



TIDAL RIVER
openspace

A meeting place to begin the connection



VIEW ACROSS SANDSCAPE
Tidal River Open Space
Wilson's Promontory


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Overview

Wilson’s Promontory National Park (WPNP) is a place of great significance. It is the oldest existing national park in Victoria. It was first reserved in 1898 and this was made permanent in 1905. It is now internationally recognised as an iconic site of great beauty on the south coast of Australia. Affectionately known as ‘The Prom’, it is a destination much loved by Australians that have holidayed there, often for generations, and it is a place valued by locals for leisure and recreation.

Tidal River Open Space, (TROS) is a place and an experience that has been developed and designed to improve and enhance WPNP and to create a special place for visitors to gather, learn and share in its riches.

There is currently a missing link in WPNP. ... there is no place to meet and gather, to socialise and to begin the connection ... the wild places they will encounter during their stay.

This is a project of international, state and local significance.

There is currently a missing link in WPNP. There are a string of facilities to accommodate and to provide food and information for visitors and to house administration. However, there is no place for people to meet and gather, to socialise and to begin their connection to, and appreciation of, the wild places they will encounter during their stay.

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to be an introduction, a starting point and a key attraction for tourists. It is also designed as place for local and regional visitors to build community, appreciate and use the spaces that are on their doorstep and support healthy lifestyle. It is design to be a place that optimises the value of existing assets, further cementing Tidal River as the hub of the Prom.

Wilsons Promontory National Park Context

Ownership and Management

WPNP is public land managed within the context of a wide range of international treaties, as well as commonwealth and state legislation. The Department of Environment and Primary Industries is the responsible state government authority and Parks Victoria is responsible for the management of WPNP, through its Management Services Agreement with the Department.

Parks Victoria Context

Parks Victoria’s vision is to be a world-class parks service ensuring healthy parks for healthy people. The healthy parks healthy people philosophy highlights the well-being of all of societies depends on healthy ecosystems and to have contact with nature and that parks are fundamental to economic growth and vibrant and healthy communities.

In late 2013 it released *Shaping our Future* which outlines its strategy for the next decade and beyond. Two of the four key themes in *Shaping our Future* are:

- *Connecting people and parks* which focusses on strong partnerships with people to make them accessible to all
- Providing benefits beyond park boundaries which includes greater human wellbeing, economic prosperity and liveability.

The Open Space project contributes directly to Parks Victoria’s vision and strategy.

Management Plan

The long term Management Plan for the Park was formally approved in 2000. It sets out the framework for managing the Park to promote its long-term nature conservation focus.

The Management Plan vision is to maintain the substantially natural condition and to ensure that it continues to be a place that retains a sense of wildness and remote beauty whilst still being accessible to visitors.

The Plan recognises the opportunity that the Park provides for people to enjoy the natural setting through a wide range of activities including walking, camping, sightseeing, viewing wildlife, fishing and boating.

The Park is recognised as a major tourism destination for the region and a place that can make a significant impact on the local economy. The Management Plan supports the concept of tourism as a means to promote and encourage an appreciation of the Park's natural and cultural values and recreation opportunities. Tidal River is seen as the central location for facilities that enable that enjoyment and understanding and is a starting point for visitors.

The Plan provides the basis of the Tidal River Open Space ambition to assist with this, to encourage appropriate Park use and foster the conservation ethic.

Tidal River Precinct Plan

Over the decade that followed the Management Plan many projects have been considered for Tidal River. In 2013 Parks Victoria developed a draft Tidal River Precinct Plan for discussion. This consolidates the previous plans and is intended to provide the framework for future development.

The Precinct Plan specifies the need for open space and the provision of a landscape that:

- Establishes a sense of arrival and orientation
- Entices people to walk from the Visitor Centre to the beach (and other areas)
- Incorporates an area for children's play
- Integrates seating and picnicking

The Tidal River Open Space Project contributes to these functions.

Tidal River Open Space Group and Partners

The Open Space Project has been developed by a community group formed for the purpose of establishing this facility. An extensive participative process, including the local community, key government stakeholders and interest groups was undertaken to inform its function and design.

The Tidal River Open Space Group is supported by:

- Parks Victoria
- The Prom Advisory Board
- Foster Community Association
- Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
- People and Parks Foundation
- Friends of the Prom
- Foster Rotary Club
- Prom Campers Association

The Tidal River Open Space Concept

The Tidal River Open Space concept is for an open space at a strategic location in WPNP, at the entry to Tidal River. It is conceived as a new, multi-function, experiential gathering space. The concept is elaborated below, in the Tidal River open Space Experience.

The Tidal River Open Space Concept Development

The Open Space concept has been developed in stages:

Stage 1: In 2005 some 30 people representing 47 groups a Visioning workshop to address a perceived need to create a meeting place at the Prom. This responded to the Groups recognising that there were many who wished to use the Park in inclement weather. They felt that a communal gathering space at Tidal River would facilitate more extensive use and show visitors the attraction of a natural space that embraced the diverse seasons. This was the beginning of the Tidal River Open Space concept and the formation of a group dedicated to bring this to fruition.

Stage 2: The Open Space Group formed and consulted widely to understand the needs of the local and regional community and how they could be better met at Tidal River. This program of interviews and workshops resulted in the development of a preliminary conceptual brief for a landscape designer. The Brief wished to establish a place that connected the elements: fire, wind, tide and earth in their natural cycles. A place that excited the senses, creating opportunity for natural and cultural themes that encouraged imagination, curiosity, learning and play.

Stage 3: Mary Jeavons was appointed to respond to the Brief and produced a visual concept and defined an order of cost to deliver such a concept. This design concept has been used widely to test these ideas and garner support. The process has included the establishment of a regular walks program, at the Prom, to communicate the benefits of the concept to a wider audience and to raise funds for the next stage

Stage 4: The development of this Report is to articulate the strategic context and alignment of the concept with the Park and Regional Plans and to further develop the concept to meet future needs and aspirations

The Tidal River Open Space Experience

The Open Space is an innovative new concept for outdoor space. It uses high quality landscape design to take the elemental power of the site and translate this into an experience that interprets, educates and inspires visitors in preparation for stepping into the natural and the wild areas.

The Tidal River Open Space is
never closed

The Tidal River Open Space is never closed. As open space it complements the education and visitor facilities, the shop and cafe, drawing people outdoors.

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to be the heart of the Tidal River visitor precinct. It is space for meeting, gathering, socialising, learning, creating and playing. It draws people together and provides a hub where people of diverse ages can enjoy engaging with each other, be introduced to the wild environment that surrounds them, appreciate the particular nature of this extraordinary location and be inspired to get out and enjoy the landscape. The activities that will happen there, both formal and informal will strengthen relationships and build understanding about this unique place and its people.

The Open Space contributes to the Tidal River precinct in a significant way. Its location at the entry immediately signals arrival at a very special place. It invites interaction and will

increase dwell times. It is designed to embrace the weather as a part of nature, making Wilsons Promontory National Park and Tidal River more attractive year round.

The Open Space is not only for tourists. It is targeted at making this a strong attractor for locals. It bridges the gap between the wild, natural environment and more contrived recreation spaces that support sports and recreation in the rural communities and townships in the region.

THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

Enhancing An Iconic Location

The Tidal River Open Space is located strategically in a region renowned for its outstanding natural beauty. Its site within the national park is central to the concept as a gathering zone, a starting point and an introduction to a major tourism destination, to a regional community and a world-class natural environment.

The Tidal River Open Space is a new concept for Tidal River. It adds a level of functionality not currently in place and is designed to be a unique visitor attraction that enhances the whole Park experience.

Tidal River, Wilson’s Promontory National Park

WPNP is a state and national icon at the southernmost tip of mainland Australia, jutting into the wild seas of Bass Strait. It offers spectacular scenery of granite mountains, diverse forests, pristine beaches and a rugged coastline. The region has a long indigenous history.

The Park offers many activities including a huge variety of walks from short gentle strolls to treks of many days, as well as swimming, surfing and diving. It offers unbeatable inspiration for professional and amateur photographers, artists, writers, philosophers, botanists, bird lovers and historians.

It offers accommodation ranging from campgrounds in bush surrounds to private cabins with glorious views.

The Tidal River Open Space is located at Tidal River, the Park’s visitor hub.

The Tidal River Open Space is a new concept for Tidal River. It adds a level of functionality not currently in place and is designed to be a unique visitor attraction that enhances the whole Park experience.

South Gippsland

WPNP lies in South Gippsland, a region that boasts a spectacular environment, combining picturesque rural landscapes and world-class pristine wild landscapes. The region enjoys a mild climate with distinct seasons that ensure that there are a wide variety of experiences on offer year round. There are a number of large and small towns and hamlets within the region that has a permanent population of approximately 28,000 projected to grow to 38,000 by 2031.

The South Gippsland region lies in Victoria’s East, and is approximately a 2 - 2½ hour drive from Melbourne. WPNP is approximately 222km from Melbourne’s GPO. The proximity to a population of some 4.25 million people makes it an attractive area for holiday homes and weekends away for city residents.

Delivering on Government Priorities

The Tidal River Open Space is a project that has been specifically planned and designed to meet the needs of the community and to support state, regional and local aspirations. Strategies and Plans to which this has particular relevance include:

Department of Primary Industry Tourism Investment Guidelines¹.

The Tidal River Open Space will require investment in infrastructure. The Guidelines, established in 2013, recognise the benefits of investing in national parks. They encourage tourism infrastructure that:

- Is of a high environmental standard
- Complements the values of national parks
- Enhances visitor satisfaction
- Appeals to national and international visitors
- Provides benefits to regional and local communities
- Makes a positive contribution towards the conservation of the environmental, Aboriginal and historic cultural values of the national park

Whilst these Guidelines are essentially directed at commercial interests, they are relevant to any investment in these special settings.

In addition the Guidelines set out high-level principles for investment. Proposals must be:

- Sensible and sensitive to their setting
- Determines as the highest and best use of the site (from environmental, social and economic perspectives)
- Be consistent with the legislative objectives and purpose of the national park and have regard to the management plan
- Take account of risk
- Be managed appropriately

The Tidal River Open Space meets these criteria in both its functionality and design and demonstrates compliance with all these principles.

Gippsland Regional Plan

This is the long-term strategic plan for Gippsland that has been formulated to address the changes and challenges that will impact on the region's future, its ability to adapt to change and to build resilience in the community.

The Open Space is designed to tackle the issues raised in the Regional Plan and make a difference in these key areas.

The Plan outlines the desired future for Gippsland and is one that has been developed with major inputs from a wide range of community members. One of the key characteristics of the future for the region is improved access to the region's iconic locations and the creation of unique experiences in the region's wilderness areas.

The region is forecast to grow. In the growth projections the Plan identifies a 14% increase in population to 2026 for South Gippsland of whom a large percentage (31.1%) are retirees

¹ www.depi.vic.gov.au/forestry-and-land-use

aged over 65. It predicts that holiday homeowners may convert to permanent residents, and notes that this change will increase expectations that the region will develop facilities and services to suit the new needs.

The Plan recognises the nature of Gippsland and the assets that will drive future economic prosperity and growth. In particular for this area of South Gippsland, its high proportion of public land, its rural villages and its diversity of landscape types. It sets out the key priorities and importantly highlights the opportunities inherent in the coastal and bushland locations for the tourism sector. The national parks, and WPNP as a 'flagship area' in particular, are seen as major assets and in need of improved tourism infrastructure.

In addition the Plan identifies community wellbeing as one of its strategic outcome areas. The average life expectancy of Gippsland people is lower than the Victorian average, and, despite the natural beauty of the region, the access to recreation facilities that impact social wellbeing and connectedness is also below average. The Plan emphasises the need to address these issues, to improve recreation infrastructure and to provide opportunities to better actively engage in community life.

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to tackle the issues raised in the Regional Plan and make a difference in these key areas.

Gippsland Tourism Strategic Direction 2013-2018

The vision for tourism in Gippsland is multi-faceted. Tourism "will be valued for its significant contribution to the region's economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainability." It will be delivered through "outstanding visitor experiences".

The objectives of the Strategy are to increase visitation and expenditure, length of stay, dispersal and satisfaction. These will be met through product and destination development, visitor service excellence and marketing initiatives.

The Tidal River Open Space, sited in one of the region's most recognised tourist destinations, sets out to meet these objectives and contribute to the vision.

Victoria's Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2008-2012

The Strategy was developed to seize the opportunities that were, and still remain, in this fast growing sector. The natural attraction of WPNP is seen as having the potential to put Victoria in a leading position nationally and internationally.

In particular the Strategy focuses on maintaining and sustaining the health of the natural environment to ensure that it remains robust and able to support increased interest and use.

Visiting beaches and national parks are key activities and these natural attractions play a major role in influencing visitation to Australia by international visitors.

Development of these assets is closely linked to their role in supporting the cultural vitality and community engagement that builds sustainable, liveable communities.

Developing authentic, memorable experiences is a key Direction in the Strategy and in particular developing world-class experiences at key national parks.

The Tidal River Open Space responds specifically to this Direction in its siting, design and function.

South Gippsland Shire, Council Plan 2013-2017

Council's Vision 2020 aspires to achieve some significant outcomes for South Gippsland. Of particular relevance is the desire for a caring community, for a wide range of recreation and leisure amenities and for a thriving tourism industry.

The Shire wishes to encourage closely connected communities and to support increased prosperity and new opportunity. Tourism is seen as a major economic driver and developments that promote the health and wellbeing and unique character of the community are encouraged. Council's approach is one of integration and collaboration.

The Tidal River Open Space directly delivers on the tourism and community health and well-being aspirations.

South Gippsland Shire Council, Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2012-2017

Tourism is noted as one of the major service sectors for South Gippsland. The region is already attracting more than a million visitors each year. This is not only an industry of direct benefit in its own right, but it acts as a marketing tool – bringing visitors who enjoy their experience to the extent of wanting to invest in the area buying holiday homes and relocating to the area.

The tourism sector centres on the natural attraction and the Strategy acknowledges that its greatest strength is WPNP.

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to add significantly to the level of attraction at WPNP, to support local business, to increase visitor dwell times in order to deliver these economic benefits.

Prom Country Economic Impact and Visitor Profile 2013

Reliance on tourism is critical to this region. It drives the success of accommodation providers, restaurants and cafes as well as tourism attractions. WPNP is the largest tourism employer in the region. Tourism is markedly seasonal and the low winter numbers significantly impact business success and development. WPNP is the major destination in terms of its contribution to the region's economy. In summer, 37% of visitors actually stay in the Park.

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to capture group activity and create a platform for products that attract these new market segments.

Recommendations include increasing tour in national parks, especially to suit the mature age visitors in autumn and winter. The report highlights the opportunity to package tours for people wanting a guided experience. It also notes the need to collaborate with other providers, creating itineraries and product offers that utilise the natural attractions more effectively.

Economic benefits projected by South Gippsland Shire Council are that the project could conceivably bring 12,000 additional visitors to WPNP which would have a direct annual impact of \$1.1m additional expenditure and 6 direct jobs. This would have a flow on effect to the economy of about another \$700k and another 4 jobs for a total of \$1.8m per year and 10 new jobs to the South Gippsland economy.

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to capture group activity and create a platform for products that attract these new market segments.

Target Markets

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to enhance and support visitation to WPNP. There are two key markets that it is intended to attract: tourists and locals.

Tourists

Gippsland attracts more than 10 million visitors every year. Approximately half are day-trippers, a growing market segment, and half are overnight visitors.

The Prom Country region attracts over 1 million of these visitors annually. Again approximately half are day-trippers and half stay overnight. Around 28% are regular visitors and 70% are visiting for holiday or leisure purposes. 73% are from Melbourne.²

Tourists at WPNP total 353,850 per year. This includes some 235,010 who stay in the Park overnight and 215, 729 who stay at Tidal River as well as 118,840 day-visitors.³ Day trip visitors have increased in recent years by some 10%.⁴

Locals

The population of South Gippsland Shire is estimated at 27,819⁵. The residents are largely from Australian or British backgrounds. Whilst there are many families with children, there are also a larger percentage of empty nesters and retirees, older workers and pre-retirees than in other areas of regional Victoria.

Residents from areas around Fish Creek, Foster, Venus Bay, Yanakie, Walkerville and Tarwin Lower are the most likely to use WPNP and The Tidal River Open Space most frequently.

Specialist Groups

Many commercial and community groups visit the Prom to take advantage of the spectacular scenery. Writers, artists, photographers, wildlife enthusiasts and walkers are keen visitors year round. Examples of this use include Prom Coast Art Group, Stockyard Gallery, Parktrek Walking Tours (www.parktrek.com), Walkabout Gourmet Adventures (www.walkaboutgourmet.com), Bunyip Tours (www.bunyiptours.com).

Schools

Many schools from throughout Victoria use the Prom for excursions. Currently these particularly focus on the Surf School that operates for 4 months of the year. The Prom is also used extensively for secondary groups e.g. VCE biology and environmental science. The Park is also used for environmental education groups, outdoor education specialists, by sports groups e.g. scuba diving enthusiasts and social groups such as Variety, the children's charity.

Market Needs

Tourism

All the plans and research has indicated that new infrastructure is critical to the growth and development of tourism in the region. Whilst the natural attraction is unparalleled, visitors

² Prom Country Tourism Development and Marketing Plan, 2006

³ WPNP Visitor numbers June 2012 – May 2013

⁴ Prom Country Economic Impact and Visitor Profile Report, November 2013

⁵ South Gippsland Shire Community Profile 2012

expect and require facilities that assist them to access and enjoy nature. Tourists often arrive at a location with very little understanding or appreciation of its value and very limited ideas of how to engage with the landscape in a meaningful way.

New infrastructure planned for the region includes road upgrades, accommodation and attractions such as tracks and trails. These facilitate physical access, but must be complemented by products and services that provide other forms of engagement.

Health and Well-being

It is a fact that people living in rural areas tend to have shorter lives and higher levels of illness and disease risk factors than those living in cities. Nor do people living in rural Australia always have the same opportunities for good health as those living in major cities⁶.

Plans for increasing health and wellbeing also refer consistently to the need for infrastructure that encourages people to be physically active, to be active socially, connected members of their community and to reap the many benefits that derive from the natural environment.

There is a growing body of research nationally and internationally that supports the long and short-term benefits of spending time outside. There are now numerous resources that fully document the advantages of interacting with nature.

The Tidal River Open Space is designed to establish and encourage healthy lifestyles and to introduce, in a safe and comfortable setting, the delights that extend beyond its boundaries.

The Tidal River Open Space Benefits

The Tidal River Open Space has been conceived to deliver benefits that are wide-ranging and significant for both the local and the tourism markets.

1. It delivers on State and local government priorities and makes a contribution to result areas outlined above
2. It transforms the Tidal River visitor precinct into an attractive tourism hub that will increase footfall and support tourism and food and beverage businesses operating within the area
3. It provides a destination attraction for local residents that is not currently available in the towns and that connects them with the wider assets of the region
4. It creates an appropriate space for formal education for use by local schools and tertiary institutions and schools from the wider region
5. It encourages an active, social lifestyle that will support community health and well-being
6. It assists park managers and others to educate visitors about the Park and its natural and cultural values.
7. It is more than a functional space, it symbolises the importance of the natural world and the need to conserve and protect our natural heritage

The quality and site specific nature of the Tidal River Open Space design, far from being a standard product, offers the opportunity to win awards at an international level, differentiating the Prom from other national parks, and increasing its market value.

⁶ Australian Government, Institute of Health and Welfare

The Tidal River Open Space Preliminary Design Brief

Since the 2008 design, the Tidal River Open Space concept has further developed and is summarised below.

Functions

The Tidal River Open Space functions as part of the Tidal River Precinct. It complements the other facilities offered at the visitor centre, café and shop as well as the education centre.

An identifiable space where a group can gather before heading further afield

The Tidal River Open Space is easily accessible and will have all ability access design features. It is next to a car park and shared walking lead into the space.

The functions of the Open Space include:

- A gathering place for groups – an identifiable space where a group can gather before heading further afield
- Meeting spaces – spaces for smaller groups to sit and be oriented, learn, create and celebrate
- Rest spaces – spaces for contemplation and quiet chatting
- Performance amphitheatre and seating – spaces for performance
- Lookout – places for viewing the wider environment
- Study – places for focussing on the detail of land, plants, wildlife, sky
- Creative play – spaces for climbing and clambering, discovery and sand play

Design Features

The Tidal River Open Space is designed⁷ to respond to the natural world and the elements of earth, tide, wind and fire - elements that are the very essence of life at the Prom. It is a place that excites the senses, creating opportunity to explore natural and cultural themes and encouraging imagination, curiosity, learning and play.

The design responds to the selected themes as well as the practical aspects of weather and seasonal change

The built forms, materials and plants are proposed to complement the surrounds, to support a low maintenance regime and to meet safety and risk guidelines.

There are many opportunities for embellishment with site-specific artworks

The final design will be briefed to relate specifically to the site selected and to attract people of all ages and abilities.

Cost estimates

Cost estimates to date are based on the Mary Jeavons design in 2009 values. This design would need to be reviewed in the light of any new siting and additional functionality to meet the future needs.

⁷ Concept Design: Mary Jeavons, Landscape Architects (now Jeavons Landscape Architects). The firm is an award winning practice that specialises in natural environments, parks, children's spaces and sensory gardens.

Capital Cost

The estimated total capital cost of the project is \$625,000 (2009)

This includes:

- Detailed design and documentation
- Construction (including engineering and other specialists)
- Project Management
- Contingency

Operating Costs

The Tidal River Open Space will be owned by the State and managed by Parks Victoria. The costs of operating the Open Space include:

- Insurances:
- Cleaning: the site will require daily cleaning to remove waste
- Maintenance: maintaining hard and soft landscape at a quality that supports a major visitor attraction with high visitation
- Refurbishment: periodic renovation or restoration of plantings and areas that receive greatest use

Next Steps

It is proposed that this project be undertaken in 3 stages:

Stage 1

- Prepare a final Design Brief to meet the strategic intent and attract identified market segments.
- Select a design team to develop schematic designs, based on the Brief, and to provide accurate capital cost estimates
- Develop a Business Plan to provide operational cost estimates and to identify potential revenues, based on schematic design.

Stage 2

- Use the Tidal River Open Space Report, Schematic Design and Business Plan to apply for capital funds

Stage 3

- Detail the design and undertake construction

Report Date: July 2014