



Swan Bay Environment Association Inc.

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Mr Matthew Jackson
Chief Executive Officer
Parks Victoria
Level 10, 535 Bourke Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
AUSTRALIA

Dear Mr Jackson

I write on behalf of the Swan Bay Environment Association to express my concern about the disturbance of birds by windsurfers and kite surfers in Swan Bay. Last weekend one of our members observed 15 wind surfers operating offshore from the Marine Discovery Centre (MDC) at the entrance to Queenscliff. This activity is inconsistent with the management plan and is at least in part illegal.

There is currently a Parks Victoria sign adjacent to in Swan Bay near Mercer St that indicates windsurfing is prohibited in Swan Bay. But there is no similar sign at the favoured site for wind surfing near the MDC. In our view a sign is required near the MDC, prior to more vigorous enforcement of this regulation.

Swan Bay is designated as a "Special Protection Area" in the Swan Bay Management Plan (Table 1, p13) where the general management aim is to: "Protect sensitive seagrass communities and significant shorebird feeding areas from disturbance from vessels, including noise and propeller scour. Restrict all vessels to a 5 knot speed limit in accordance with the Marine Act 1988." I note later in the document (p37) that the 5 knot restriction only applies to waters within 200 m of the shore. While this would restrict access to offshore areas by windsurfers, which cannot travel at less than 5 knots, it creates significant ambiguity in enforcement. Enforcement requires the use of the Marine Act, which was designed to protect the safety of swimmers and to prevent erosion by vessel wakes. It is not the ideal tool to protect birds in Swan Bay.

Observations I made over two days at the site where windsurfing has been occurring last weekend revealed 70-100 Little Pied Cormorants roosting and 18-42 Royal Spoonbills either roosting at Burnt Point or feeding nearby in areas disturbed by windsurfers the previous weekend.

We request that Parks Victoria clarify the legality of current windsurfer activities, and if the activity is illegal that they enforce the law. In addition, if the activity is not legal then we request that regulations (foreshadowed in the management plan) be introduced to specifically prohibit wind surfing and kite surfing.

It appears that this matter has remained somewhat ambiguous since the management plan was developed, and that the " education program for motorised and other vessel operators will be

introduced to protect birds” has never happened. We would urge you to expedite the implementation of this aspect of the management plan, as many more birds (black swans and the large number of migratory waders who arrive in Swan Bay annually) will be disturbed towards summer if this activity is not curtailed.

Finally, on a different matter, I am concerned that it is no longer possible to access Parks Victoria management plans or scientific reports via your website. In my view this is a retrograde move. These reports form an important part of Parks Victoria’s conservation charter and if these reports are not available to the public then why bother to create them? It should be an easy task to provide an accessible website for park visitors AND provide access to more technical information. The inaccessibility of the management plan made writing this letter more difficult and if I had not already been aware of its existence, how would I ever found out about it? Access to technical information is critical if you wish to engage in rationale discourse with groups like ours.

Sincerely

Dr Greg Parry
President