Queenscliff Community Association Submission to VEAC Investigation into Historic Places on public land across Victoria.

- from QCA President and Executive

December 21 2015

The Queenscliff Community Association welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to VEAC -Investigation into Historic Places on public land across Victoria.

We are hopeful this Investigation may act as a catalyst for greater level of custodianship and appreciation of not just historic places on public land but also on the importance of undeveloped public land. We are also hopeful this report does not become a mechanism to lever public land and public assets into privatised holdings or long term leases that do not have widespread community support.

The Queenscliff Community Association has been involved over the past two decades and more acting as a local community forum promoting protection, preservation and conservation of the local heritage and environmental assets -both private and public -in Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale. It has also attempted to address a wider concept of history and heritage as being more than just a set of buildings but a narrative that provides a deeper cultural connection and community understanding of our 'spirit of place'.

Since the mid 1980's there had been a strong local community ethos to protect and preserve one of Victoria's most important heritage and historic townships and its surrounding Marine environment. The Borough is prized for its unique location and set of public and private heritage assets -urban, defence, hotels and maritime. This has been well documented and reinforced on occasions at VCAT. National Trust recognition for individual sites and incorporation into the National Estate added to the historical integrity and importance of many sites in Queenscliff. The Queenscliff Urban Conservation Study of 1984 and Heritage Study of 2009, in addition to Heritage Management Plans on Fort Queenscliff were the basis of ongoing protection and more strategic planning scheme controls.
Our planning scheme derives its rationale from a strong urban heritage framework and is strongly based on heritage overlays and individual heritage recognition for its unique Urban Character. Marine Parks, Cultural Heritage, RAMSAR site recognition and Shipwreck protections add to the legislative complexity and diversity of Queenscliff, Swan Bay, Port Phillip Bay and Point Lonsdale. The Marine Park links us to the Heads and Point Nepean that has been posited in some earlier submissions.

However, pressures and tensions for development and a 'modernisation/progress' push that have been evident over the past decade has meant the QCA has had to increasingly deal with a wider spectrum of planning issues and attacks on the existing heritage protections. Heritage, to some became a troublesome obstacle and something to skirt around. We believe this is a short-sighted strategy.

Council has also been thrust into the role of Committee of Management with the task of looking after parcels of land without sufficient funding and/or with a viewpoint these gifts are a 'cost burden' and/or an asset that needs to provide some form of financial or economic return to Council without looking at the wider net community benefits these assets provide.

We believe Council ascribes a depreciation schedule to various assets and hence should have a means of funding maintenance on these depreciated assets should it choose.

We welcome aspects of the current VEAC report, at least in recognising that Government and other bodies have a responsibility in maintaining properties. Importantly, it has placed the spotlight on the importance of heritage assets and places in Victoria. It identifies funding and management issues that are readily apparent but has failed to delve into the deeper and complex issues of governance, accountability, transparency and economic and net community benefit. Some local heritage assets and locations are threatened by impacts of climate change and impacts on the natural environment caused by other users e.g dredging the Rip and channel deepening. These have not been adequately addressed as potential risks to heritage assets. We would ask whether the bond provided by the companies undertaking Channel deepening was returned despite the widespread implications on the coast? We can cite ongoing repairs to the seawalls at Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale as well as other locations across the Bay. Have these been met by the taxpayer?

We are surprised there has been no mention of Queenscliff in the VEAC document given the Borough's importance in maritime, defence and tourism heritage. We shall refer later to some of the Borough properties that should be recognised.

We understand that preservation is an expensive and problematic economic proposition. However, in the case of Queenscliff, as with other locations, local tourism and economic well-being is framed around maintaining and conserving these heritage places and assets. They are so important to the streetscapes and to the intrinsic value, integrity and authenticity of our
heritage. They are crucial to cultural understanding and enrich both the residential and tourist experience. They are fundamental to the urban, natural and marine character.

A number of properties and sites do exist on public land and are in the hands of government, who due to budget restrictions, do not appear to find necessary funds for asset renewal or on going and systematic maintenance. At the same time we puzzle over grants or programs that appear wasteful, the result of the ad hoc nature of political lobbying and either avoid or fail to complement the heritage and history of the asset.

We would suggest a form of property and asset valuation be applied to all heritage sites as a public document.

We believe a need exists for better management and transparency of funding. A properly staffed and funded Heritage Victoria should be a priority as a result of this report but this Statutory body must be more accountable to the community and engage in a more robust conversation.

The discordant policies of Local Council and Heritage Victoria working occasionally in opposing directions has resulted in outcomes that appear contradictory to orderly planning and contrary to maintaining heritage streetscapes and character.

In the QCA submission on the Heritage Act Review we have outlined with case studies the problems and issues associated with two bodies such as Council and Heritage Victoria working in tandem often with a different methodology and heritage and planning approaches and principles. We see it as essential this overlap and conflicting principles be addressed.

The QCA perceives a problem in yet another bureaucratic overlord with a commissioner for public land heritage. We are concerned that another layer or level may compound some of these heritage management issues.

We believe existing heritage protection policies represent a powerful instrument. We insist they be followed and be applied consistently. The problem with another management layer is an area of potential conflict and possibility for bureaucratic indecision. Are they to have ultimate control or power or be a facilitator of getting economic returns or for lubricating lease arrangements? How will they rest between other heritage and planning authorities?

We agree with Draft Recommendation 2 A standard does need to be set to maintain and preserve heritage places and buildings. We do believe there should be council powers or some other authority to force owners to maintain properties to a standard before being allowed to fall into convenient disrepair or makes them unsalvageable.

This applies equally to Government and Council managed properties. We are witnessing a sad long-term decline of some buildings in Fort Queenscliff for example which then become the subject of some wild and unsustainable
tourism ideas such as a brewery and up market accommodation that defy a business plan and are contrary to any cultural connection to the existing heritage.

We fully support a recommendation that data, and importantly, accurate information and record keeping on these properties is essential in order to provide good policy, management and planning strategies. Over time, changes in legislation has affected the status of local sites that were on the National Estate now being covered under the Victorian Heritage Register or Database. Yet properties under the National Estate remain under that title in the local planning scheme. We believe it leads to a confusing array of heritage recognitions that may not have legislative weight.

A systematic review needs to be undertaken to clarify and update heritage status. An onus is placed on the Borough to review its own planning scheme that is long overdue.

Our experience has indicated there appears a policy of devolution of responsibility and cost shifting. The Borough Council has taken control of two important Lighthouse Reserves at Shortland’s Bluff in Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale. Despite their importance as open space and publicly accessible coastal foreshore, Council has elected, despite overwhelming community opposition, to continue to explore and present a case to provide a revenue stream via the introduction of non-historical cabin accommodation. We believe this sets a dangerous and unwelcome precedent. It is a policy that impacts on heritage accommodation providers.

Very few properties in Queenscliff, whether public or private, would generate sufficient revenue to fully cover maintenance costs. Given the age of the buildings, lack of prior or ongoing maintenance in some cases and even issues with heights etc. makes it difficult to promote re uses that would cover preservation costs and maintenance. We would argue Fort Queenscliff is one such example. Costs of refurbishment and adaptive re use would far exceed any economic return. We believe many would fail a comprehensive audit of a business plan if they were subject to such scrutiny.

However this appears to be the premise of the current VEAC document i.e. an attempt to generate returns to cover costs of upkeep.

We are concerned the Investigation may become a process of privatisation by stealth by either selling or encouragement of long term lease arrangements.

The Draft recommendations that posit Committees of Management and Trusts are noted. We welcome the recognition given to the many volunteer organisations or personnel who manage these properties and represent an important cog in the wheel for preserving these heritage places. We especially commend organizations such as the National Trust for their on-going role in heritage protection. But as noted they too are under pressure.

We acknowledge also the submission of Andrew Sutherland on the significant
weaknesses in governance, support and oversight of CoM’s. These are important matters that need to be fully addressed.

We have noticed Appendix 4 has no reference to Queenscliff and the surrounding marine heritage assets. We believe there are many heritage places on the National Heritage List including the following based on the Queenscliff Planning Scheme.

We ask why the properties and places that are on Register of the National Estate and Properties and places listed on the VHD are not included in Appendix 4?

We believe there is not adequate information been provided in the VEAC document if these have not been referenced.

We submit parts of Clause 22.03 of the BoQ Planning Scheme for consideration.

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The Municipal Strategic Statement identifies the need for a local policy to ensure the unique heritage character and attributes of the Borough of Queenscliff are recognised, acknowledged and preserved. The Borough of Queenscliff’s heritage, comprising of individual buildings, sites, places, objects, significant trees and streetscapes, is of regional, State and National Significance. This heritage is important in the course and pattern of Victoria’s cultural history, cultural diversity, richness and its association with significant events, developments, or cultural phases in the history of European settlement in Victoria.

22.03-12 HERITAGE POLICY 13 REGISTER OF THE NATIONAL ESTATE

This policy applies to all that land designated on Policy Map 13” - the area known as the area on the Register of the National Estate. This policy also specifically applies to the following individual items listed on the Register of the National Estate, of particular heritage significance, to which special consideration should be given:

“Lathamstowe”, 44 Gellibrand Street, Queenscliff; Fortifications - Queenscliff, Gellibrand Street, Queenscliff; Anglican Parish Hall, Learmonth Street, Queenscliff; St George The Martyr (Anglican) Church, Hobson Street, Queenscliff; “Roseville”, 42 Mercer Street, Queenscliff; “Waringah”, 80 Mercer Street, Queenscliff; Pilot’s Row Cottages, 60-62 Gellibrand Street, Queenscliff; 22-24 King Street, Queenscliff; Ozone Hotel, 42 Gellibrand Street, Queenscliff; Queenscliff Post Office, 47 Hesse Street, Queenscliff; Old Vicarage, 13 Mercer Street, Queenscliff; Former Methodist Church, 79 Hesse Street, Queenscliff; Former Sunday School, 81 Hesse Street, Queenscliff; South Pier, End of Symonds Street, Queenscliff; Queenscliff Hotel, 16 Gellibrand Street, Queenscliff; 26 King Street, Queenscliff; St James (Anglican) Church, Albert Street, Point Lonsdale.

We believe the Parks in addition to Fort Queenscliff both on Gellibrand St are also currently or were on the Register of the National Estate. We believe the South Channel Fort is also on the Register. There is also reference to 65 Australian Heritage Places pertaining to this local area.
Many of the Shipwrecks close to both the Borough and Point Nepean, in addition to the various Forts make the Borough a special case for consideration as an area of national significance. We are hopeful the VEAC investigation highlights such special locations. We believe a number of places in the Borough are those that exhibit 'Exceptional natural and cultural places including indigenous and non-indigenous sites that contribute to Australia’s national identity, or define critical moments in Australia’s development as a nation.'

Consideration should be given to enlarging the classification under the VEAC investigation including Deakin's holiday home in Point Lonsdale and the precinct in front of the Fort at Shortland’s Bluff with its significant Lighthouses, indigenous middens and remnants of the early lighthouse quarters as places for preservation and recognition.

Queenscliff's entrance also boasts one of the earliest and most intact WW1 and WW2 Avenue of Honour that deserves ongoing protection, preservation and recognition. This important vista into Queenscliff has been the subject of a recent consultancy, which the QCA is apprehensive about given the comments made by Council. Instrumentalities such as power authorities and Vic Roads have paid scant regard to conservation values in their works on or near this historic and important Avenue.

Queenscliff also lost important vital components of its maritime heritage when the historic slipways in the old harbour were deemed to have Work Safety issues. The VEAC Investigation should examine the ways new legislation can erode heritage.

Queenscliff Conservation Area

Source: Got to the Register of the National Estate for more information. Record Identifier: 3669

Location: Gellibrand St, Queenscliff Local

Government: Queenscliffe Borough

State: VIC Country: Australia

Statement of Significance: This area exemplifies the unique character of Queenscliff and its varied history as pilot station, fishing village, garrison town and holiday resort. Probably in no other area in Victoria is the entire history of a town or locality so aptly displayed by its built form, its land use and its environment. It comprises the old
Queenscliff Fort (now the Australian Military Staff College) (AMSC), which long guarded the entrance to Port Phillip Bay; The pilot station, a reflection of the town's original function; Gellibrand Street with its old guest houses and hotels and the beautiful foreshore reserve, both of which reflect the town's important function as a long established holiday resort; the boat pier and the old fisherman's village, which reflect the town's long standing function as a fishing port; the main commercial street, Hesse Street, which still retains much of its nineteenth century character; and Stokes Street which presents an intact Victorian era residential streetscape.

(The Commission is in the process of developing and/or upgrading official statements for places listed prior to 1991. The above data was mainly provided by the nominator and has not yet been revised by the Commission.)

**Description:** The old fort (now the AMSC) has a long history and today contains many buildings and works of historic significance. Its high gunholed brick walls and imposing keep have long been a significant landmark in Queenscliff and dominate the southern end of Gellibrand Street. Gellibrand Street contains some elaborate and imposing Victorian and Edwardian era guest houses and hotels in excellent, near original condition, together with some very old houses and cottages. There are some intrusive elements in the streetscape and its buildings exhibit great variation of style and scale but it is of major importance because of its beautiful setting, the individual significance of many of its buildings and its clear exposition of the history of Queenscliff as an important holiday resort. The buildings in Gellibrand street overlook the sea and the wide foreshore reserve. The foreshore reserve is significant for its undulating topography, mature trees and its enhancement of the townscape. The bridge, bay, beach streets area comprises the old fishing village. The streets are lined with small weatherboard fishermen's cottages, most of which date from the nineteenth century. Although almost all of the cottages have had
unsympathetic alterations, such as imitation brick cladding and enlarged windows, they generally retain their original form and there are very few modern intrusive buildings. The area is important because it retains its original form and function, many of its cottages still being inhabited by fishermen. Hesse Street, between Hobson Street and Stokes Street, contains many buildings of individual significance and retains much of its nineteenth century character. The streetscape retains basically the same scale and form as it did in the late 1800s and early 1900s, despite the fact that most of the original shopfronts have been modernised and some new shops have been constructed. The northern side of Stokes Street, between Gellibrand Street and Mercer Street, is an intact streetscape of nineteenth century detached houses and terraces. Most of the buildings are in original condition and there are few intrusive elements in the streetscape. The western side of Learmonth Street, between Stokes Street and Hobson Street, is important because it contains a group of early cottages and the former foresters lodge hall of 1870. The Church of England complex on the northern side of Hobson Street, between Learmonth Street and Mercer Street, is a particularly significant group of old church buildings comprising the church, parish hall and vicarage.