

Swan Bay Environment Association Inc.



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NEWSLETTER NO. 65 – December 2013

What's (been) the Point? *(Bob Fuller)*

The recent sale of 'The Point' in Point Lonsdale by Stockland to the Moremac Property Group for an undisclosed sum is a timely occasion to refresh our memories about this development, its history and why SBEA has opposed the development from its inception.

The 195 hectare site was reportedly purchased by Stockland in 2002 and sits between two Ramsar-listed water bodies (Swan Bay and Lake Connewarre). The company's first development proposal included 1000 house blocks, a hotel and a golf course. Following a hostile response from an outraged community, a revised scheme was proposed in May 2006. The number of houses was reduced to approximately 600, but still included 170 retirement units, an aged care facility for 120 and a convenience shop. If completed, the development will increase the local housing stock by 40%. A key feature of the \$330 million development is a one-way tidally-driven canal system.

Although reduced in size and scope, this second proposal was also opposed by a majority of the community. The Point Lonsdale Community Association and the Point Lonsdale Coastal Spaces Group led the community opposition. Members and supporters door-knocked 1800 homes, more than 50% of the Borough, and found that 74% of those canvassed expressed opposition to the development.

On the Easter weekend in 2005, more than 300 people met in Point Lonsdale and unanimously opposed the development. Among those attending was the former Deputy Premier, John Thwaites, who promised to take the message of the meeting back to the then-State Labour Government.

Opposition continued and was formally expressed at a Panel Hearing in May 2008. Almost 230 submissions were made, with most community submitters again opposing the proposal. The community raised \$100,000 to engage a senior counsel in planning and environmental law to argue the community's case. In addition to the views of the community, organisations such as the Swan Bay Integrated Catchment Management Committee, the Queenscliffe Community Association, Bird Observation and Conservation Australia and the Geelong Environment Council made submissions.

The Swan Bay Environment Association made written and oral submissions. The main four points of our opposition were and remain the following:

- that the water quality of Swan Bay would decline due to the run-off from the development into Lakers Cutting and thereafter into Swan Bay itself. The water quality of the Bay is naturally our most pressing concern. Stormwater is a

significant cause of pollution to our major water bodies like Port Philip Bay, and Lakers Cutting, into which the development will discharge, is particularly vulnerable as it is shallow and often there is little water exchanged with each tidal movement. Reed beds have been proposed to remove pollutants. Even when well-designed and maintained, reed beds do not remove all pollutants and therefore any residue will eventually find its way into Swan Bay.

- that the development poses a threat to the indigenous flora with a housing development inevitably leading to the introduction of non-native species. In addition, many of the proposed species listed for planting in the public spaces of the development were not indigenous and two are even known (or considered) to be environmental weeds.
- that the development would have an adverse impact on native fauna, particularly birds. However, the clearing of the site would undoubtedly be detrimental to other fauna such as the Rakali, the native water rat.
- that the development would result in a change in the topography of the area. Dunes would be (and have been) removed and soil moved around the site. Such activities destroy niche habitats for flora and fauna. Changed topography also exposes the site to stronger winds, affecting the microclimates which have allowed indigenous fauna and flora to establish themselves.

The community was not alone in voicing its opposition to the development. In 2006, Ted Baillieu, the then-State Opposition Leader, is quoted as saying that the proposed development " ... breaches town boundaries, it contradicts coastal policy and it threatens internationally recognised wetlands". The final report of the Select Committee on Public Land Management in September 2008 said that the Stockland proposal "could have adverse impacts on public lands adjacent to the development, particularly the integrity of Swan Bay and may contravene Australian's obligations under the Ramsar Convention on Migratory Birds."

Unfortunately, despite the concerted effort of the community and others, the Planning Panel recommended that the Environmental Effects Statement for the site and development be accepted, subject to the Panel's recommendations. The Panel believed that there would be a net benefit to our community as a result of the development. It is interesting to note that in an address to the Municipal Association of Victoria Planning Conference in July this year, that Kathy Mitchell, Chief Panel Member, included the Stockland development in her presentation entitled "Decisions that have Shaped Planning in Rural and Regional Victoria: One Step Ahead".

Following the Panel's Report, the proposal was approved by the-then Minister for Planning, Justin Madden, in January 2009. In announcing his approval, the Minister justified the development with statements that it would create over 8000 full and part-time jobs and when completed and

generate about \$40 million in benefits a year to the local community.

These predictions appear to have been excessively optimistic. According to one recent media report, 500 of the house lots still remain unsold and after suffering a \$147 million loss for the six months to the end of last year, Stockland announced that it was selling a number of residential developments, including the Point.

In the recent SBEA newsletters (see Nos 62 and 63), the Association has tried to keep members up-to-date with developments, particularly with respect to water quality. We remain concerned. Stages 4-14 of the project are subject to stringent controls involving the modeling and monitoring of water flows into Swan Bay via Lakers Cutting. According to our information, there is still no timetable for these actions. The recently-elected Federal Government went to the electorate with a promise to cut 'green tape'. The Association will be vigilant that Swan Bay does not become a casualty of this attempt to put economic development ahead of the environment and that the new developer observes all the environmental controls.

Nursery (*Jill Warneke*)

A very successful second session of "Biodiversity in your backyard" organised by the Bellarine Catchment Network was held at the Potato Shed in Drysdale on 16th October. The first, held last year, had covered Fauna of the Bellarine Peninsula and this second one concentrated on Flora. Jill Warneke, co-ordinator of our Queenscliffe Community Indigenous Plant Nursery was one of the speakers. She introduced the Nursery, its purposes - for

conservation and the environment, although the public are also welcome to purchase the plants – the volunteers, the work undertaken there and the difficulties involved in the propagation of some of the local plants.

Jill gave an example of the process involved in growing the Coast Beard Heath (*Leucopogon parviflorus*). This grows from seed, but only from seed which has passed through the gut of a bird, so the volunteers collect bird poo from under the trees. Crows, wattle birds and seagulls are particularly fond of the seed which is delicious if eaten when white and ripe. The Nursery has learnt to duplicate the process by soaking the seed in one part hydrochloric acid to ten parts water and although not quite as successful as the poo collecting method this has produced good results.

Recently the Nursery received a request from a company which specialises in vertical gardens – for aesthetic and insulation purposes. They wanted to experiment with Climbing Lignum (*Muehlenbeckia adpressa*). Some of this species had been grown (from underground runners) and reserved for the revegetation of the dunes so the request was refused. A few days they called again saying the Queenscliffe Nursery was the only place where they could locate this plant and please could they have a few to start experimenting with this species. So a few were sent to them and we may see them growing up the walls of the new Medibank building at Docklands in the future. Other presenters at the event spoke about grasslands, sea grass, kelp, remnant bushland and floral art and there were also singers, art displays and a didgeridoo player. A great night.