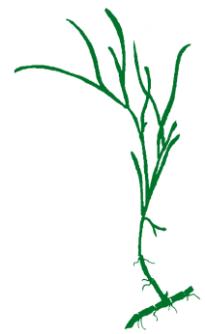


Western Port Seagrass Partnership Ltd

ACN 096 685 871 – ABN 81 096 685 871



Media Statement:

Act Now on Western Port Coastal Reserve!

Chairman of the Western Port Seagrass Partnership, Emeritus Professor John Swan (AO) has called on the Federal and State Governments to take urgent action to protect the north-eastern coastline of Western Port.

“I call on the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to work cooperatively to establish a dedicated Coastal Reserve, with clear delegation of management responsibility and the formulation of a management plan and the allocation of sufficient resources for its implementation.” he said.

“At the moment there is no recognition of the importance of this coastline, no clear management responsibility for its care and no agreed plan to tackle the serious problems that beset it!”

“Every year up to a metre of coastline is slumping into the bay, with resultant serious loss of saltmarsh habitat and thousands of tonnes of mud entering the north-east sector of the bay, making conditions impossible for seagrass survival or recovery.” he said. (1)

“These areas are vital habitat for the migratory birds covered by the Ramsar Convention and the winter feeding grounds for the endangered Orange Bellied Parrot. To lose these habitats on top of the massive damage done to seagrass meadows caused by sediment inputs to Western Port would be unforgivable.”

“The Commonwealth Government signed the Ramsar Convention undertaking to protect these vital saltmarshes and the State Government is responsible for the management of these coastal and marine areas.”

“We risk losing all the remaining coastal lands in public ownership and exposing private landholders to increasing seawater encroachments and personal losses and expense. It will only get worse with climate change modeling clearly predicting greater inundation episodes along this coastline.” (2)

“It is clearly time to plan for this impact and to build it into a strategic plan to manage this coastline and all natural and artificial inlets that make up the estuarine areas. Government needs to negotiate with private land holders and plan for an area of coast that can absorb these impacts and provide both improved habitat and a degree of protection and certainty for private land holders beyond the high impact areas.”

“The State Government has responsibility for establishing a coastal reserve, but the Federal Government must shoulder some financial burden as part of its international Ramsar Convention responsibilities.”

“The State Government should also be examining **environmental offsets** for the expected impacts of the Port of Hastings expansion. Establishing a coastal reserve and acting on coastal erosion and habitat protection could provide such offsets and help achieve net environmental gain for Western Port.”

“It is the job of Government to sort out the coastal management arrangements but we note that the northern catchment streams and the massive drainage area of the Koo Wee Swamp drainage area are all managed by Melbourne Water. So perhaps one way to achieve integrated catchment and coastal management, and bring in the engineering and scientific expertise needed for this task, is to extend Melbourne Water’s responsibility to cover the coastal reserve. We encourage the Victorian Government to trial such an approach along this coastline and to evaluate it as a broader model for adoption.”

“We call for the State and Commonwealth Government to work cooperatively on this matter and to immediately set up a working party to plan the actions and timelines needed to establish this State Coastal Reserve and management plan. The Western Port Seagrass Partnership stands ready to work in partnership with all those committed to this initiative.

On behalf of the Board of the Western Port Seagrass Partnership.

Professor John Swan
Chairman

Pdf attachment:

1. Photos of the eroding coastline.
2. Maps of Western Port showing coastline likely to be affected by climate change.