

CITATION & FERERRO RESERVES MASTERPLANS

Stakeholder Consultation Notes, Mount Martha House Wednesday 27th March 2013 (revised by BERG MT MARTHA April 29 2013)

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1. BALCOMBE ESTUARY REHABILITATION GROUP (BERG MT MARTHA)

The Estuary and BERG MT MARTHA

The Balcombe Estuary Reserves, declared in 1987, which cover 44 hectares between Nepean Hwy and the coastline Balcombe Creek is the most extensive waterway on Mornington Peninsula and the Reserves protect the largest intact and unspoilt estuary on the eastern side of Port Philip Bay. They are also an integral link in a larger habitat corridor for indigenous flora and fauna. The estuary and creek are protected by and reliant on the Reserves' long linear ecotone of riparian vegetation of regionally significant Swamp Scrub and Grassy Woodland. Fauna species are of local, regional, state and national significance and recent surveys have exposed declining populations and diversity. The Reserve is a natural asset, widely used and highly valued for ecological status, aesthetic and social benefits by both the local community and visitors.

BERG MT MARTHA was formed in 1997. Richard Hawkins, founder of BERG MT MARTHA, stated that *"I hope that, as a result of our efforts, in fifty years' time people enjoying the area will look back and be thankful we had the vision and energy to make the most of our beautiful creek and bush."*

BERG MT MARTHA's up-dated vision adopted in 2013 is *'to preserve and restore the precious ecology of the Balcombe Estuary and Reserves through its technical expertise, passionate volunteerism and community involvement''*.

Membership and Activities:

Membership is over 400 members, with about 60 of these participating as active volunteers.

BERG MT MARTHA obtains grants worth between \$70,000 and 120,000 per year, with 'in-kind' / volunteer support time valued at about the equivalent, matching grant monies. The grants obtained are often ones that are not available to the Shire. They are used to employ contractors to undertake heavy estuary maintenance (tree and weed removal), supplemented by BERG MT MARTHA's substantial volunteer weeding, planting and community awareness programs.

For planning and management of environmental works, the Reserves are divided into a number of defined management zones (18 – as per existing Shire Management Plan). Active recreation / oval areas are maintained by the Shire and Clubs. Some areas are left untouched by people as a 'bank' for native flora and fauna, in accord with the Plan.

BERG MT MARTHA primarily works in the creek corridor from the foreshore to the Highway, and has been working in Hopetoun Creek and other tributaries, trying to ensure that the habitat biolink corridor from the Reserves remains intact. Activities include:

- Water quality monitoring through the Waterwatch program
- Weed control (Tuesday and Friday groups weekly; Sunday group monthly)
- Revegetation
- Clean Up Australia Day, Weedbusters, and Mornington Peninsula Schools Environment Week
- Construction/maintenance & monitoring of fauna boxes set up in the Reserves
- Community awareness programs (annual speaker program, school programs with Balcombe Grammar and Mt Martha Primary School, university research links to Deakin University)

Environmental and Life Science faculty, free indigenous plant offer, signage, environmental training workshops, newsletter, website etc)

BERG MT MARTHA has initiated programmes for working together with other community organisations (Rotary, Yacht Club, Lifesaving Club, Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group) to share resources at events such as Clean Up Australia Day and Weedbusters Program.

Other interested parties: For the past 5 years BERG MT MARTHA has extended its work to the foreshore area and hopes to establish a Mt Martha Foreshore Advisory Group; BERG MT MARTHA is also linked to the Balcombe Moorooduc Landcare Group and many other environmental groups on the Peninsula.

BERG MT MARTHA focuses on restoring the poor quality areas, but also concentrates on preserving the high quality areas. BERG MT MARTHA does much of the work involved, but also uses grant monies to employ Naturelinks, Council's preferred contractor.

The Shire (through Jo Tetteroo and Sam Hand) oversees the operational aspects of the Management Plan, its implementation, management and updating. The Shire also undertakes fire management in the Reserve.

Melbourne Water oversees the creek zone. BERG MT MARTHA is no longer able to work in the 'bed and bank' zones due to insurance / liability issues, but works in surrounding riparian regions to complement Melbourne Water's work.

A recent on-site survey of users, estimated that up to 55,000 walks were undertaken annually in the reserve along the boardwalk alone. Walkers commented on the uniqueness of the walk and on the value of the work being done by BERG MT MARTHA .

Users are diverse and include families, joggers, dog walkers, retired people as well as local disabled groups, as the area is quite level and short walks are possible.

Anglers from the foreshore sometimes move up into the estuary, fishing for bream.

The Rotunda area (the public campground area until the 1980s) is in high demand as there is shelter and good parking, which makes it attractive for beach users.

Ferrero Reserve is also used by many people, not just sports club, with its attractions including the playground and the ovals, which provide a general open area for games.

There is no real demand to open up more walking areas, with no sign of people creating other 'desire line' trails. Good flat zones exist for kids at western end of the Reserves. BERG MT MARTHA would oppose any new tracks/roads as they would threaten fauna habitat and biolink corridors for fauna movement.

The structured boardwalk is good for keeping people 'on track', helping to prevent further incursions into bushland.

There are 8 stormwater inlets into the creek. Current proposals are in place with Melbourne Water for raingardens and silt/pollution measures to be developed in the area to treat stormwater before it reaches the creek.

Environmentally 'low value' areas are the north west area of Citation Reserve and the leash free dog walking area off Uralla Road (the old Soccer pitch). BERG MT MARTHA manages and needs to maintain the area south of Citation Reserve as an integral part of the creek reserves. Consideration could be given to using the northwest area as a car parking zone, but this would require an improvement in erosion control and revegetation. Both the old soccer pitch and this area of Citation Oval have good access. However, besides dog walking, the soccer pitch is also used for casual sports uses, eg soccer, golf. Revegetation works have been undertaken here and its swampy nature makes it unsuitable for regular sports and parking. Also there is little scope for extensive parking and access routes are hazardous.

Main Issues:

- Promotion and restoration of bushland corridors to ensure the viability of wildlife (The very effective restoration of Hopetoun Creek and its adjoining bushland along Greenfield Way highlights the need to improve the remaining part of this habitat corridor to the Reserves. BERG MT MARTHA is the sole community 'minder' of this vulnerable and unique natural environment. It works closely with the Shire's Conservation Officers to preserve and restore this precious local asset.
- Making the community aware of the value of the precious and unique ecology of the Balcombe Estuary and Reserves – any part that is taken will never be replaced
- Event expansion at the sports reserves. A recent example was the work recently undertaken by stealth to create an overflow carpark area for the football grand final series, with an entrance to Zone 6 cleared and filled, and concrete brought in. There is serious concern at the lack of consideration, communication, and coordination of management between BERG Mt Martha and other users of the reserve. This area is a vital part of the wildlife corridor connecting the vegetation of Balcombe Creek to Hopetoun Creek and is scheduled as part of the management program for weed species (eg Tea tree) to be selectively removed and the open Grassy Woodland (EVC 175) re-established.
- Run-off from unmade roads is a problem throughout the Reserves. This is a major issue in Seppelt Ave, with run-off at the bend.
- This run-off from unmade roads, along with run-off through the 8 storm-water drains, is causing serious silting up of the estuary and the creek.
- Weeds: the long, linear, narrow nature of the Reserves make it a considerable challenge to prevent and manage weed infestation, which occurs via people, birds, and wash down.
- Road reserves along local streets are no longer contributing to the corridor, as native vegetation is removed and introduced vegetation can easily take over.
- Dogs off leash in the Reserves trample small flora and threaten wildlife.
- Feral animals – foxes, rabbits and cats – are destroying wildlife.
- Extent of parking and uncontrolled parking - there is insufficient car parking for all clubs, including the Life Saving Club and the Yacht Club

Ideas for Master Plan

- Tie in the Master Plan proposals with the Management Plan in terms of zones; use consistent language and descriptions, and integrate maintenance and management proposals.
- A precedent and model for a holistic approach to use and management of the Reserves is provided by the work being done at Sunshine Reserve by the Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group and local developers; eg. pressure and action by Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group and local residents resulted in preservation of threatened bushland and extension of the bushland reserve when encroachment and integrity of the biolink was

threatened by development to the restored bushland accomplished by Shire, State, Federal and Melbourne Water grants.

- Advertise the proposed Management Plan process, eg in local paper and Bendigo Bank community notice board
- Include Hopetoun Creek in the scope of the Master Plan, to retain and improve this corridor Newsletter and letter drop to residents in affected areas. BERG MT MARTHA newsletter too, as this comes out 2-monthly.
- Separate passive and active recreation.
- Re access to Ferrero Reserve, the use of fire tracks in and around the reserve for through traffic should **not** be contemplated, as it would disturb and destroy a vital linking habitat corridor ie between Balcombe and Hopetoun Creeks. (Unfortunately the present location of the 2 Ferrero Ovals already compromises this link – further development of the area would destroy it completely).
- Re car parking and car traffic management in and around the Ferrero reserve, BERG MT MARTHA met with the FRUG (Ferrero Reserves User Group) - **Refer attached Additional Comments**
- Upgrading Seppelt Avenue to a (sealed) dual carriageway is critical due to the high volume of traffic even currently being experienced. Completing the sealing of Seppelt Avenue would also improve erosion control and reduce silting of the Creek and Estuary.
- Upgrading drainage throughout the reserves would also greatly improve the silting problem in the Creek and Estuary (as well as, we understand, improving the maintenance of the Ferrero ovals).
- **Citation Reserve** offers the opportunity for sufficient car parking for many sports events. A shuttle bus could be used, as vegetation assets here are low and no corridors would be affected. The existing open space of Citation Reserve offers better scope for the provision of new and upgraded sporting facilities. This would overcome the problems at Ferrero Reserve. We note that the problem here is that the two different football clubs using these ovals would have conflicts of interest in efficiently using these public assets. If the two clubs were merged, or worked together, the car parking problem could be more effectively managed with less environmental impact. Unfortunately, this seems an unlikely scenario.

BERG Mt Martha has not sighted any plans as yet regarding the Citation Football Club's intentions, but we understand they are concerned about an 'escape' route in the event of a bush fire and this may involve the upgrading of the firetrack on the western side to the extension of Augusta St. BERG Mt Martha would not be amenable to the wholesale removal of indigenous vegetation beyond that required under the statutory fire control measures which the Shire already carries out. It also feels this fire track should not become regular access for traffic to and from the ovals. (However we would not oppose the removal of Pine trees from this area, as it would enhance the habitat corridor and at the same time greatly reduce the fire risk.)