MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC STATEMENT

Introduction

The Minister for Planning is the responsible authority and planning authority for the unincorporated territories of French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island, as the Islands do not fall within any municipal boundary.

Profile

French Island

French Island (the Island) is located approximately 65 kilometres southeast of Melbourne in Western Port Bay and has a land area of around 17,000 hectares. French Island sits approximately five kilometres east of Stony Point, 10 kilometres south of Tooradin and five kilometres north of Phillip Island. Interfacing municipalities, although interrupted by the waters of Western Port Bay, are the Shires of Mornington Peninsula, Cardinia and Bass Coast.

Day-to-day access to and from the Island is by the passenger ferry from Stony Point and Cowes to Tankerton or the vehicular ferry from Corinella to Saltmine Point.

French Island’s regional context has regard to:

- The waters of, and the land surrounding, Western Port Bay.
- French Island National Park and French Island National Marine Park.
- Heritage and Tourism.
- Natural systems.

French Island was named in 1802, after the French crew on the ship ‘Le Naturaliste’, who were the first to establish that Isle de Francais was an island and not joined to the mainland. Pastoralists James and William Gairdner were the first legal settlers on the Island in about 1847, taking up a pastoral license for 320 hectares on the south coast. McLeod Prison Farm was established on the Island in 1916 and operated until 1975.

The main activities around the time of settlement, in 1847, included cattle grazing, dairy farming and cropping. Salt works were prevalent in the 1870s with chicory growing and processing introduced later in the 1890s. The chicory industry became the main industry for the Island until around the 1940s when it ceased due to unstable markets with the introduction of instant coffee and the Island’s isolation (cost factors).

French Island National Park and French Island National Marine Park were proclaimed in 1997 and 2002 respectively. Although the National Park is contained wholly on the Island, its regional context needs to be considered in relation to its impact on geographically broader ecosystems. The whole of the Island’s coastal area, other than three small Crown Land reserves at Tankerton, the Barge Landing and Freeman Point, is included in areas protected under the National Parks Act 1975 (i.e. the French Island National Park and the French Island Marine National Park.

The French Island National Park and French Island Marine National Park play an important role in conserving and protecting the Island’s natural environment. The coastline and abutting waters and land of French Island contain a number of significant environmental values including areas of saltmarsh, mangrove and melaleuca habitats and mud banks which support seagrass meadows and form a major part of plant life in the bay.

French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island are inhabited by a vast number of migratory birds listed under the JAMBA and CAMBA. The majority of the waters of Western Port Bay, including the coastal environment of the Islands, was nominated and incorporated into the Ramsar ‘Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat’. This
international acknowledgement requires that the wetlands be designated and managed for conservation and compatible uses. French Island is also recognised for its Chlamydia-free koala population.

Approximately one-third of the Island is rural freehold land and the remainder of the Island is included in the French Island National Park.

French Island tourism can be considered in a regional context through its proximity to tourist attractions on Phillip Island, the Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Bay.

Sandstone Island

Sandstone Island is located in Western Port Bay and has an area of around 22 hectares. Sandstone Island is approximately one kilometre south-east of the Hastings foreshore. The closest point of Sandstone Island to the mainland is at its southern tip where it is about 600 metres from Jacks Beach Reserve at Bittern. Sandstone Island needs to be considered with regards to its regional environmental significance.

Elizabeth Island

Elizabeth Island is located in Western Port Bay approximately two kilometres south east of French Island and has an area of approximately 26 hectares. Elizabeth Island functions as a tourism accommodation retreat and has limited access infrastructure to and around the Island. Elizabeth Island needs to be considered in regards to its regional environmental significance.

21.01-2 Key issues and influences

French Island

Key issues which influence use and development are based on the historic nature of uses and activities, the present day situation and the potential for change in the future. The key issues for French Island are focussed around the following themes:

Settlement, population and housing

- The Island has maintained a stable permanent and part-time population since the McLeod Prison Farm closed.
- The settlement pattern is scattered across the Island, with clusters of houses in the restructure areas of Tankerton Estate and Bullock and Decoy Swamp, and dispersed housing in the remaining rural areas.
- The Island’s infrastructure and environmental constraints limit future settlement and housing opportunities.
- The Island’s isolation contributes to the unique and valued Island lifestyle and has created a ‘stand alone’ but not self sufficient community, as most goods and services need to be sought from the mainland.
- It is important to protect the rural landscape which contributes to the Island’s visual, cultural and heritage values, from inappropriate use and development.
- Tankerton Estate comprises 700 lots, however the Tankerton Estate Restructure Overlay allows for a maximum of 19 dwellings to be developed on restructured lots in accordance with environmental and land capabilities and infrastructure constraints.
- A Restructure Overlay applies to an area in the north-west of French Island known as the Bullock and Decoy Swamp. A total of 13 dwellings are permitted in the restructure plan, which
reflects the environmental constraints and sensitivity, poor level of access and relative isolation in this part of the Island.

- The whole of Sandstone Island is subject to a Restructure Overlay to address an old and inappropriate subdivision of 142 lots created in the 1960s. The restructure plan allows for one dwelling on the island, in accordance with its environmental setting and land constraints.

### The environment

- Items of environmental significance on French Island include:
  - French Island National Park
  - French Island Marine National Park
  - Sites of National and State botanical and zoological significance
  - Listed fauna species under the Japan-Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (JAMBA) and the China-Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (CAMBA)
  - Coastal environs
  - Wetlands nominated to the Ramsar Convention.

- This list recognises the significant flora and fauna species on the Island, which includes over 260 fauna species, of which over 230 are indigenous bird species, and more than 580 species of flora including over 100 native orchid species. Identified flora and fauna species also extend beyond the National Park boundaries, contributing to the environmental significance of the Island as a whole.

- The following lead organisations and registered environmental databases have identified different environmental aspects of French Island as having high significance, which are described in more detail at Clause 21.03:
  - National Trust of Australia
  - Ramsar Convention
  - State botanical significance (Victorian)
  - National zoological significance (Australian)

- The Island’s isolation contributes to its environmental significance.

- The Island is susceptible to wildfire due to its type and extent of vegetation coverage.

- The impacts of climate change on the Island and the waters of Western Port Bay may affect future land use and development, particularly in coastal areas.

- Sandstone Island is mostly cleared with some old Moonahs (Melaluca Lancelota) and introduced plants.

- Elizabeth Island has a low vegetation bluff in front of low tide platform cuts in basalts and Mesozoic sediments. A small pocket of mangroves and salt marsh occurs in a sheltered site on the eastern coast of the Island.

- All three islands are noted for their significance to the internationally acknowledged Ramsar wetlands located in Western Port Bay.

### Economic development

- The Island has limited ability to sustain commercial activities due to the low permanent and non-permanent population and relatively low tourist numbers.
Tourism is predominately based on passive recreational activities.
Tourism accommodation includes private lodges and private camping grounds, in addition to the designated National Park camping locations.
There is some potential for new tourism ventures, however these need to be sensitive to the importance of maintaining agricultural practices on the Island.
New tourism ventures may result in an increased number of visitors to the Island, which may subsequently impact on environmental values and infrastructure constraints.

Resource management

- There is approximately 5,500 to 6,000 hectares of freehold rural land on French Island. Grazing of livestock is the predominant farming activity carried out on the Island and provides the main source of income for the majority of the Island’s permanent population.
- Land owners are diversifying into value added practices including horticulture, biodynamics, viticulture and free range poultry farming.
- The Island’s access, isolation and infrastructure constraints are economically inhibiting factors that impact on the viability of a range of rural activities and the ability to diversify rural interests.
- Tourism and other non-agricultural activities in the rural areas should be balanced with the need to protect viable farming activities.

Heritage and built form

- The Island contains a number of important early settlement sites and buildings as well as sites of Aboriginal significance. The historical farming practices and settlement pattern also contribute to the Island’s heritage. These need to be protected for the benefit of the local and wider community.
- The Island’s environmental qualities support the application of sustainable development practices in the built form.
- French Island has national and state heritage value in demonstrating patterns of agricultural land use and pioneering settlement of an island system as identified by its registration on the Victorian Heritage Database.
- Elizabeth Island has no current identified areas of heritage significance.

Transport

- The Island is accessed via a passenger ferry, which operates daily between Stony Point, Tankerton Jetty and Cowes (Philip Island), and a barge, which operates on an as-needs basis offering an irregular service between Corinella on the mainland and the barge landing, Barge Access Road, on French Island. The barge can be used for the transportation of vehicles, fuel, cattle and other goods.
- The Island can also be accessed via private aircraft or boat.
- Access to Sandstone Island is by private aircraft or boat only.
- Access to Elizabeth Island includes a barge service which operates on an as-needs basis from Corinella, and private aircraft or boat.
- Maintaining ferry and barge access is crucial both for visitors to the Island, and for the community seeking services and facilities on the mainland.
- The Island’s unsealed road network limits accessibility and movement around the Island, but also contributes to the unique and valued Island lifestyle.
- Movement around the Island is predominantly by car.
- Visitors to the Island must obtain a permit from Parks Victoria of the French Island Community Association to bring a vehicle on to the Island.

**Infrastructure**

- Community services and facilities on French Island are limited due to low population levels, however the primary school, sports ground and community hall play important roles in providing the Island with a sense of community.
- The Parks Victoria Office and radio link to the main land provide services to the protection of, and communication to and from the Island.
- Other community services and facilities need to be sought from communities on the mainland.
- The Island has no reticulated services. The extent of local infrastructure includes an unsealed road network, jetty, telephone service and small community tip.

**Climate change**

- The report *Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change in the Western Port Region* (Westernport Greenhouse Alliance, 2006) predicts that a number of climatic changes will take place within the Western Port Region, including a rise in temperature and an increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme rainfall events.
- The predicted climatic changes will place pressure on the islands’ water storages, agricultural industries, natural systems and emergency response services. It is therefore essential to develop capacity to cope with climate change.

**Sandstone Island**

- Sandstone Island contains limited infrastructure and is occupied by a single dwelling and shed. There are no commercial or tourism facilities and, given the island’s access, isolation and infrastructure constraints, there are limited opportunities to provide such facilities.
- Sandstone Island’s natural environment is important due to its location within Western Port Bay.

**Elizabeth Island**

- Elizabeth Island’s limited infrastructure provides for tourism accommodation and residence. Any opportunities to expand the current activities on the island must be considered within the Island’s environmental and isolation constraints.
- Elizabeth Island’s natural environment is important due to its location within Western Port Bay.

21.01-3 Vision and strategic framework plan

**Strategic vision**

**French Island**

*A strong community that protects, conserves and enhances the environmental values and natural systems of the island whilst successfully balancing rural land use diversification.*
Sandstone Island

To protect and conserve the land in accordance with the Island’s restructure plan, environmental and coastal constraints and isolation.

Elizabeth Island

To conserve Elizabeth Island as a self sustaining tourism facility in accordance with the environmental significance of the surrounding Western Port Bay.

Strategic Framework Plan

The strategic framework for French Island is guided by its existing pattern of land use and development. French Island’s unique conditions, including its stable population levels, limited access, isolation, infrastructure constraints and environmental qualities, denotes the limited capacity for change. However, various new uses and developments can potentially be accommodated on the Island in many locations and particularly in the southwest, in accordance with its environmental context. The broad strategic directions for land use planning in French Island, Sandstone Island and Elizabeth Island are illustrated in the Strategic Framework Plan.