

Presentation from Swan Bay Environment Association
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The Swan Bay Environment Association strongly opposes the housing development that Stockland proposes to build on the Lonsdale Lakes site in Point Lonsdale.

One of the aims of the Swan Bay Environment Association is to ensure that any “development” in or adjacent to Swan Bay shall be **entirely sympathetic**, sensitive and appropriate and not interfere in any way with the natural environment and ecology of Swan Bay and its environs.

The City of Greater Geelong’s Coordinator of Strategic Implementation, Mr Peter Smith, has been quoted as saying that there would need to be a very good reason to refuse the development. The Swan Bay Environment Association has three good reasons to refuse this development - namely its impact on bird life, plant communities and water quality.

I will now enlarge on our objections in these three areas.

The first of these areas is the local bird life.

As you will already be aware, the site on which Stockland want to build their housing development is adjacent to a wetland which is recognised internationally as an area visited by migratory wading birds.

Geoffrey Carr and Darren Quin’s report on flora and fauna issues which was issued subsequent to our submission in January of this year, supports our original contention that the one of the direct impacts of the proposed development will “potentially involve loss of vegetation and fauna habitat by clearing”. This report also underlines the potential of such a development to threaten bird species that are already considered significant at international, national and state levels.

Any consideration that such a wetland can co-exist with a housing development ignores the threats to bird life that will come with a housing development. Walking around an area even of medium density housing you will notice many introduced species of birds such as sparrows and blackbirds as well as the more aggressive and opportunistic of our native birds like magpies and wattle birds. What is missing from these areas are the birds which are currently found on the site but which won’t be found in a suburban development such as blue wrens and fire-tail finches. These birds will not stay in a development with distractions such as dogs running and barking nearby, noise from traffic, music and lawnmowers and an increasing human presence. Our valuable wetlands and the bird populations that they support cannot exist adequately within a suburban environment.

Wetlands are threatened worldwide, yet these habitats are enormously important to many species of migratory wader birds. Stockland’s wetland area adjoins an internationally recognised wetland area and there are grounds for including this site in the Ramsar classification. A recent article by Bob Sutherst, Judit Szabo and Evan Cleland in Birds Australia’s publication *The State of Australia’s Birds 2007* explores the effects of climate change on Australia’s threatened bird species. The authors state that one of the best chances

for retaining species during climate change is to “protect wetland habitats”, which they say “are particularly vulnerable to development on our coasts and rivers”. With this wetland being a habitat for migratory birds, any detrimental affect on the bird populations in Point Lonsdale will potentially affect a global population. The birds on this site are already too vulnerable to be placed under further pressure by building a housing estate adjacent to their habitat.

The second area of concern to the Swan Bay Environment Association is the plant life.

We propagate indigenous plants at our community nursery. Last year we distributed over 20,000 plants for local projects. We are committed to ensuring that the dominant vegetation in the Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff areas is indigenous. Many local residents have visited the nursery to buy indigenous plants for their gardens. Often they are replanting gardens after removing environmental weeds or are establishing a drought-tolerant garden. Others recognise the ecological and aesthetic value of a garden planted with indigenous species.

Carr and Quin have identified eight Ecological Vegetation Classes on the proposed development area. None of these are compatible with the kind of garden that most people buying into a housing development would be planning to establish. The current dominant vegetation types on the site are low-lying, salt-tolerant vegetation, and these will be destroyed by any development of the area. Conditions on the site are harsh and the soil is poor. People will struggle to create gardens on this site without the introduction of soil and fertilizers which will compromise the existing habitat.

The Swan Bay Environment Association is also worried about the introduction of weeds and other invasive non-indigenous plants to this area. Movement of soil around and on to the site, introduction of new plant species to the area and drastic alteration of the existing habitats, will all contribute to increasing the number of weeds found on the site.

Many of the plants listed for planting in the public spaces in the *Point Lonsdale Residential and Waterways Development Landscape Architect Report* prepared for Stockland in June 2003 are entirely inappropriate for use either in this area or for the purpose for which they have been selected.

The trees selected for the Access Streets include species not appropriate for street planting such as *Melaleuca linariifolia* and *Melaleuca squarrosa* which are normally found in wet areas. Also listed for street planting are two *Callistemon* species which are native to NSW and Queensland and a Western Australian eucalypt.

None of the species on the list of plants for Open Space are indigenous to the area, and the *Melaleuca armillaris* and *Hakea Laurina* are well known weed species which should not be planted anywhere on the site. Trees such as *Ficus Macrophylla*, *Cupressus macrocarpa* and *Araucaria heterophylla* are large, striking trees that dominate the skyline and strongly influence the character of the area. These trees are not sympathetic to the vegetation communities found in the area which, apart from the Moonah, are predominantly low shrubs, grasses and wetland-dominated vegetation. Plantings of trees in this area should reflect these vegetation types and larger tree species should be limited to those that are indigenous to the Point Lonsdale/Queenscliff area.

The selection of species in this report has been poorly researched, and a local horticulturalist has suggested that, in her experience, this selection of plants is mostly inappropriate for the purpose and the site for which they have been selected.

Members of the Swan Bay Environment Association are extremely concerned that a vegetation plan for the proposed housing development has selected so many species that are anomalous with this habitat. While we recognise the degradation that has occurred on this site during its use as a quarry, we know that this area can be rehabilitated. Through weed removal and planting of appropriate species, the wetland area can be restored and improved. The establishment of a large housing development on this site will seal its fate for ever. Any attempt to recreate or maintain a wetland area on the margins of such a large housing development will produce a poor imitation even of what is currently in place.

Our third area of concern is the water quality in Swan Bay. We believe that this will deteriorate if the housing development goes ahead, adversely affecting the marine life and therefore the birds that feed in this area.

Dr David Provis' expert witness statement reiterates the Swan Bay Environment Association's concerns that water quality in Swan Bay may deteriorate if a canal system draining into Swan Bay is introduced into the natural water course between Lake Victoria and Swan Bay. This report refers to modeling suggesting that there will be slow water movement through the development, with flushing time for the water way at 130 days (or about 4 months) and also shows that there is little water exchange between Lakers Cutting and Swan Bay. As a result, most of the water moving through the canal system will not flow into Swan Bay but will sit in Lakers Cutting before moving through the canal system once again.

We are worried that a canal system that takes the run off from a housing development will carry a lot of contaminants in the form of faecal matter from dogs and cats, grease and oil from cars, detergents from car and window washing and fertilisers and weed killer from gardens. These will concentrate in the canal system and Lakers Cutting, gradually moving out into Swan Bay in particular during periods of heavy rain. As these contaminants move into Swan Bay they will pose a risk to the seagrass and to the fish which breed in Swan Bay and, further up the food chain, to the birds which come to Swan Bay to feed.

In closing I would like to ask the panel to be aware mindful of our concerns when making your decision whether or not to allow Stockland to build such a large housing development on such an ecologically significant and fragile area. I ask you to consider the effects that such a housing development will have on the bird and plant life in the area and the water quality in Swan Bay. Being mindful that these three areas are interrelated and that any detrimental effect caused to one of these will affect the others, I ask that you not give approval for a housing development which has the potential to harm local, state, national and even international populations of birds and plants.