Strategic Directions

Settlement

The pattern of settlement is dispersed across French Island. There are two restructure areas on the Island - Tankerton Estate, located in the south-west; and Bullock and Decoy Swamp, in the north-west. Dwellings are clustered in the Bullock and Decoy Swamp restructure area and dispersed across the remaining rural areas.

French Island has no reticulated services or facilities. The Island’s isolation, rural nature, access and infrastructure constraints, and the restrictions in the restructure areas limit future housing and settlement opportunities, but also contribute to the unique and valued Island lifestyle.

The overarching strategic directions relating to settlement and housing on French Island are to:

- Maintain the existing settlement pattern across the Island, with clusters of houses in the Bullock and Decoy Swamp restructure area and dispersed housing in the remaining rural areas.
- Limit future settlement and housing opportunities based on the Island’s isolation, lack of infrastructure and environmental constraints.

Sandstone Island is rural freehold land held in single ownership and is isolated and constrained by its geographical location and lack of infrastructure. The Island is bordered by steep, grassy coastal bluffs and makes an important contribution to the biodiversity values of Western Port Bay.

Sandstone Island was subdivided into 142 residential lots in the 1960’s. The Sandstone Island Restructure Plan now limits development on the Island to one dwelling only, in accordance with its environmental setting and land constraints. The access, isolation and infrastructure constraints on Sandstone Island limit the capacity of the Island to accommodate use and development. It is therefore important to retain the Island in single ownership to limit the opportunity for future development.

The overarching strategic directions relating to settlement and housing on Sandstone Island are to:

- Limit settlement opportunities through the Sandstone Island Restructure Plan, that allows for only one dwelling on the Island.
- Protect Sandstone Island’s contribution to the biodiversity values of Western Port Bay.
- Protect and enhance the environmental values of Sandstone Island.

Elizabeth Island is rural freehold land held in single ownership and is isolated and constrained by its geographical location and infrastructure, which is limited to a private jetty and barge landing. The Island contains a dwelling used for tourist accommodation, a caretaker’s dwelling and a shed. It also contains important biodiversity values and makes an important contribution to the biodiversity values of Western Port Bay.

The access, isolation and infrastructure constraints on Elizabeth Island impact directly on the existing tourism facility operating on the Island. It is important that any further development of the Island is in accordance with the geographical and environmental constraints of the Island.

The overarching strategic directions relating to settlement and housing on Elizabeth Island are to:

- Limit opportunities to expand the current tourism accommodation and residence on the Island in accordance with the Island’s environmental values and isolation constraints.
- Discourage tourism uses that compromise the environmental values of the Island.
- Protect Elizabeth Island’s contribution to the biodiversity values of Western Port Bay.
Environmental and landscape values

The quality of French Island’s natural environment can be attributed to its isolation, where its ecosystems are relatively undisturbed. As a result, many parts of French Island are home to a number of rare or threatened plant and animal species. The Island contains over 260 fauna species, of which over 230 are indigenous bird species, and more than 580 species of flora including over 100 native orchid species.

Major areas of environmental significance on French Island are:

- French Island National Park (11,050 hectares).
- French Island Marine Park (2,800 hectares).
- Sites of national and state botanical and zoological significance.
- Coastal environs.
- Wetlands nominated to the Ramsar Convention.

The French Island Marine National Park extends along the northern shoreline of French Island and includes extensive areas of saltmarsh and mangrove communities and seagrass beds that act as a nursery for fish. The area is also a significant feeding habitat for migratory waders found in Western Port Bay.

The natural biodiversity of the Island is highly regarded by both the Island community and the State Government.

French Island, due to its extensive natural environment and minimal development, also has unique landscape values. The National Trust has given the landscape on French Island a ‘high’ rating, assigned to parts of the physical environment considered to be essential to the heritage of Australia.

Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island, in addition to French Island are noted for their significance to the internationally acknowledged Ramsar wetlands located in Western Port Bay.

Three distinct landscape character areas have been identified for French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island based on broad areas of common physical, environmental and cultural characteristics, as follows:

- Inland National Park, defined by the preservation of the natural environment on French Island, in one of the largest intact areas of wilderness within close proximity to metropolitan Melbourne.

- Pastoral Fields, defined by the low scale and low level of development across rolling pastoral land on French Island, and the contrast that this provides against the broader vistas to the Inland National Park and further afield to Western Port Bay and the mainland.

- Coastal Fringe, comprising the varied coastal landscapes of French, Sandstone and Elizabeth Islands and defined by a variety of small bays, headlands, long sweeping sandy beaches, pebble beaches, mangroves and saltmarshes reflecting the underlying geology, topography and orientation.

The overarching strategic directions relating to environmental and landscape values on French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island are to:

- Protect and enhance natural habitats for French Island’s indigenous flora and fauna, given the importance of the French Island National Park in conserving and protecting the Island’s natural environment.

- Manage the sensitive interface between the National Park and Marine National Park on French Island, and private land holdings.
- Protect and enhance the identified landscape character areas on French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island.
- Protect the rural landscape that contributes to French island’s visual, cultural and heritage values.

### 02.03-3 Environmental risks and amenity

Environmental risks on French Island include bushfire risk and climate change, while climate change also affects Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island.

French Island’s isolation, road network, lack of reticulated services and prominent natural environment make it highly susceptible to bushfire.

Climate change affects all three islands and is predicted to cause an increase in sea levels, a decrease in rainfall and more frequent and severe storm events. This will impact on coastal settlements, biodiversity, infrastructure and agricultural production. As the coastal fringe of French Island is largely low-lying below 10 metres in elevation (apart from the southern coast which rises up to heights of above 30 metres), the future impacts of climate change are a significant planning issue.

The overarching strategic directions relating to environmental risks and amenity on French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island are to:

- Ensure new use and development minimises exposure to bushfire risk particularly from significant stands of native vegetation, including heathland, woodland, open forests and scrub, both in the French Island National Park and on private land holdings.
- Ensure new use and development minimises exposure to the impacts of climate change, including potential sea level rise, erosion, storm surge and rain intensity on the Island and the waters of Western Port Bay, particularly along the coastal fringe.

### 02.03-4 Built environment and heritage

French Island’s lack of services requires development to be self-sufficient in energy generation, water supply and storage and wastewater treatment and disposal. This directly affects the built environment.

French Island has national and state heritage value in demonstrating patterns of agricultural land use and pioneering settlement of an island system as identified by its registration on the Victorian Heritage Database. French Island retains a number of structures of historic value and interest including houses or cottages from early settler times, wattle and daub buildings and chicory kilns. These buildings provide a link to the Island’s past settlement activities. A total of 28 significant heritage sites exist on the Island. These heritage features make an important contribution to the significance of the visual landscape. There are also sites of Aboriginal value, and buildings and sites of historical and cultural value.

Elizabeth Island and Sandstone Island have no current identified areas of heritage significance, however these islands may contain sites of indigenous cultural heritage.

The overarching strategic directions relating to built environment and heritage on French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island are to:

- Encourage development to be sympathetic to the isolated rural environment and valued landscape character.
- Protect and manage sites of indigenous cultural heritage.
- Protect sites and buildings that contribute to the heritage values of French Island.
- Protect the historic structures and settlement pattern on French Island that contribute to the Island’s heritage.
02.03-5 Economic development

French Island attracts up to 8000 visitors annually. Access constraints to and around the Island, combined with a limited number of tourist services and recreational opportunities, contribute to the low tourist numbers. The limited number of commercial and community activities on the Island also reflects both the low population and low visitor levels.

Tourist accommodation facilities on the Island include private lodges, the former McLeod prison farm, private camping grounds and camping locations in the French Island National Park. A number of residents on French Island are self-employed through their farm holdings or through the provision of a visitor (tourism) service (or a combination of both). French Island is becoming increasingly popular as a tourist destination centered around recreational activities in the French Island National Park and its native flora and fauna.

Elizabeth Island contains a dwelling used for tourist accommodation, a caretaker’s dwelling and a shed. Given the Island’s isolation and access constraints, tourism and commercial opportunities are limited.

The overarching strategic directions relating to economic development are to:

- Encourage a limited amount of business activity to meet the needs of the community and visitors to French Island.
- Provide opportunities for recreation and tourist activities, consistent with French Island’s infrastructure constraints and significant conservation values.
- Avoid tourism uses that compromise the primary agricultural use of rural land and the environmental values and geographical constraints of French Island.
- Discourage new tourism uses that may result in an increased number of visitors to French Island.
- Discourage recreational and tourist-related activities that adversely impact on the environmental values and natural resources of the islands.
- Discourage tourism activities that unreasonably impact on the island’s infrastructure, in particular access requirements and waste management.

02.03-6 Transport

Access to and from French Island is limited to a ferry between Stony Point, Tankerton and Cowes, a private barge service to Corinella, or private aircraft or boat.

French Island has an unsealed road network. This network limits accessibility and movement, but also contributes to the unique and valued Island lifestyle. Movement around the Island is primarily by motorised vehicles although some visitors walk, ride bicycles or see the Island by bus tour.

The overarching strategic directions relating to transport are to:

- Maintain ferry and barge access to French Island.
- Maintain safe access and movement around French Island.
- Maintain access to Sandstone Island by private aircraft or boat.
- Maintain access to Elizabeth Island by a barge service.

02.03-7 Infrastructure

French Island has a limited range of community facilities, including a general store and post office, a primary school, the Parks Victoria office, a public hall, sports ground, cemetery, a jetty, a radio link to the mainland for telecommunication and a small community tip. There is no reticulated
service for electricity, gas, water or sewage. Electricity is provided by generators and domestic water is provided from rainfall or bores. The limited infrastructure restricts development opportunities on the Island.

Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island have no public infrastructure.

The overarching strategic directions relating to infrastructure on French Island are to:

- Retain and support community facilities that meet the needs of the community.
- Maintain local infrastructure including the unsealed road network, jetty, telephone service and small community tip.