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Resource Planning & Development Commission
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Dear Ray and members of the panel,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Interim Report of the RPDC's Inquiry into the establishment of marine protected areas within the Bruny Bioregion.

1. Introduction

We note that the Interim Report indicates areas *identified* as suitable for inclusion in Marine Protected Areas (MPA's), in accordance with the Identification criteria of Comprehensiveness, Adequacy, Representativeness, Ecological Importance, International or National Significance, Uniqueness, Productivity, Vulnerability Assessment, Biogeographic Importance and Naturalness.

In our submission (E4) to the Hearings held at the end of last year, we presented the view that most of these Identification criteria apply to Ralphs Bay and nearby areas around the South Arm Peninsula. In particular, we indicated that this area possesses Uniqueness and Ecological Importance to a very high degree, and that it also has recognised International and National significance.

We are delighted to see that the Inquiry has identified 7 areas around the South Arm Peninsula as satisfying the Identification criteria. It was gratifying to see that 8 public submissions recommended Ralphs Bay or Conservation Areas in the bay for MPA status; the highest number of nominations for any particular area in the Bioregion.

We are pleased to see critical habitat of the Spotted Handfish identified for protection, in areas 38 and 21. We are also pleased to note the Inquiry's recognition of the importance of sandflat ecosystems and the feeding habitat of resident shorebirds as well as shorebirds protected under the JAMBA and CAMBA agreements, in the identification of areas 39

and 40. We welcome the identification of areas 22, 44 and 23, which all contain important natural and cultural values.

We commend the Inquiry's recognition of the interconnectedness of different areas of shorebird feeding and roosting habitat, and linkages of habitat areas around the South Arm Peninsula with the Ramsar site at Pitt Water.

As explained in our previous submission to the Hearings (E4), and accompanying documents, Save Ralphs Bay Inc would like to see a State Reserve protecting the whole of Ralphs Bay and surrounding areas of contiguous coast which contain Spotted Handfish habitat. If identified areas 38 and 21 were merged, and all waters of Ralphs Bay were added to their combined area, this would also protect areas 39 and 40, and create the Ralphs Bay State Reserve. It could certainly be argued that identified areas 23, 44 and 22 could be included, creating the larger South Arm Peninsula State Reserve.

A State Reserve would integrate a number of sites worthy of protection, into a larger more meaningful area, thus connecting a range of ecosystems. It is important to note that, when protecting natural ecosystems, scientists usually have only the beginnings of an understanding of what is being protected. If "gaps" are left between nearby protected areas, it may later be realised that exceedingly important values needed protection in the gaps, or that the values the reservation intended to protect depend in previously unknown ways on the areas between. The precautionary principle indicates that protection of a wider area, integrating smaller areas with identified values, has merit.

A State Reserve comprising Ralphs Bay and surrounding areas on the South Arm Peninsula would satisfy the criteria of Adequacy, Representativeness and Biogeographic Importance.

While endeavouring to avoid repetition of our submission to the Hearings, we would like to enlarge on certain matters relating to the Selection criteria for MPA's in the Bruny Bioregion.

2. Economic interests; protecting existing aquaculture business

Besides contributing to the conservation of natural values, protection of Ralphs Bay and the South Arm Peninsula would also have the economically important effect of protecting the existing aquaculture industry in Pipeclay Lagoon, and Pitt Water beyond. As shown in the Background Report's *Figure 6, General circulation pattern for coastal waters in southeast Tasmania*, resuspended heavy metal-bearing sediments arising from a major development in Ralphs Bay would have the potential to travel round the coast in an anticlockwise direction. Exactly how soon these currents would drop their burden of resuspended sediments is unknown. However, it is worth pointing out that the Derwent Estuary Program (DEP) has been unable to source oysters from Pitt Water with low enough heavy metal levels to use for comparison in studies of the heavy metals accumulated in oysters deployed for short periods at various locations in the Derwent. (Zinifex Hobart smelter Environmental Management Plan, 2004/2005 Triennial Review).

While our previous submission (E4) estimates that Australian oyster aquaculture worth \$24 million depends on spat from the nursery in Pipeclay Lagoon, this is only one of the businesses operating from the lagoon. Besides the oyster nursery business, the plate oyster producers are also critically dependent on the maintenance of excellent water quality all around the South Arm Peninsula, and a Marine Reserve in Ralphs Bay would help to ensure this. Aquaculture operators in Pitt Water would doubtless also be relieved to have the waters of the lower Derwent estuary protected from pollution which could result from major development in the marine environment.

3. Small business & ecotourism benefits

Small business spinoffs for the South Arm Peninsula that could be anticipated from the creation of a State Reserve might include windsurfer hire and instruction at Lauderdale, kayak hire and instruction operating from a variety of locations including South Arm (operating from Johns Point to the Iron Pot reef), boat and dive tours operating from the Opossum Bay Jetty to the Iron Pot reef and around Betsey Island (including Blackjack Rock, the famed “parking spot” of Condor 11), other ecotourism ventures, provision of food and beverages to visitors, tourist accomodation and the making and sale of souvenirs and artworks. In an area with little local employment, this would bring social benefits, if sensibly managed.

4. Visitor Centre – a major tourist destination for Hobart’s eastern shore

Interpretation facilities, such as a Visitor Centre, could be located at Lauderdale, creating a regional tourism focus for the South Arm Peninsula, based on appreciation of the area’s natural and cultural heritage values. Given the importance of the marine environment in general, and given the very high value of estuaries in terms of the ecosystem services they provide, the Visitor Centre would interest, entertain and inform tourists, students and the general community.

Topics worthy of interpretation in the Visitor Centre would include:

- Incredible journeys. The migration of shorebirds on the East Asian/Australasian Flyway. Maps with lights to indicate current locations of the birds year-round; touch-screens, to select footage of the birds living and feeding in their homes around the world; information on the threats faced by these birds worldwide.
- 7% of the Australasian population. The life and times of the Pied Oystercatcher, including Ralphs Bay foodwebs and the movement patterns of the birds as they make use of a network of interconnected feeding, roosting and breeding sites.
- The fish that walks. The incredible story of the critically endangered Spotted Handfish. Artworks loaned from the Allport library? History of human encounters with the species; the population crash, and possible reasons for it. The Recovery Plan. Fish in tanks? Video of the fish, and how it moves and breeds.

- The importance of estuaries. The most valuable ecosystems on earth, in terms of the cash value of the Ecosystem Services they provide: US\$22 832 per hectare per year, according to Costanza et al, writing in the prestigious journal Nature (reference given in E4). This figure is far higher than that for any other ecosystem they studied. The role of sandflats in maintaining water quality (“the kidneys of the estuary”); storm surge protection; fish nurseries.
- Saltmarsh and wetlands. Ecological character; species; importance. Artwork, photography, herbarium specimens. A living, growing area in the Visitor Centre, with interpretive signage?
- Climate change impacts. Located in an area identified in the Sharples Reports as being particularly at risk of climate change impacts, the Visitor Centre should have at least a 50-year focus and aim to document climate change impacts in the State Reserve and across Tasmania, with aerial and on-ground photography, mapping and a fluid, regularly updated display of current research findings. If built up on stilts, the Visitor Centre would make a strong visual statement of the reality that changes in sealevel are coming.
- The legacy of industry. The pollution of the Derwent by heavy industry. Recognition of the problem. “The worst polluted river in the world” (Prof Harry Bloom, 1970’s). Disastrous results of attempts to grow oysters in Ralphs Bay in the ‘70’s. Attempts to clean up the estuary in recent years. Remaining problems; targets for improvement.
- The Derwent Estuary Program, an example of local councils, state and federal governments and industry working together to clean up, reduce pollution loads, and monitor natural recovery.
- Aboriginal heritage. Artwork, artefacts, text, historic accounts, storytelling. (See our previous submission, E4)
- European history and cultural heritage. Artwork, text, facsimiles and actual historical documents. (See our previous submission, E4)
- Whale dreaming. Whales in the estuary; birthing areas, migratory traditions. Their cultural importance to aboriginal people. Bay whaling and the Droughty Point story. The end of whaling, and the beginning of the return of whales to the Derwent, including mothers with calves. Artworks, historical documents, artefacts associated with whaling, film, storytelling.
- Peninsula artists respond. Artworks inspired by Ralphs Bay vistas; local species etc. Ralphs Bay and Peninsula vistas are important aspects of the social value of the area.

Whilst we fully appreciate that the design and layout of a Visitor Centre is not the role of the current Inquiry, we have supplied these details to demonstrate what a superb State Reserve and Visitor Centre we could have, and how great its tourist and educational appeal would be.

Interpretation based in the Visitor Centre would be linked into interpretation on the ground, with possibilities including birdwatching opportunities and a suitably named Trail with interpretive signage at particular points. This could link with the Tangara Trail and other tracks and trails being developed by Clarence City Council.

5. Practicality/feasibility

Close proximity to the airport and Hobart would help the Ralphs Bay State Reserve “take off” as a tourism destination.

Integration of the sites identified in the Interim Report into a larger State Reserve would contribute to ease of management for all the values included in the area. Existing reserves, such as that at Cape Deslacs and others dotted around the Peninsula could be included in an integrated management plan for the whole area.

Ralphs Bay is already mentioned in several mainland tourist guides as a “Wildlife tourism” destination for birdwatching. Recognition and promotion of the area would be enhanced by the creation of a major named reserve with interpretation facilities.

Needless to say, protection of the natural and cultural heritage values would remain paramount, and interpretation facilities could not be permitted to degrade these values. Adequate resourcing and staffing of the State Reserve would be essential. However, by conferring State Reserve status on the area, it would receive the highest status for resourcing and staffing, whereas numerous “bitty” little reserves to protect the values identified in the Interim Report would all be at risk of having low status in the battle for adequate funding.

6. Zonation for multiple use

Clearly, the State Reserve we envisage would need to be zoned appropriately for multiple uses. There would be no intention whatsoever to interfere with low-impact recreational activities such as windsurfing and boating. There is every possibility that recreational fishing would continue in many areas, with the probable exception of critical habitat for the Spotted Handfish, which would merit no-take status. It was encouraging to see this point acknowledged at the Hearings, by TARfish, the Tasmanian Association for Recreational Fishing, which noted the presence of, “Hand fish communities in Storm Bay and (the) Derwent River”, and went on to say, “these areas may well require a no-take zone due to their significance” (E13). We believe that the vast majority of Tasmanians are justly proud of the state’s natural heritage and would not like the Spotted Handfish to become “the thylacine of the sea.”

7. Threatening processes

We request that **resuspension of sediments into the parent water body as a result of excavation and/or dredging in the marine environment** be added to the list of key threats identified by the Inquiry. This is especially important as the Derwent Estuary Program (DEP) plans to develop Derwent-specific dredging guidelines, but this has not yet occurred (see Draft Water Quality Improvement Plan for Derwent Heavy Metals).

We request that **disturbance of acid sulphate soils** be added as a key threat.

Canal estate developments would be a very reasonable key threat to add, based on the available evidence (for instance, see Ramsar Topics No. 1: Report on Canal Estates).

8. Conclusion

Save Ralphs Bay Inc (SRB) commends the RPDC on its thorough Inquiry into the establishment of marine protected areas in the Bruny Bioregion.

We commend the identification of 7 areas around the South Arm Peninsula as meeting the Inquiry's Identification criteria.

SRB recommends the creation of a Ralphs Bay State Reserve embracing at least 4 of the identified areas, in and near Ralphs Bay. Alternatively, we would welcome the integration of all 7 identified areas into a South Arm Peninsula State Reserve, zoned for multiple uses.

We are hopeful that the tremendous potential of such a Marine Protected Area to maintain and enhance the natural, social and cultural values of Ralphs Bay and the South Arm Peninsula; to promote their public understanding and appreciation and to stimulate sustainable local business based on protecting these values, will be realised.