



# Engagement report

South Gippsland Shire Council: Coastal Strategy

30 April 2023



## About this report

This report provides an overview and outcomes of the community engagement process undertaken on behalf of South Gippsland Shire Council from December 2022 to February 2023 to inform the development of the new Coastal Strategy. It provides an overview of the engagement process, who we heard from, and the key findings from the questions asked through the engagement process.

It report will be used to share the findings with the community and stakeholders and as a basis for further discussion and input into the Coast Strategy.

## Project background

South Gippsland's coastline is facing unprecedented challenges from coastal hazards such as rising sea levels, erosion, and bushfires that have caused significant damage to the region's natural environment and coastal infrastructure. South Gippsland Shire Council is developing a Coastal Strategy to address these challenges and support the community's economic and social needs. As a first step, Council developed a Discussion Paper, which formed the basis for the engagement process. The engagement program aimed to understand the community's views on proposed actions such as removing growth areas, new planning scheme provisions and nature-based solutions.

An important goal of the engagement was to build awareness in the community about the coastal hazards and their potential impacts and to start a conversation about what this means for the future of the coastal townships.

The decision to undertake a broad and inclusive engagement process demonstrates Council's commitment to building trust with the community by involving them in the decision-making process and ensuring the Coastal Strategy reflects their needs and concerns.

## Limitations

As with all engagement, there are limitations to the process that should be considered when reading this report:

- At the start of the engagement process, Council and our team identified proposed actions in the Discussion Paper that were most meaningful to test with the community, based on their potential impact and ability to be influenced by community feedback. Therefore, while the community was given the opportunity to provide feedback on the Discussion Paper as a whole, the questions asked were specific to these identified actions.
- Almost a quarter of responses came from residents or homeowners from Venus Bay. This likely skewed the results to issues specific to this town.
- It is also likely that some respondents will have provided feedback in multiple ways by responding to the online survey, contributing to the other online engagement activities and potentially providing a



- written submission.
- We were not able to engage First Nations representatives during the engagement period. As such, they have been invited to participate in the next phase of the project.



## Snapshot of activities and participation

**770** people provided input

### Online survey

**Purpose:** to seek feedback from a broad cross-section of the community.

**428** people engaged

### Online engagement

**Purpose:** to engage with the community to generate ideas and discussion.

**75** people participated in an online forum

**53** people contributed to the ideas board

**25** written submissions\*

### Community dialogue

**Purpose:** to begin a conversation with the community about the future of its coastal townships.

**22** people engaged

### Pop-ups

**Purpose:** to engage with a broad cross-section of the community.

**6** pop-ups across the South Gippsland Shire

**145** people engaged

### Online information sessions

**Purpose:** to build awareness and understanding of the discussion paper.

**1** online information session was held

**11** people engaged

### Stakeholder discussions

**Purpose:** to engage with key stakeholders.

**4** stakeholder discussions

**11** interview participants

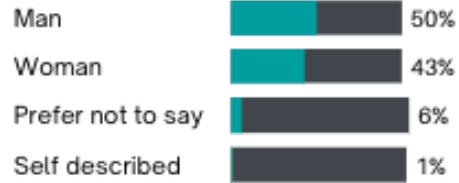
**Note:** Some submissions were received via email by Council.



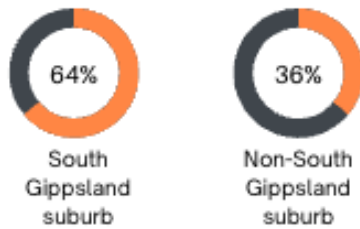
## Who we heard from

**571** people provided demographic data from the online survey and pop-up

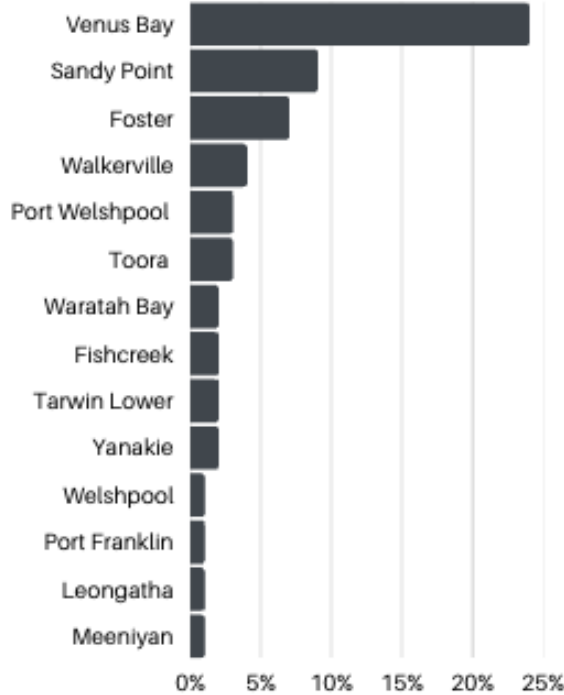
### Gender (n=571)



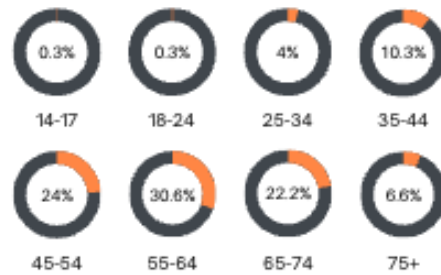
### Main place of residence (n=563)



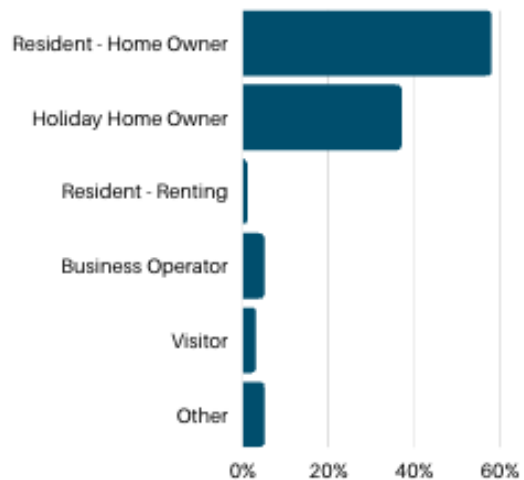
### South Gippsland townships (n=361)



### Age groups (n=566)



### Connection to the Shire (n=566)





## Key findings

### Level of support for proposed actions

#### Removal of growth areas

77% of survey and pop-up respondents supported this proposed action



The majority of people we heard from support the removal of growth areas in Venus Bay, Sandy Point, and Waratah Bay. This is primarily due to concerns over the fragile environment and ecosystems, lack of infrastructure, and desire to maintain the small town and coastal feel of these communities.

Concerns about the impact of climate change, protecting wildlife habitat and farmland, and the potential for new development to spoil the natural beauty of the towns were also key reasons for supporting this action.

#### Planning scheme provisions

74% of survey and pop-up respondents supported this proposed action



The main reasons for supporting the proposed planning scheme provisions (one dwelling per lot and subdivision restriction) were to protect the natural environment and wildlife, preserve the coastal and rural character, and minimise overpopulation and overcrowding.

Residents and holiday homeowners, who made up the bulk of the respondents, also highlighted concerns about overdevelopment and its effects on the community and the need to encourage appropriate and sustainable housing. Overall, there is a strong desire to protect the natural environment and maintain the unique character of these coastal communities while balancing the need for growth and development.

#### Common Ground initiative

78% of survey and pop-up respondents supported this proposed action



There is strong support for the Common Ground initiative; particularly it's potential to protect and restore the natural environment, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and provide economic benefits and ecotourism opportunities.

The feedback strongly favours protecting and restoring the natural environment, adopting nature-based solutions, and taking action on climate change. Overall, the support reflects the desire to protect the environment and maintain the beauty and ecology of the region.



## Nature-based solutions

78% of survey and pop-up respondents supported this proposed action



The community prefers nature-based solutions for coastal hazard mitigation over traditional engineered solutions due to their environmental benefits and cost-effectiveness.

The responses also emphasise the importance of involving local communities and stakeholders in the planning process and call for further research into the effectiveness of these solutions.

People would like a comprehensive, holistic approach that considers multiple factors such as environmental health, hazard management, and economic initiatives to ensure the best outcomes.

## Transfer of crown land

24% of survey and pop-up respondents were supportive of this proposed action, while 34% were not supportive



Less than a quarter of the people we heard from agreed with the proposed transfer of Crown Land, emphasising the importance of environmental protection, conservation, and better resource management.

Approximately a third oppose the proposal, expressing concerns about state government management and stressing the significance of local knowledge and input.

Slightly less than half remained neutral, citing a lack of information, management concerns, or ambivalence about the potential impacts of the proposed action.

## What features or characteristics do you most value about the township you live in or visit?

People highly value the natural environment and wildlife surrounding the coastal townships. The sense of community and the welcoming, supportive people were also frequently mentioned, indicating strong social networks in the townships. Peace and quiet are important, reflecting a desire for a slower, more relaxed pace of life. Overall, respondents appreciated the rural or small-town character of the townships and their natural coastal features, such as beaches and scenic beauty, without excessive development or high-rise buildings.

The following features or characteristics were most highly valued by residents and visitors, in order from most frequently to least frequently mentioned:

- Natural environment and wildlife
- Community and people
- Peace and quiet
- Rural and small-town character
- Beaches and natural coastal features



Do you have any other feedback about the proposed actions in the Discussion Paper, including feedback on the other actions or if you think anything is missing?

Key issues raised in relation to the Discussion Paper:

- Concerns about the impact of climate change and the need for a climate change adaptation plan.
- The need to improve infrastructure and services, such as drainage and medical facilities.
- Calls for Council to support renewable energy initiatives, such as community energy projects and wind turbines.
- The importance of preserving First Nations heritage and consulting with First Nations people.
- Opposition to offshore wind turbines in areas where they may impact views of the coastline.
- The need to encourage younger families to the area and support local businesses.

What people have identified as missing from the Discussion Paper:

- The need for defined outcomes and goals rather than aspirational language.
- The need for stronger action on education regarding the value of natural vegetation.
- The need to limit population and economic growth to ensure sustainability.
- The need to work better with Parks Victoria to protect coastal parks and sustainably open up some areas for eco-tourism.





## Analysis of responses by the key themes in the Discussion Paper

To provide another lens on the feedback, we analysed all responses to the questions above by the key themes outlined in the Discussion Paper.

### Population pressure and development

- Overdevelopment and overpopulation are major concerns - people do not want the area to become 'like the Peninsula'
- Residents love their towns the way they are - close to nature, safe, great for families
- People love the 'coastal lifestyle', surrounded by farms and nature
- In supporting the growth restrictions, people acknowledge that there is still room for development to take place in the townships
- The protection of neighbouring farmland is seen as a good reason to limit development.

*"People choose to live in these townships because they are small, quiet and undeveloped. I live in Venus Bay and do not want it to become another Inverloch."*

*"Services and resources in small coastal settlements can be as fragile as the environment, so human development needs to be realistic, practical and appropriate. The amenity of this area lies in the small scale of towns and community connections, which would be impacted by subdivision."*

*"There are many reasons why second dwellings may be appropriate under controlled conditions and /or defined timeframes. Blanket restrictions and controls rather than advice to property owners only serves to stifle innovative solutions to current and future challenges."*

### Environment and Landscape

- Reducing environmental impact and protecting biodiversity and coastal environments is a major priority for the community
- There are concerns about the loss of vegetation and wildlife due to increased development
- Most people are supportive of the Common Ground initiative and nature-based solutions
- Managing coastal hazards and climate impacts are a key concern for most - particularly the increased risks of flood, fire, storm surge, erosion, and sea-level rise.

*"This is something I have advocated for, for 40 years. Returning the area to the natural salt marsh would create a carbon sink to help mitigate the effects of climate change and coastal erosion."*

*"I am supportive of any nature-based solution that can mitigate coastal hazards but see these opportunities as complementary to seawalls and levees, not a replacement."*

*"The coastal areas near these townships are fragile and will be degraded by more expansive and intense settlement. We have already destroyed far too much of the natural bush, and coastal areas have been cleared and damaged, with the loss of unique animals and plants. We need to stop any further damage now."*



## Development infrastructure and management

- The transfer of land is not supported, although a significant percentage of the cohort remains neutral
- The main issues are a lack of trust in State Government and Parks Victoria (“What if the government changes?”) and a preference for local management
- Those that are supportive believed that the State would have more funding
- Many in the neutral camp said they did not have enough information to make an informed choice and that the people directly affected need to be consulted
- Concern around the state of amenities and infrastructure is also a major concern (roads, parking, public toilets) - old and needed to be upgraded to account for population growth.

*“It will hopefully provide consistency in approach and funding required for proper conservation. There needs to be significant local input though and opportunities for regular community consultation and feedback.”*

*“People in state government are too far removed from the area and the unique issues faced by people in our area to make informed decisions.”*

*“Seawalls and levees are not a permanent solution to these problems and cannot adapt to the changing environment. Nature-based solutions will be more adaptive in the long term, especially with climate change.”*

## Community and economy

- While there is strong support for the planning restrictions, many recognise that growth is important and/or inevitable
- This is largely related to boosting the economy and the provision of services - particularly for an ageing population
- People really value the ‘close-knit’ communities and do not want to see this change
- There is an interest in the community about how growth can be accommodated if it is done in a controlled and sustainable way
- There is a concern for the recruitment of volunteers for community and emergency services in the future.

*“Townships need to expand to support population growth development and attract jobs to the area.”*

*“There needs to somehow be a balance between allowing town/population growth and protecting the unique places we live (and why we live there).”*

*“Venus Bay needs to expand...we need local employment for the existing and future young people in the area.”*



## Differences between the key coastal townships

Throughout the engagement, it became clear that each coastal township has its own challenges, concerns, and vision for the future. We analysed the responses from residents of three of the major coastal townships to understand how these visions and concerns differed.

### Port Welshpool

- There is a concern about the state of local businesses, such as pubs or stores, indicating a desire for growth to support the town and community while valuing the natural environment.
- Some respondents express support for higher-density housing and/or greater development, but with consideration for environmental impact or adequate infrastructure. These responses highlight the high cost of housing. They noted that families may wish to subdivide to provide housing options for elderly or young members of their family (i.e. granny flats). Others mention the lack of development as a positive.
- Some respondents reported a desire for affordable housing or rental properties in the area.

*“You can't restrict lots to one dwelling and restrict growth areas. Not helping townships grow/succeed.”*

*“People with families may wish to subdivide their blocks because of the cost of housing.”*

### Venus Bay

- There were specific mentions of desired improvements to infrastructure in Venus Bay, such as better maintenance of dirt roads or the need for infrastructure such as an emergency community refuge (place of last resort), playgrounds and sewage.
- A few comments about the need to balance preserving the natural environment and allowing for some development and infrastructure.
- There is general opposition to higher-density housing in Venus Bay; however, some respondents express a desire for affordable rental properties in the area, adding that limiting development could exacerbate the renting and housing struggles many workers and families are facing.
- Respondents noted that some development should be allowed to occur, but with restrictions and caveats to manage environmental impacts.

*“There is a large need for affordable rental properties in this area. A maximum of two small dwellings on a site would assist greatly with this issue.”*

*“Everything in moderation. Don't want a sleepy town. No high-density housing but we do need progress”*

### Sandy Point

- There were differing points of view relating to paths and trails in Sandy Point. While there was a desire for streetlights and footpaths in certain areas, some members of the community enjoyed the lack of paths, noting it added to the character of the town.



- Some respondents express support for development or subdivision under certain conditions (such as larger lot sizes or environmental considerations)
- Unlike Venus Bay, there was a sense that the lack of water and sewage infrastructure in Sandy Point lent to the coastal hamlet character of the town, with some noting it was nice to be 'off-grid' in a way.

*"It is really important that no restrictions are placed on building on existing lots, i.e., not retrospective. People have purchased land in good faith and should not be restricted in the development of their properties."*

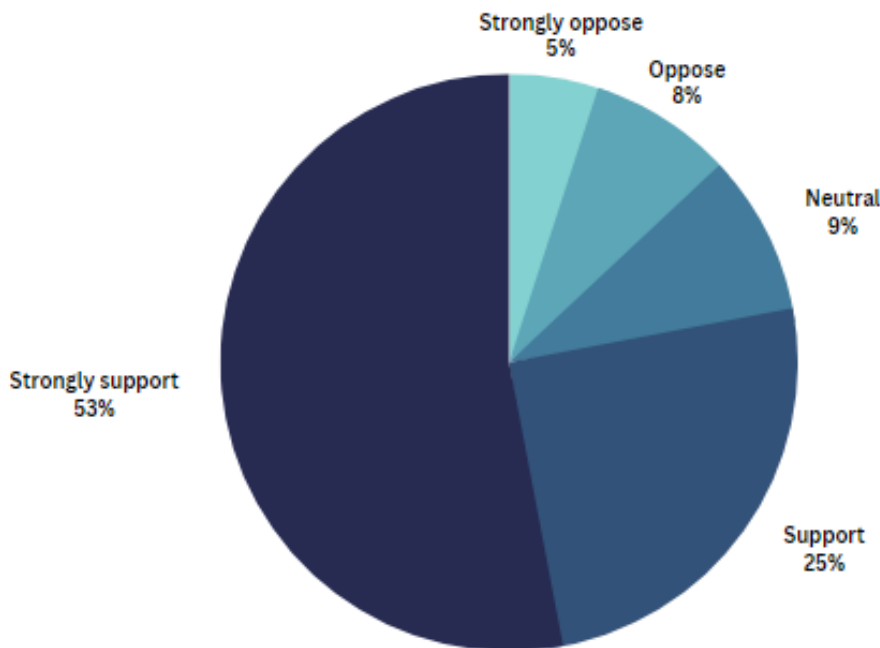
*"Infrastructure is lacking, and I like it that way. I like the wilderness"*



## What we heard

### Proposed action: Removal of growth areas

Explore the removal of our growth areas from the planning scheme for Venus Bay, Sandy Point and Waratah Bay, which means the townships would not expand beyond their current boundaries. Please indicate your level of support.



Why did you choose this answer?

In explaining why they supported the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Environmental preservation and protection:** Concerns about climate change, wildlife conservation, impacts on natural habitats, and other environmental issues.

*"The coastal areas near these townships are fragile and will be degraded by more expansive and intense settlement. We have already destroyed far too much of the natural bush, and coastal areas have been cleared and damaged, with the loss of unique animals and plants. We need to stop any further damage now."*

*"We should preserve our coastline, wildlife corridors, and farmland. These areas need more protection for the fragile environment that they are in."*



*"Expansion would ruin the town. There is ample evidence that increased population in these areas exacerbate damage to the indigenous ecology, especially fragile dune systems."*

**Infrastructure and capacity limitations:** Concerns about roads, parking, water supply, sewerage, and powerlines.

*"Existing infrastructure is already stretched, including roads and powerlines. Flooding often occurs and by 2050 sea level rise will mean that many of the low lying areas of these coastal towns may well be uninhabitable."*

*"Infrastructure does not support an increase in population. One road in and out, plus parking is an issue over peak periods."*

*"Ageing and neglected comms and energy infrastructure needs to be addressed before considering growth."*

**Maintaining small town character and lifestyle:** Feedback received concerned overdevelopment, loss of community feel, impact on tourism, and other related issues.

*"I don't want to see the town overdeveloped. Our limited services and space will not cope."*

*"I think that we are at risk of losing our cozy small-town feel that is one of our drawcards for tourism and I do not feel as though coastal towns have the capacity to host an increased number of residents or the infrastructure necessary to support that growth."*

*"These townships have a charm as they are. Too much development changes this."*

**Resource limitations and sustainability:** Feedback concerned limited resources, ageing infrastructure, and the need for balance and sustainability in coastal townships.

*"Due to water supply limitations at all three locations and lack of sewerage at Venus Bay and Sandy Point, any expansion of the areas would need improved infrastructure that Council clearly cannot afford."*

*"Balance at a sustainable scale should be the aim, not endless growth. We should aim to preserve productive farmland and surrounding lands as they are to avoid endless geographic expansion of coastal towns."*

*"These communities do not have the infrastructure to support a bigger population. They are situated in sensitive environments in which a larger population could cause a detrimental impact."*



**Sensitivity to environmental impacts and climate change:** Concerns about bushfire risk, sea level rise, weather events, and the potential impact on wildlife and natural ecosystems.

*"Climate change and increase in adverse weather events (fires and flooding) present a higher risk in these areas and render them low priorities for growth."*

*"All three of those townships sit within environmentally/climate change sensitive environments, which, if the predictions are correct, are only going to come under more pressure over the next decades."*

*"Venus Bay is surrounded by fragile ecosystems, being the Cape Liptrap park and the inlet. More growth puts that at risk."*

In explaining why they **did not support** the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Sustainable growth and economic development:** Respondents emphasised the importance of sustainable growth, promoting economic development, and supporting local businesses. They highlighted the need for responsible growth that benefits coastal communities while preserving the environment and wildlife.

*"Communities need to grow and generate economic activity. Need mitigation strategies."*

*"One of the actions in the discussion paper is to support local economies; I don't see how that can work when you limit growth like this. To support the economy, you need growth."*

**Affordability, inclusivity, and diversity:** There was a focus on maintaining affordability, promoting inclusivity, and supporting diverse populations in the coastal communities, with residents concerned that limiting development could have flow-on effects that price families and workers out of the housing market. Respondents noted the importance of providing opportunities for others and keeping coastal areas accessible for the general population.

*"Escalates values creating homes for the rich and discounting beach areas for the general population."*

*"We need to be inclusive, not exclusive, people should have opportunities to live where we do in a responsible and measured approach."*

**Improved infrastructure and services:** We heard that there was a need for improved infrastructure and services, such as roads, water, sewerage facilities, and economic activity to support cafes and stores, while considering the balance between growth and environmental protection.

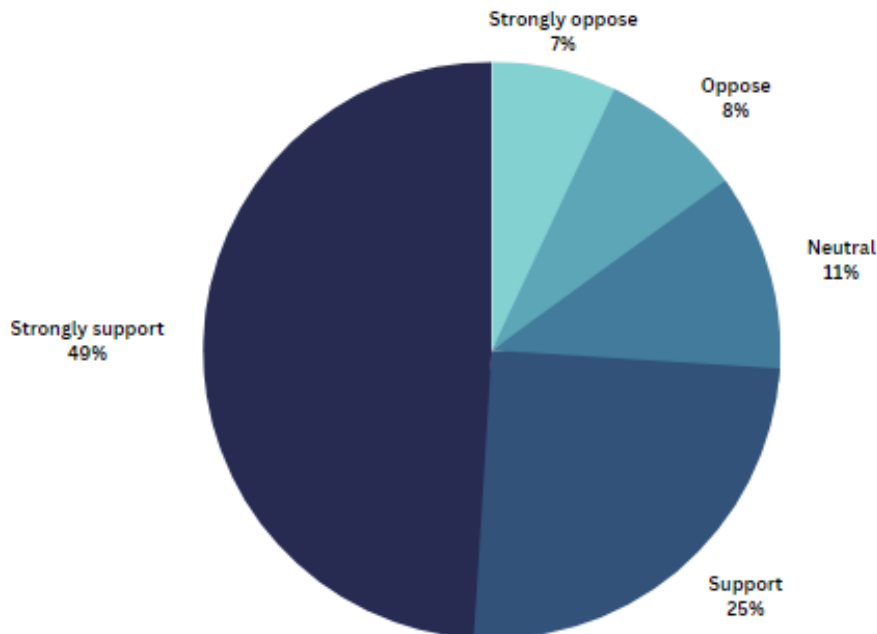
*"Growth with the right infrastructure. Provide new road infrastructure, not in bushfire or flood zones."*

*"There are many engineering solutions which can be used to protect our existing coastal communities."*



## Proposed action: Planning scheme provisions (one dwelling per lot)

Council is proposing to explore a Planning Scheme provision that restricts new development to one dwelling per lot and restricts subdivision. Please indicate your level of support.



### Why did you choose this answer?

In explaining why they supported the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Protection of environment and wildlife:** Respondents highlighted concerns over the impact of overdevelopment on the environment, erosion, wildlife and the local ecosystem.

*"Overcrowding will continue to reduce the wildlife and have a negative impact on the environment due to septic systems and reduced biodiversity."*

*"Too much overdevelopment will create erosion, impact wildlife and destroy the ecosystem."*

*"Maintaining the current character & density is important to me to protect our environment & wildlife. I enjoy the lifestyle here living in nature."*





**Retaining coastal towns' character:** Respondents expressed a desire to maintain the character and charm of their coastal towns, including the simple look and feel of the towns, as well as preserving the view from the beaches along the coastline.

*"Would like to keep coastal living feel to towns."*

*"To keep the look of our small coastal towns simple."*

*"Lack of development of high rise and multi-dwelling units are part of the attraction of the area keeping the view from the beaches along the coastline almost pristine which is very rare and to be valued."*

**Infrastructure and services:** Respondents highlighted concerns over the lack of infrastructure and services, such as water and sewage. They believe that overdevelopment could put further pressure on ageing infrastructure and services.

*"Infrastructure not consistent with such development."*

*"Lack of infrastructure (water/sewer), added fire risk."*

*"Most small towns are struggling to accommodate tourists through summer; plenty of accommodation choices but the roads, water, power, internet and parking are not suitable currently and not many options for increasing capacity for some of those."*

**Limits on growth and development:** Respondents expressed support for restricting development to one dwelling per lot and limiting subdivision, citing reasons such as preserving native vegetation, reducing overcrowding, protecting the environment, and maintaining the character of their towns.

*"I'm very supportive of restricting subdivision and also restricting one dwelling to each lot."*

*"It is important to retain native vegetation in built-up areas to support biodiversity."*

*"One dwelling per lot maximum will preserve the charm and character of our existing coastal towns and villages."*

**Opposition to higher-density living:** Respondents expressed opposition to high-density living, with concerns over increased traffic, loss of open space and greenery, and a desire for space and privacy.

*"I believe residents buy property or move to this area to live in a place where there is a reasonable amount of space around them NOT to live on top of each other."*

*"It shouldn't be needed if there is proper planning and subdivision."*



*"Most of our blocks are small so subdivision would entirely change the character."*

In explaining why they **did not support** the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Need for housing diversity and affordability:** Respondents emphasised the importance of providing diverse housing options, including smaller dwellings and subdivisions, to cater to the needs of the ageing population, workers, and young families. They also mentioned the need for affordable rental properties and the impact of the proposal on housing prices.

*"There is already a shortage of real estate for accommodation "*

**Economic growth and community development:** Respondents expressed concerns that restricting growth areas could hinder the economic growth and development of local communities. They argued that subdivisions and increased density levels could attract more people to the area, encourage local businesses, and help improve the region.

*"Subdivisions bring more people to the area and encourages growth of local communities."*

*"We need growth to improve the region."*

**Avoiding blanket rules:** Respondents expressed a desire for more flexibility in property development decisions, emphasising property rights and the importance of avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches. They argued that each development should be considered on its merits, and that blanket rules are often counterproductive.

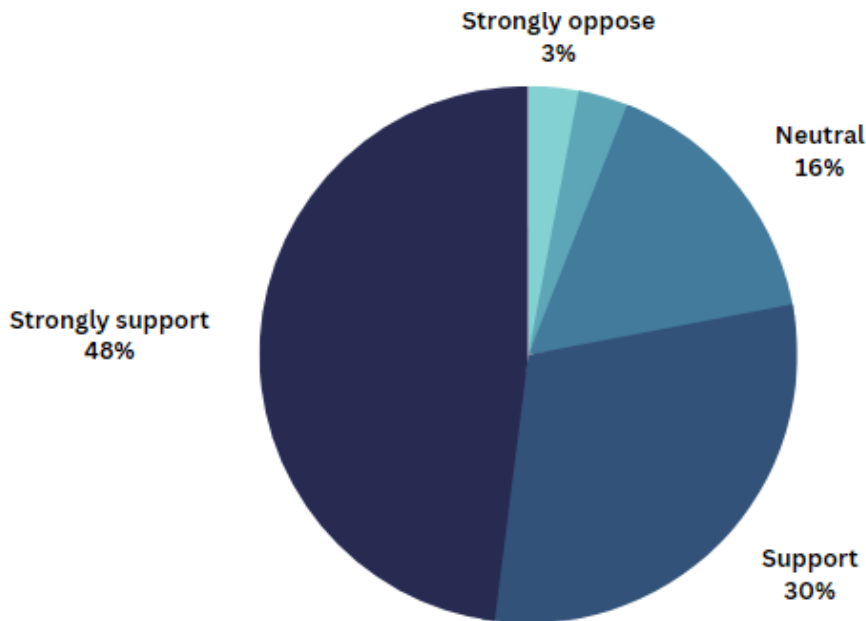
*"Let people subdivide if the property can handle it."*

*"A one size fits all approach should be avoided. Each new development should be considered on its merits."*



Proposed action: Common Ground initiative (nature-based solutions)

Investigate the Common Ground community initiative on the land adjoining Andersons Inlet at Venus Bay which proposes nature-based adaptation concepts that, if implemented, will assist in managing storm surge, flooding and coastal erosion. Council's role in the initiative is to advocate to the State and Federal government for funding and support. Please indicate your level of support.



Why did you choose this answer?

In explaining why they supported the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Environmental protection and restoration:** Many respondents expressed their support for the Common Ground initiative as a means of protecting and restoring the natural environment. They emphasised the need to preserve and maintain the coastal habitats, wetlands, and native flora and fauna.

*"Protecting the environment is always a priority"*

*"Preserve natural environment but don't lock us out"*

*"Restoration of the natural environment to resist storm surges is always a better proposition than man-made intervention"*



**Climate change mitigation:** Respondents highlighted the importance of adopting natural-based solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation. They believe that the restoration of wetlands would be an effective way to sequester carbon and reduce the impact of climate change. Many also expressed their support for the idea of developing ecotourism opportunities in the restored areas.

*"Mitigations against a changing climate need to be recognised and implemented to support the existing communities"*

*"Nature-based climate change mitigation needs to be adopted as soon as possible"*

*"This is so important"*

**Flood mitigation and management:** Respondents supported the need for management strategies to address flooding and coastal erosion risks, including the use of natural solutions such as wetlands and saltmarshes.

*"This would be a huge benefit to local wildlife and as a recreational area for locals and a huge attraction for ecotourism which would, in turn, bring money into the local towns"*

*"Venus Bay is at risk of flooding from rain storms and sea level rises. Nature-based adaptation is the only approach which will be effective in the long term"*

*"Helpful in managing flooding"*

**Tourism and economic development:** Respondents saw the potential for economic benefits and opportunities for eco-tourism associated with the restoration and management of the natural environment.

*"Modest eco-tourism could be established as the wetlands regenerate"*

*"Wetlands are proven to be hugely beneficial in carbon sequestration to mitigate the effects of climate change and would provide jobs for local people"*

*"Ecotourism opportunity and benefit"*

In explaining why they **did not support** the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Climate change scepticism:** These responses expressed disbelief in climate change and its impact on the coast. Some respondents suggested that the project is a waste of money, and others argued that erosion is natural and should be left alone.

*"Stop pushing green nonsense"*

*"What climate change?"*



**Doubt in outcomes:** Some respondents expressed concerns about the impact of the proposed project on farmland and open spaces on the community.

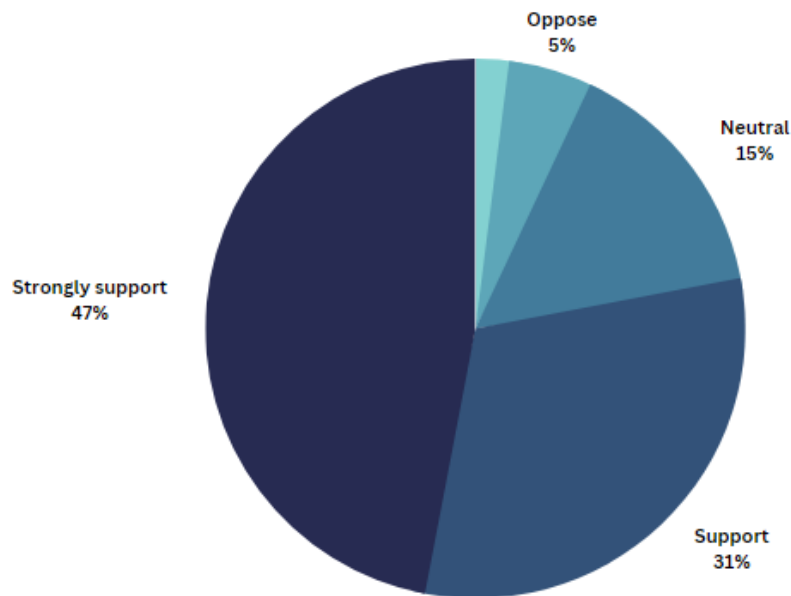
*"We worry that to try and return to the wetland would mean the space is an overgrown wasteland."*

*"Would want to see more details."*



## Proposed action: Nature-based solutions

Like the Common Ground community-led initiative, Council is looking to investigate projects that draw on nature-based solutions to help mitigate coastal hazards, such as salt marshes instead of seawalls and levees. Please indicate your level of support.



In explaining why they supported the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Environmental sustainability:** This theme focuses on the environmental benefits of nature-based solutions, with respondents emphasising their preference for these solutions over traditional engineered solutions. They argued that nature-based solutions are more environmentally friendly and work with the environment rather than against it.

*"Nature-based solutions are almost always preferable to man-made structures and plans."*

*"Natural environmental solutions are always better than man-made interventions."*

*"Nature-based approaches are working with the land and natural processes rather than contrary to them."*



**Cost-effectiveness:** This theme highlights the cost-effectiveness of nature-based solutions, with many respondents pointing out that they can be cheaper than traditional engineered solutions in the long term. They argue that natural solutions are more sustainable and require less maintenance.

*"Less invasive and less expensive."*

*"Cheap, long term and sustainable. Good idea."*

*"Nature-based solutions should be longer term and more sustainable."*

**Community engagement:** This theme emphasises the importance of involving local communities and stakeholders in the planning and implementation of nature-based solutions. Respondents argue that local communities have valuable knowledge about the natural environment and should have input in decision-making processes.

*"Community feedback essential."*

*"Should have local community input."*

*"Supportive of that approach where this would work. Far better to work with nature than fight against it with artificial barriers."*

**Need for research:** Respondents highlighted the need for further research into nature-based solutions, with some calling for more investigation into their effectiveness. They argue that evidence-based decision-making is critical to ensure sustainable outcomes.

*"Happy for the research to be done."*

*"Very supportive of this. Council should sponsor research into such nature-based erosion control measures."*

*"Worth exploring, so long as the relevant research is done."*

**Need for a holistic approach:** There was an emphasis on the importance of considering multiple factors, such as environmental health, hazard management, and economic initiatives, in the planning and implementation of nature-based solutions. Respondents argue for a comprehensive approach to ensure the best outcomes.

*"A holistic approach is necessary to ensure that all aspects of the environment are considered."*

*"It's important to look at the bigger picture, including the economic."*

*"Consideration of all aspects is crucial."*



In explaining why they **did not support** the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Preference for engineered solutions:** Some respondents were sceptical of the effectiveness of nature-based solutions and expressed a preference for engineered alternatives like seawalls.

*"No, we need proper flood mitigation, NOT nature based!"*

*"I don't think this is a practical or effective solution. It might sound fine in theory, but in practice, I doubt any salt marsh will help as a seawall does."*

**Scepticism towards the governance and impacts:** Respondents express concerns about the decision-making process, questioning the involvement of local communities and the trustworthiness of government agencies. These responses indicate a level of confusion between the 'Common Ground' community initiative and Council's proposed action to investigate nature-based solutions.

*"Should be done by a professional body, not by local amateur groups."*

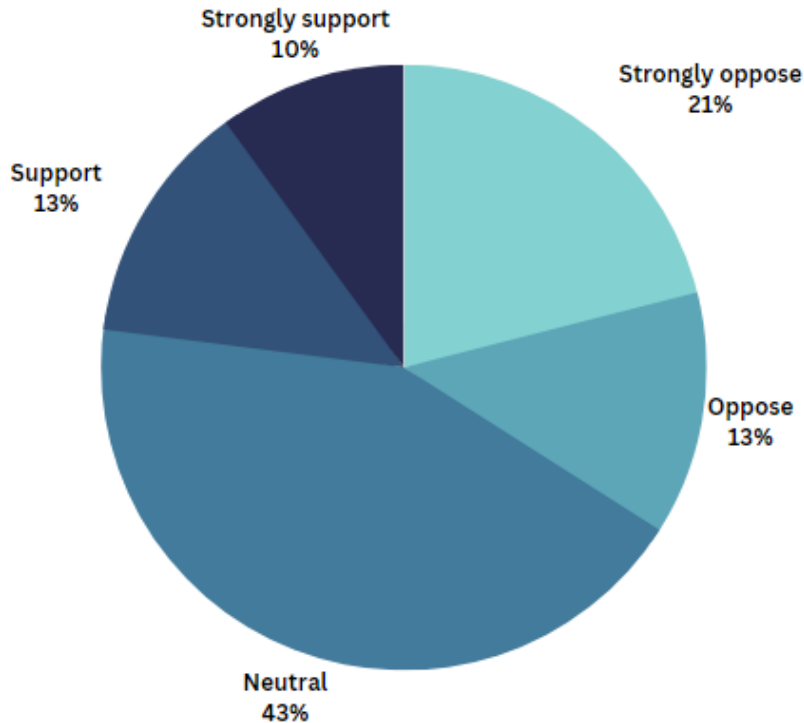
*"One-sided approach - no consideration is currently being given to the impact of this on existing private and community infrastructure. Layout what this 'nature-based' solution would result in and what the impacts of this would be. There has been no public discussion, only a one-sided proposal"*





### Proposed action: Transfer of Crown Land

Investigate the transfer of land management responsibility to the State government for Council managed coastal crown land (such as Yanakie foreshore, Fisher Reserve at Foster and Waratah Bay). Please indicate your level of support.



Please tell us why you chose this answer.

In explaining why they **supported** the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Environmental Protection and Conservation:** Respondents highlighted the importance of proper management and resources for the protection and conservation of coastal areas, with some respondents advocating for the state government to take over these responsibilities.

*"It would help in protecting and caring for these coastal areas, which really belong to all citizens, as Council has insufficient funds and human resources to do the necessary work to the necessary standard."*

*"This will improve consistency of management and bring these areas directly under the state's environmental legislation and policy."*



*"Important to manage the environment as a whole rather than cut it into segments managed by a variety of often conflicting interests."*

*"All coastal crown land management should be with the state, not Councils."*

**Insufficient resources:** Some expressed frustration with the South Gippsland Shire Council's management of coastal crown land and support transferring management responsibility to the state government due to a lack of resources and expertise.

*"Council cannot manage what they have, so less management will be better"*

*"Council lack the capacity to regulate matters and always defer to state Government anyway for crown land matters in these vicinities."*

*"Council seems not to have sufficient resources and/or funding/motivation for management required."*

**Input and collaboration:** This theme highlights the importance of collaboration between the South Gippsland Shire Council and the state government in managing coastal crown land, with respondents advocating for local input and community consultation.

*"There needs to be significant local input though and opportunities for regular community consultation and feedback."*

*"We are supportive of Council initiating a conversation with the state Government about taking on the relevant land management responsibilities."*

In explaining why they **did not support** the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Lack of trust in state government:** Respondents expressed a lack of trust in the state government's ability to effectively manage the land, citing concerns such as the government's focus on economic development over environmental protection, lack of knowledge of the area, and past track record of mismanagement. Respondents generally expressed satisfaction with the current management of crown land by Council, but suggested that more funding and resources should be provided to enable them to better manage the land.

*"I don't trust the state Government has the coastal communities' best interests at the forefront of their minds."*

*"I don't trust the state Government. It should stay in the hands of the Local Council."*

*"Council seems to be doing a reasonable job in the managing of these areas."*



**Importance of local knowledge and input:** Respondents emphasised the importance of local knowledge and input in the management of crown land and expressed concern that transferring management to the state government would result in the loss of this crucial aspect of effective management. They also suggested that Council is better equipped to manage the land due to their knowledge of the area and ability to respond to local needs.

*"Local knows best."*

*"Local government more perceptive and receptive of community feedback in relation to land management of foreshore areas."*

*"Transferring land to a state government who don't necessarily understand the local perspective...nor are invested in the long-term vision of the people who choose to live there is a bad idea."*

**Potential issues and challenges:** Respondents identified specific issues and challenges related to the transfer of crown land they felt should be addressed. These included concerns about access being limited and the importance of maintaining the natural environment for wildlife and flora.

*"If this goes ahead my access to Corner Inlet and the boat sheds would be taken away."*

*"The state Government does not know how precious our landscape is and may just look at ways to promote economic growth which will adversely impact our natural assets."*

*"The best outcome would be for the state to give grants to Council."*

In explaining why they are neutral on the proposed action, the main themes in the responses were:

**Lack of knowledge and understanding:** A large number of respondents indicated they did not have enough information or understanding of the issue to form an opinion. They expressed a need for more details about the proposal, including the reasons for the transfer and the implications for land management.

*"Don't know enough about the pros or cons of this proposal."*

*"Not sure of the implications or advantages of this."*

*"I am unsure of the consequences."*



**Management concerns:** Some expressed concerns about the ability of either Council or the state government to effectively manage the crown land. Some suggested that neither entity had the necessary resources, while others questioned the accountability of the state government.

*"Neither entity has sufficient resources to effectively manage this land."*

*"Not sure that the state is better positioned to manage a local environment than a local council is."*

*"Concern that at a state level the local community will come second to state policy making."*

**Ambivalence or no opinion:** A sizeable portion of respondents indicated that they did not have a strong opinion on the matter or were ambivalent about the proposal.

*"Don't have an opinion."*

*"Can't see how it would change anything."*

*"Don't really want to get involved with the politics of who manages it."*



## Town Character: what features or characteristics do you most value about the township you live in or visit?

In explaining what they valued about the township they lived in, the main themes in the responses were:

**Natural environment and wildlife:** Respondents value the natural environment and wildlife in the area, including the beaches, bushland, flora, fauna, and the diversity of birds and animals. They appreciate the need to preserve and protect these natural assets for future generations.

*"The natural coastal environment of Venus Bay and surrounding areas - flora and fauna including the huge range of birds. It is the primary reason we are in Venus Bay."*

*"The extraordinary beauty and peace. Being surrounded by nature—bush, birds, wombats, lyrebirds, koalas and so on. Knowing that the animals have their place to live and be."*

*"The natural environment. Living in the bush with space between residences. The abundance of bird life & wildlife. Supportive community."*

**Community and people:** The community spirit, friendliness, and supportiveness of the people in the area are highly valued by respondents. They enjoy the close-knit nature of the community and the sense of belonging that comes with it.

*"Sense of community and effective community capacity not experienced by me in Melbourne."*

*"Small, friendly, caring community. Diversity of backgrounds and skills. People committed to a sustainable future."*

*"I really like the non-commercial aspect of Sandy Point compared, for example, with places like Phillip Island or the Mornington Peninsula."*

**Peace and quiet:** Many respondents value the area's peace and quiet, with minimal traffic and noise pollution. They appreciate being able to escape the hustle and bustle of city life and enjoy the tranquillity of the natural surroundings.

*"The isolation, lack of people and the small, close-knit community of mostly farmers and retirees."*

*"Quiet, native animal presence (birds, reptiles, marsupials etc.), no big structures."*

*"Natural environment (foreshore reserve, Cape Liptrap Coastal Reserve), beaches. Limits of development because they have led to the preservation of the natural vegetation and a quiet, unpretentious lifestyle."*



**Rural or small-town character:** The rural or small-town character of the area is highly valued by respondents, with its lack of high-rise buildings, commercial development, and traffic lights. They appreciate the slower pace of life and the sense of being away from the urban sprawl.

*"Its 'coast meets country' character. Its rural, small-scale and quiet nature. The sense of being close to natural flora, bird life, fauna, indigenous habitats and wildlife."*

*"It is embedded in nature. Human impact is obvious but has not completely displaced forests and the animals which live in them."*

**Beaches and natural coastal features:** The natural coastal environment, including the beaches, rocks, and ocean views, are highly valued by respondents. They enjoy the unspoiled beauty of the coastline and the opportunities for water-based activities such as swimming, surfing, and fishing.

*"Freedom for all people to enjoy such a wonderful beach. Perhaps be a bit more inclusive of all users."*

*"Proximity to the ocean and inlet for recreational purposes and birdwatching and photography. The enjoyment of being surrounded by native, coastal bush."*

*"The natural assets: Beaches and inlets, coastal vegetation, wildlife, clean air, mostly peaceful. Small but great local businesses, friendly supportive community, limited population growth."*

Do you have any other feedback about the proposed actions in the Discussion Paper, including feedback on the other actions or if you think anything is missing

Respondents provided overall feedback on the Discussion Paper, including what they thought may be missing and ideas for improvement. The main themes in the responses were:

**Environment and sustainability:** Responses were related to protecting and preserving the natural environment, including issues related to climate change, renewable energy, wildlife, and preserving open spaces. We also heard about the need to protect and preserve local wildlife and biodiversity, including discussions about the impact of feral animals and plants on the environment.

*"The discussion paper needs stronger action on education regarding the value of natural vegetation and against environmental vandalism."*

*"The discussion paper needs to better address the problem of feral deer destroying bushland in the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park."*



*"The discussion paper needs to work better with Parks Victoria to protect coastal parks and sustainably open up some areas for ecotourism."*

**Development and growth:** Responses were related to the need for responsible development and growth, including discussions about population growth, housing affordability, and balancing the needs of locals and tourists.

*"Population and economic growth need to be limited to ensure sustainability, which is missing from the discussion paper."*

*"I think we need to limit coastal development because we will have to mitigate sea level rise at some time in the future, and are ratepayers going to have to pay to protect development from coastal erosion in the future?"*

**Infrastructure and services:** Responses were related to infrastructure and services, including discussions about the need for better roads, improved sewage and water systems, emergency infrastructure and the importance of community facilities.

*"I believe Venus Bay requires a safe place to go when natural disasters occur so the community can support each other."*

*"Serious consideration should be given to limiting population & economic growth to keep it at a sustainable level to support quality of life and wellbeing into the future. Our infrastructure cannot cope with ever-increasing numbers. Bigger is not always better. Smarter and nature-based is better."*

**Community engagement:** Responses related to community engagement and consultation, including discussions about the importance of listening to locals and involving them in decision-making about the future of their communities. Many community members commended Council on their efforts to engage with the community on the Discussion Paper, and are eager to see more of this in the future.

*"The region has faced great fear and panic from proposed wind turbine locations this year. It is imperative that local government and community work together on a unified plan to continue to preserve the area."*

*"As in this initiative, it's great to get input from the community regarding future directions."*

**Heritage and culture:** Responses related to the importance of preserving local heritage and culture, including discussions about First Nations heritage and the impact of development on historic sites.

*"Ongoing work to protect indigenous and heritage values...as well as amenity of coastal areas and ensure such values are considered in coastal hazard assessments."*

*"Protection of First Nations Heritage and consultation with First Nations people should be a priority in all proposed development and nature-based management of the land."*



**Defined goals and outcomes:** Some respondents are eager to see more clearly defined outcomes and goals rather than aspirational language.

*"The discussion paper does not have clear outcomes or goals, rather it is filled with aspirational language."*

*"Some of the general actions could be more specific eg. What cultural heritage would we protect, what are specific infrastructure needs would we tackle and how- what roads, what walking tracks, bins etc."*





## Community dialogue

The Community Dialogue brought together 22 members from various South Gippsland community groups to discuss the impacts of limiting growth in coastal townships in response to increasing coastal hazards. The purpose was to identify priority areas that would need to be addressed if planning controls were put in place and explore how limiting growth would affect the coastal townships.

When engaging with the community through surveys, pop-ups and discussion, we sought to understand their feedback and concerns on a personal level. The community dialogue asked participants to look at the bigger picture and consider the impacts on their community as a whole.

**The key questions or remit the group was asked to consider: If growth is restricted due to increasing coastal hazards, how can Council and the community work together to support the resilience and well-being of our coastal communities?**

Participants explored the impacts of limiting growth through the lens of the environment, infrastructure, population/community, and economy. The big issues and questions identified by the community were:

### Community and social equity

- There was a concern that limiting growth would lead to more 'exclusive' communities as property prices increase and families and workers are priced out of the housing market.
- Concerns were raised that by restricting further development, coastal townships would increasingly be reserved for wealthy people and families purchasing holiday homes.
- Finding affordable and accessible accommodation was identified as a major concern for business and industry. Participants noted that it was likely to increase labour shortages as farm hands, hospitality and healthcare workers struggle to find accommodation.
- Loss of volunteer base is also a priority concern- it is already an issue but is expected to become even more difficult.

### Infrastructure

- The community recognised that infrastructure spending is typically tied to population, so if the population is not growing, the coastal communities are unlikely to attract further funding.
  - A key question is: what would this mean for existing plans for upgrades?
- There is an expectation that as Melbourne/Victoria's population continues to grow - the coastal townships are at risk of being 'loved to death' by tourists and day-trippers.
  - As infrastructure ages and new infrastructure is not built in response to coastal hazards - what will this mean for tourism?
- With a view that existing infrastructure is already ageing or feeling the strain, the impact on existing communities is a priority.



### Economy

- The participants were concerned that without growth, businesses will struggle. This was especially a concern with businesses in townships with huge tourism surges that also saw numbers dwindle in the off-season.
- Concerns that limiting growth and subdivision would make it more difficult to find affordable housing and accommodation, making it increasingly difficult for businesses to find staff.
- There were concerns that the struggle to find and accommodate workers in coastal townships would become worse, as participants noticed this is an issue already affecting the community. In particular, participants were concerned about the hospitality industry that relies on younger people, and farmers and fishers seeking labourers.
- The participants were concerned with the increasing trend of Airbnbs and holiday lets, which could also push families and workers out of coastal areas.
- The group also expects expanded shoulder seasons as more people visit during off-peak periods.



## Written submissions

We received 25 written submissions from community groups, local residents, state government and land management groups. The key themes from these submissions are provided below. Some submissions, particularly from state government and land management groups, included specific details, requests and suggestions. These submissions have been included in the appendix.

**Coastal hazards:** There is significant concern about the impact of coastal hazards, including erosion, sea-level rise, and storm surges, on the natural and built environment. Many submissions expressed support for the proposal to remove growth areas from three coastal townships due to these hazards. There was also support for a climate change risk assessment. State government and land management bodies were also strongly in support of undertaking a climate change risk assessment and noted that similar studies were being undertaken and effort should be made to align these projects and work together.

**Development and growth:** There is strong support for sustainable development that balances economic growth with environmental protection. Several submissions suggest that the Coastal Strategy should prioritise sustainable land use and development practices, such as the use of renewable energy and green infrastructure.

Those who support removing growth areas argue that it is a necessary step to protect the environment and reduce the risk of damage and loss of property from natural disasters. They believe that development should be limited in areas that are at risk of flooding, erosion, and other coastal hazards and that preserving the natural environment is important for the long-term sustainability of the region.

On the other hand, those who oppose removing growth areas argue that it could limit economic growth and development in the area, including the potential for tourism and increased property values. They suggest that instead of removing growth areas, measures should be taken to mitigate the risks of coastal hazards, such as improving infrastructure and implementing building codes and zoning regulations.

**Community character:** Many submissions emphasise the importance of preserving the unique character and identity of South Gippsland's coastal communities. There is concern that unchecked development and tourism could erode the distinctiveness of these places and harm the quality of life for residents. Many responses were in favour of proposed actions to restrict growth in order to preserve town character.

**First Nations:** Submissions highlight the importance of incorporating First Nations perspectives and knowledge into the Coastal Strategy. There is a recognition of the deep connections that First Nations peoples have with the land and water and a desire to ensure that their voices are heard in the planning process.

**Infrastructure and services:** Several submissions highlight the need for improved infrastructure and services in coastal areas, such as better public transport, waste management, and emergency services. There is a recognition that increased demand for these services is a key challenge facing the region.

**Yanakie boat sheds:** Some residents are concerned about the potential loss of the Yanakie boat sheds, which they view as an important part of the community's heritage and character. There was a concern that the community directly affected was not informed, indicating there may be some confusion about the proposed



action. Respondents noted that more consultation is required with those directly affected.

## Online engagement

Online engagement activities, including an interactive forum and an ideas board, gave the community a chance to discuss the issues and hear different points of view.

### Ideas board

On the Ideas Board, the community was asked, 'If there was one thing our community could do to improve the resilience of our coastal areas, what would it be?'. Forty-five ideas were posted by community members, with 53 people providing ideas or commentary on the ideas board. The ideas provided have been grouped into themes (from the discussion paper).

#### **Development infrastructure and management**

- Install emergency exits and an emergency relief centre in Venus Bay
- Improve pedestrian safety in Venus Bay by installing traffic calming infrastructure and separating pedestrian and vehicle traffic
- Provide public transportation, including free or subsidised community bus services
- Increase the availability of childcare facilities
- Equip Venus Bay community centre with medical and allied health services
- Increase the number of public toilets
- Build a boardwalk for Beach No. 1 in Venus Bay to allow for easy access to the beach for those with limited mobility
- Provide ramp access and sturdier steps to the main beaches
- Reopen the 5-mile track to Morgan Beach to allow access for all communities and emergency vehicles

#### **Environmental and landscape**

- Reclaim wetlands at Anderson Inlet to create a buffer against tidal inundation, flood mitigation and increase biodiversity on the Venus Bay peninsula
- Encourage the retention and enhancement of locally indigenous species in bushland areas, parks and gardens
- Actively control weeds and support landowners to do this
- Encourage conservation measures such as revegetation contributions in labour with rate reductions
- Create an ocean pool to improve safety and attract tourists
- Provide plant vouchers to residents to plant more native trees on their properties

#### **Population pressure and development**

- Change building permits to minimise bare soil and include a requirement of a specific number of trees and shrubs to be planted post-development
- Install screening fence at the back of commercial precinct for aesthetics and protection
- Establish shooting exemption zones
- Stop building permanent structures close to the shoreline



### Community and economy

- Invite greater community participation in providing ideas and feedback through regular focus locations in each community
- Ask for more feedback from the community

### Online forums

The online discussion centred around six themes in response of the prompt: “What do you think are the key elements a coastal strategy should address?”. People could also comment on posts from other users.

In total, 75 people contributed to six discussions. In addition to the initial discussion, five additional forum questions were posed; these were related to bores and septic tanks, protecting coastal views, the Venus Bay beach car park, town expansion and boundaries, and seawall management.

An analysis of the discussion identified the following key themes:

- **Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and the environment:** There were concerns around ‘legal’ vegetation clearing and loss of indigenous habitats due to housing development. Users also commented that more needed to be done about invasive species, particularly deer and weeds causing affecting biodiversity. Participants were also concerned with the impacts of climate change and development on sand dunes, noting they were receding and must be protected. There was positive discussion about the Common Ground project and nature-based adaptation methods.
- **Infrastructure and community amenities:** Participants commented on the current level of infrastructure, noting that additional public toilets and rubbish bins would be positive for the community, especially when accommodating tourism. Participants also commented on street lights, suggesting that they were not needed and would be detrimental to the character and biodiversity of the town. Bores and septic systems were also discussed, with some calling for regulation of bore use. Other comments were concerned with the impact of septic systems on the surrounding environment.
- **Housing affordability and accessibility:** There was discussion around the need for affordable housing options for families and workers, with users commenting that housing stress is a real issue now, and indicating they were concerned for the future of housing in coastal areas.
- **Development and growth:** Users indicated support for planning restrictions, including heights and subdivision, noting that protecting vegetation loss and town character should be a priority.
- **Access to beaches:** There was a discussion over access to beaches, primarily the need for increased car parking, with users noting its importance for emergency access and tourism. Some comments related to the need to protect dunes and habitat along the beach by installing boardwalks, signage and rubbish bins. There were also some concerns with access to beaches via private roads.
- **Concerns over proposed wind farms:** There was a concern with the proximity to the coastline of proposed wind farms, primarily due to the belief that it would be detrimental to the health of marine environments and the visual amenity of the area.