework that can address the cumulative impact of development decisions on local areas (the concept of shared amenity), as well assessment of individual sites.
- Ensuring adequate recognition of infrastructure limits and environmental capacity.

The conservation of heritage sites and precincts within the Shire are also a particular focus of concern. A strategic approach to manage and provide direction on these issues is required as a priority.

Strengthening commercial activity centres

The Shire's town centres are more than a collection of shops; they are community centres that substantially contribute to the quality of life for the Peninsula's residents and visitors. It is important to strengthen the existing centres:

- Economically - by providing commercial land to accommodate sustainable levels of commercial floor space, seeking to address gaps in the range of retail services, and coordinating public and private investment in the town centres.
- Functionally - through traffic management and parking provision and the integration of pedestrian ways and linkages, including the promotion of continuous retail streetscapes.
- Environmentally - through development design that recognises the importance of these areas to the community and that supports a distinct township identity; and through the provision of appropriate infrastructure to service town centres.

Township industrial areas

The township industrial areas provide an important employment base as well as services to the local population. The ability to attract more regionally based industry and employment depends on maintaining appropriate land resources, insulated from residential areas and with the necessary supporting infrastructure. Industrial areas are often located at the "gateway" to townships and adjacent to main roads, and strongly influence the presentation of the townships. Design in these areas needs to respond to both the opportunities and responsibilities associated with this level of public exposure. These areas often attract bulky goods retailing and provision may be made in these areas for restricted retailing, provided the retail function of the town centres is not compromised.

Foreshores and coastal areas

Coastal management is a core issue for the Peninsula and the relatively narrow coastal strip is the focus of multiple land use pressures. Sustainable use of the Peninsula's foreshores, offers major social, environmental and economic benefits but requires careful planning and coordination.

Conservation values

The Peninsula's environmental values have been well recognised; however, many of the environmental systems, which support these values, are under some degree of pressure. The Peninsula's ecosystems are under pressure. The removal of vegetation, drainage modifications, coastal works and weed and pest animal invasion have all impacted on habitat viability, species diversity and regeneration, stream and ground water quality, soil stability and salinity, and the condition of wetlands, intertidal areas and the Bays.

However, these ecosystems have the potential for restoration, albeit in a modified form. Strategies which protect and build on existing sites of high significance and core areas of public land can aim to restore environmental diversity and resilience.

The Peninsula also has a rich history, with buildings, places and sites of heritage significance. Significance, in terms of the Burra charter, refers to places that help us to understand the past, that enrich our life now and that we expect to be of value to future generation. The challenge is to make good decisions about the care of these important places.

The areas and sites of outstanding conservation value, special character, or unusual historical or scientific interest, which include national, State and regional parks; flora and fauna reserves; and other areas of natural bushland are seen as one of the Peninsula's key strengths.

Landscapes, recreation and tourism

Outstanding natural landforms, rural landscapes, seascapes, coastlines and beaches are considered one of the Peninsula's key strengths. These areas are suitable for a wide range of recreational activities, particularly unstructured outdoor pursuits. They are supported by a well-developed scenic road network that caters for through traffic, sightseeing, local access, walking and riding.

The rural and coastal landscapes of the Peninsula reflect diverse landforms, environmental systems and land use histories. They provide the basis for recreational experiences and a "sense of place", that have a strong cultural significance. Much of the Peninsula's attraction for recreation is connected to this "cultural capital" and a key challenge is to ensure that land use and development does not lead to incremental change that devalues the Peninsula as a recreational area.

In this sense, sustainable development is seen as that which supports the inherent values of the Peninsula and provides opportunities for access, understanding and enjoyment rather than introducing elements that are disruptive, intrusive or out of character.

Agriculture

Agriculture has a number of aspects on the Peninsula. It is a valuable land use in its own right, based in the productive capacity of the Peninsula's soils and climate and the locational advantages of proximity to Melbourne markets. However, in the context of the Peninsula's other planning priorities, agriculture is seen as a use which can foster sustainable land management practices and can be conducted without detriment to the natural and modified landscapes of the Peninsula. In this context, diverse rural activities, including vineyards and wineries, are considered one of the Peninsula's main strengths.

Supporting agricultural use is also consistent with maintaining areas with a low population density and providing a separation between incompatible uses, such as townships and port development areas.

The existing pattern of subdivision in the Shire's rural areas already presents a challenge to continued agricultural land use. Further fragmentation of rural land and increasing population in rural areas, would tend to undermine viable farming practices, and destabilise the land market. This in turn would reduce confidence of investment in land management and further fuel pressures for the conversion of rural land to hobby farms and rural residential subdivisions. Individual proposals for excision or subdivision may appear to have marginal effect on the achievement of the Peninsula's planning objectives. However, the expectations of rural landowners and the cumulative effects of individual decisions are critical elements in long-term land management. For this reason a sustainable and consistent rural subdivision policy is of vital importance.

Port development

Western Port is an area of high environmental value and sensitivity; however, the potential for further port and port related development is seen as key strength. Realising this potential presents a number of challenges. These include:

- Ensuring adequate protection of the Bay, its catchment and environmental systems.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA PLANNING SCHEME

- Proper management of the port land resource and the establishment of the infrastructure necessary to support port related uses.
- Avoiding land use conflicts by maintaining separation between port development and sensitive township areas.

These factors must be properly managed to ensure that port development gains the support of both industry and the community.