



Lorne Habitat Restoration Project 2023

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT



We acknowledge and respect the separate and distinct Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the Great Ocean Road's land, waters, seas and skies and acknowledge their cultural knowledge that has led to sustainable practices and has cared for Country over tens of thousands of years.

We honour Elders past and present and express gratitude for their sharing of wisdom that has ensured the continuation of Culture and Traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner and meaningfully build relationships that reflect self-determination and enable us to work together with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices, and together deliver on their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 04** INTRODUCTION
- 05** PROJECT OUTLINE
- 06** HOW WE ENGAGED THE COMMUNITY
- 07** HOW WE ENGAGED
- 08** PROJECT TIMELINE
- 09** WHAT WE HEARD
- 10** KEY POINTS RAISED AND OUR RESPONSE





INTRODUCTION

OUR COMMITMENT TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

We're undertaking an engagement process to share knowledge and strengthen relationships with the Lorne community. The focus will be on forthcoming habitat restoration works happening on the Lorne foreshore.

The Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (the Authority) is immensely privileged to be tasked with protecting and enhancing the Great Ocean Road's coast and parks on behalf of the community.

Our commitment is to listen, engage, respect, and echo the views of our community and stakeholders in all we undertake, following our [Community Engagement Strategy](#).

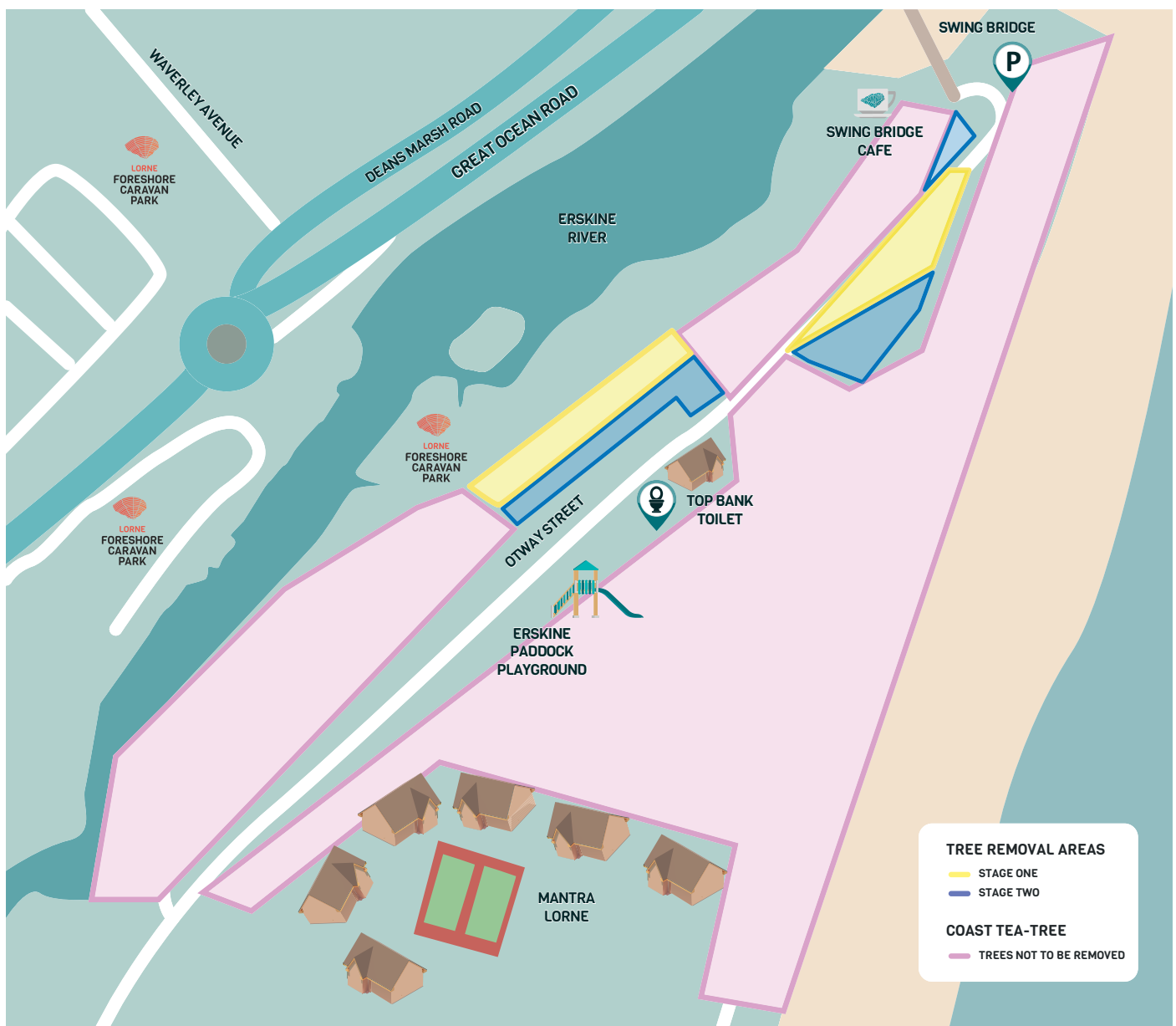
We are committed to being transparent and open with our communities and building and deepening relationships grounded in reciprocity and trust. Through various channels, mediums and engagement spaces, we will invite feedback, robust discussion and reflection to strengthen our connections and common purpose.

PROJECT OUTLINE

Our vegetation management is guided by our [Coastal Vegetation Strategy 2022](#). This strategy is being implemented through the restoration of Lorne's natural habitat, which is backed by best practice scientific insights that support the eradication of environmental weeds like Coast Tea-tree, Sweet Pittosporum, and Sallow Wattle. [CLICK HERE](#) to watch a video that explains habitat restoration.

Lorne is part of the Otway Ranges Bioregion. We're taking a staged approach to removing plants that don't belong in this bioregion and replacing them with indigenous species, or allowing natural habitat regeneration to occur. As part of this approach, we're set to remove Coast Tea-tree from several sections of the Lorne foreshore in August 2023. These areas, earmarked for removal in 2023, are designated as Stage 1 on the map below. This initiative builds upon the restoration efforts we've been carrying out over the last decade.

Following the Coast Tea-tree removal, we will revegetate the area in September 2023 to deliver habitat and biodiversity benefits. We will also undertake ongoing maintenance to control weeds which will encourage natural regeneration of indigenous species. Further weed removal and revegetation work will be done in the areas marked as Stage 2 on the map below in 2024 and 2025.

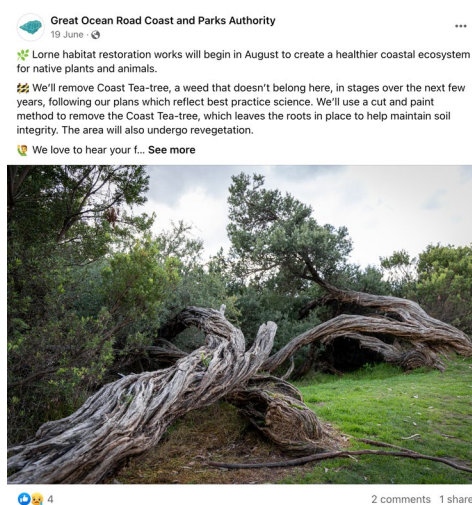


HOW WE ENGAGED THE COMMUNITY

In December 2022 we engaged with the Lorne community on habitat restoration via a community walk and talk where we shared information on habitat restoration works. Some community members expressed a desire to better understand the rationale behind our habitat restoration projects before we proceeded with additional work.

In response to this feedback, from 13 June to 16 July 2023 we shared knowledge about habitat restoration and answered community questions through our [Have Your Say website](#), two local community conversation sessions, an online feedback survey and a community-led [frequently asked questions](#) document, that was updated throughout the engagement period.

The insights collected from this engagement process are informing our approach to keeping the Lorne community updated on habitat restoration efforts and future opportunities to participate in revegetation and related activities.



Definitions

BIOREGIONS

Bioregions are a landscape-scale approach to classifying the environment using a range of attributes such as climate, geomorphology, geology, soils and vegetation. There are 28 bioregions identified within Victoria by the Department of Environment and Climate Action (DECA).

ECOLOGICAL VEGETATION CLASSES (EVC)

EVCs are the standard unit for classifying vegetation types in Victoria. They are classified by DECA. Each EVC includes a collection of plant species that occur across a bioregion.

NATIVE SPECIES

According to the *Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, native species are plants or animals that are indigenous to Australia and were present prior to 1600 AD. Native species are not indigenous to all areas of Australia.

INDIGENOUS SPECIES

Indigenous species are native plants or animals that are locally unique to an area. These species are adapted to the conditions of the area and remain in balance with other species. Plant species that are indigenous to an area are allocated to Ecological Vegetation Classes.

For example, Sweet pittosporum is native to Australia and indigenous to Gippsland. In the Otway Ranges Bioregion, Sweet pittosporum is classified as being outside its natural range and is classified as a weed. In this bioregion it out-competes indigenous plant species. Queens Park is a good example of its dominance in the landscape.

Coastal weeds targeted in Lorne habitat project

BY BILLY HIGGINS

INVASIVE weeds will be removed from Lorne Foreshore and community conversations will begin for restoration of the town's habitat in the first steps of an ongoing renewal project.

Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority is continuing its Restoring Lorne's Habitat program this winter, with locals invited to attend in-person events to find out more about the project.

The land manager will target Coast Tea-tree weeds at the foreshore from Otway Street starting in August, in the second of five scheduled yearly winter removals of the plant.

GORCAPA will also revegetate impacted areas with indigenous species during spring.

The authority indicated that coast tea-tree can outcompete native plants if left alone due to its fast growth, reducing habitat value for animals including small mammals.

GORCAPA environment manager Alex Sedger MacDonald said the

works aimed to "create a healthier coastal ecosystem for indigenous plants and animals".

"We'll remove Coast Tea-tree, a weed that doesn't belong in the Otway ranges bioregion, in stages over the next few years, following our Coastal Vegetation Strategy which reflects best practice science."

Meanwhile, the authority will also seek feedback from Lorne residents about the vegetation removal through in-person events this weekend and an online survey.

GORCAPA said the events will help shape how it informs locals about restoration works and shares opportunities to participate in revegetation activities.

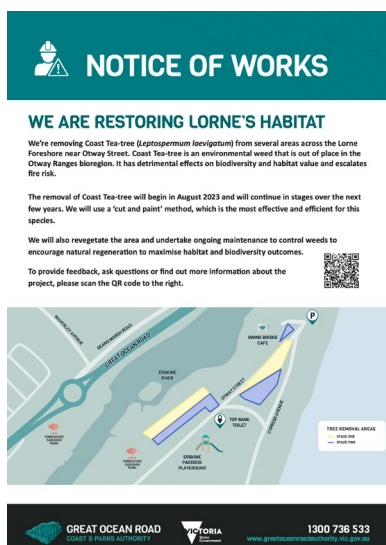
"We know that some community members are keen to better understand why we undertake habitat restoration," Sedger MacDonald said.

"We'd love to hear feedback and questions about this work and invite interested locals and visitors to join us for a community conversation today (June 23) or on Saturday (June

24) at the Lorne Community House at 10.30am."

"For those who cannot make the community conversations, we are also gathering community feedback through an online survey and all interested community members are encouraged to have a say."

The online survey is open until July 10. For more information or to participate in the survey see GORCAPA's website.



In response to our engagement on this project, we received 23 survey responses, a written submission from the Friends of Lorne and we also recorded key points raised at community conversation sessions.

HOW WE ENGAGED



32

people attended
2 community
conversation
sessions



57

online surveys
submitted



1

email submission
from Friends of
Lorne



6

stakeholder groups
contacted



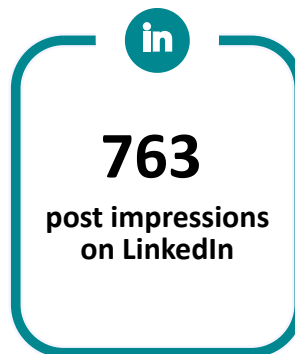
224

website visits



2340

reach across
4 Facebook posts



763

post impressions
on LinkedIn



76

views of 2 YouTube
videos



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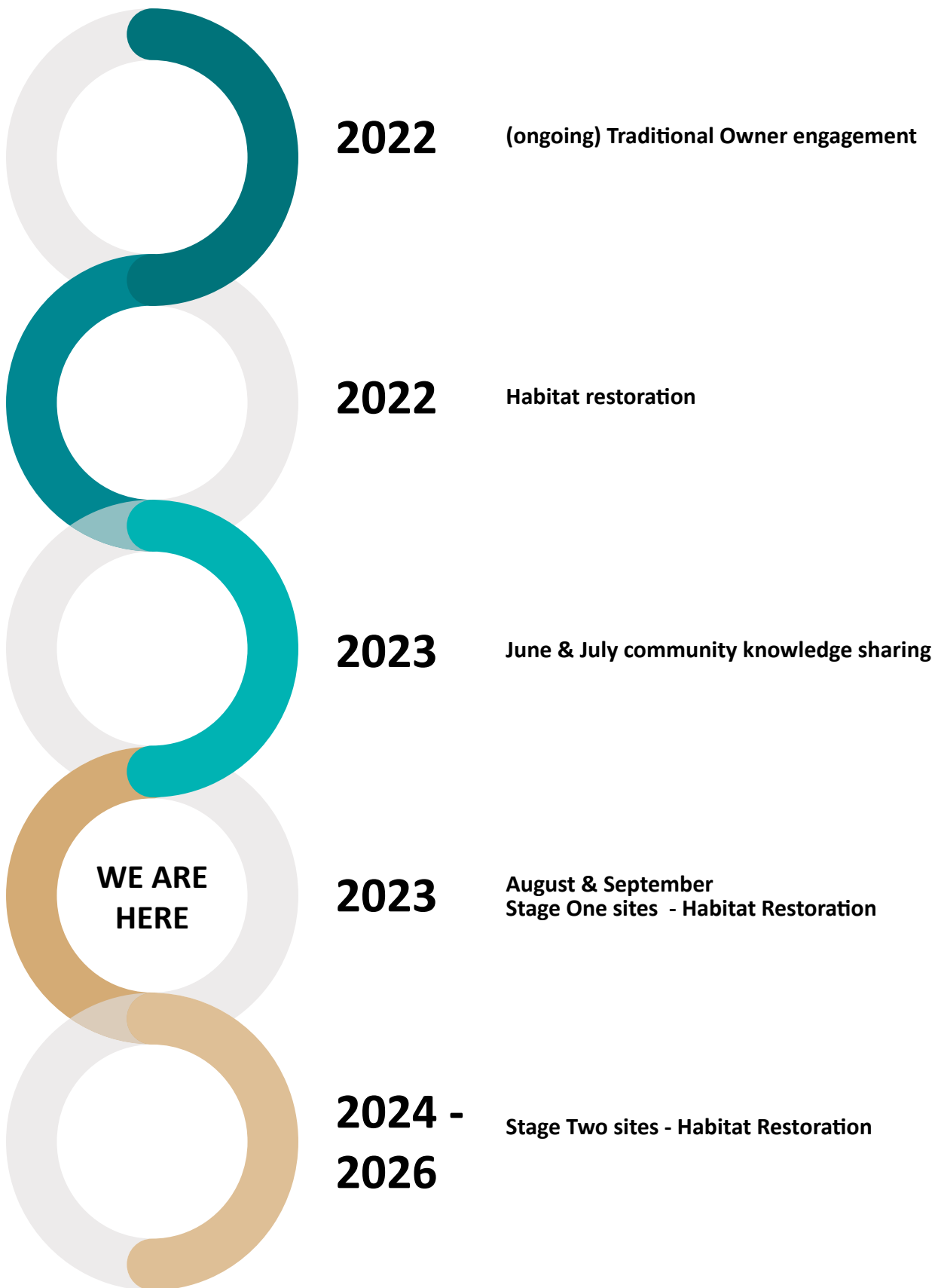
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PROJECT TIMELINE

WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE ARE HEADING...



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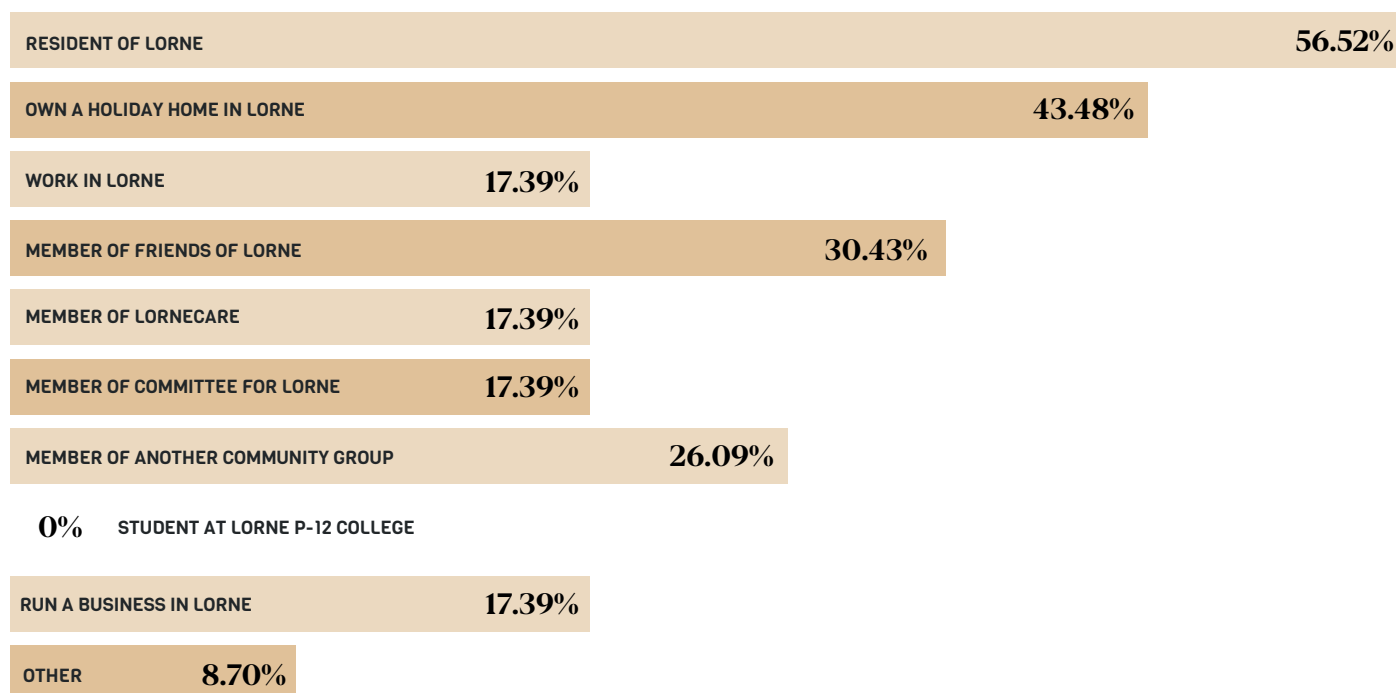
WHAT WE HEARD

DIVERSITY OF VOICES TEA-TREE

The Authority values hearing from a diverse array of community members across all our engagement initiatives. Data collected from survey respondents helps us understand the diversity of voices contributing to the engagement.

Note: Respondents could identify as more than one attribute

SURVEY RESPONDENTS' CONNECTION TO LORNE



OVERALL SENTIMENT

Survey respondents were asked how concerned they were about the upcoming habitat restoration works. Out of a total of 100%, with 100% being very concerned and 0% being not concerned, the average rate of concern was 84%.

The reasoning behind this higher level of concern was varied and is included in the Key Points Raised and Our Response section on the following section.





KEY POINTS RAISED AND OUR RESPONSE

Community members expressed both concerns and support for the upcoming habitat restoration works, offering ideas on how we could better engage the community and disseminate information on habitat restoration in the future. Here is a summary of the key points raised:

THE REMOVAL OF COAST TEA-TREE

Feedback regarding the removal of Coast Tea-tree on the Lorne foreshore was mixed, as gleaned from community conversation sessions, survey responses, and emailed submissions.

Comments included:

“There is too much tea-tree dominating the coast. “

“We would like to express our strong opposition to the planned further removal of any coastal tea tree in Lorne.”

“Just leave it as is please.”

“I would like to see the removal of the tea tree on the Lorne Foreshore.”

Our response:

Guided by the Coastal Vegetation Strategy we manage the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks as a landscape, rather than focusing on individual sites. To ensure habitat restoration at a landscape scale we will continue to remove woody weeds from across the land we manage Coast Tea-tree is the only woody weed remaining en mass in the Lorne foreshore area and therefore its removal is a key component of habitat restoration.



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INVOLVEMENT IN SITE REVEGETATION AND MAINTENANCE

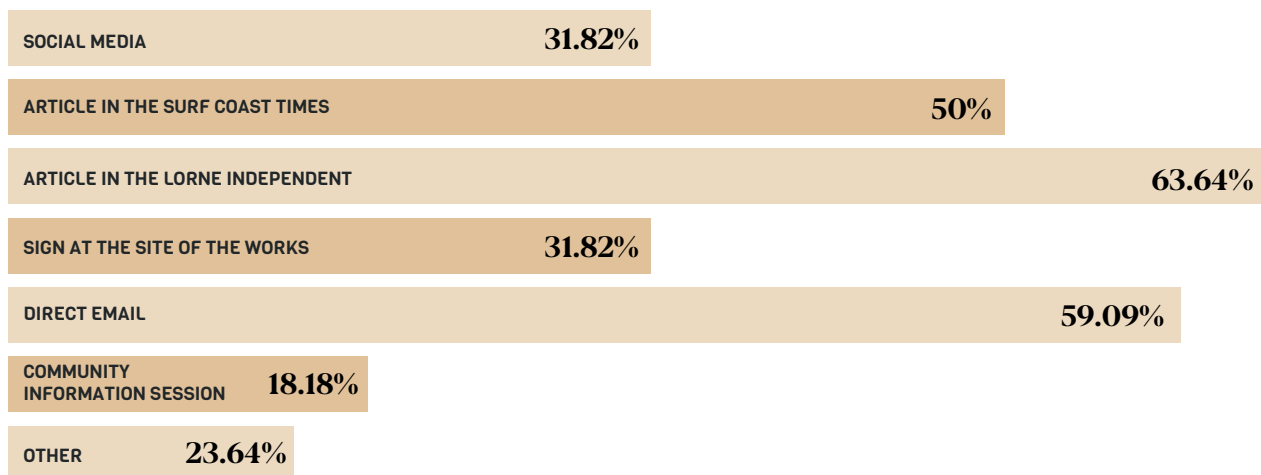
75% of survey respondents said they would not like to be involved in looking after habitat restoration sites. The types of involvement people did express an interest in included taking part in planting days or site maintenance (5 people) and attending future community information sessions (3 people). The Friends of Lorne submission also highlighted that they would be interested in supporting monitoring of the restoration sites through a citizen science program.

Our response:

We're delighted to see that some members of the Lorne community are eager to participate in habitat restoration efforts. We will integrate this preference into planning for future works through community information sessions, community planting days and investigating the potential for citizen science to contribute to monitoring the outcomes of habitat restoration works. A community planting day will be held on August 29, 2023, to revegetate the areas where Coast Tea-tree are to be removed earlier in August.

FUTURE COMMUNICATIONS ON HABITAT RESTORATION

The community feedback we received in 2022 was that the Lorne community wanted to know more about the habitat restoration works. Preferences for different methods of receiving information are shown in graph 2 below.



Comments included:

"It is commendable that information has been provided."

Our response:

We will use this information to guide future communications with the Lorne community on habitat restoration works.

IMPACTS ON FORESHORE AESTHETICS, AMENITIES, AND TIMING OF WORKS

Community feedback expressed considerable concern about the potential negative impacts on the aesthetics and amenities of the Lorne foreshore due to the restoration works. A solution suggested was to not remove Coast Tea-tree at all, or if it is removed to do it in a slower manner. Conversely, several respondents stated support for the removal of Coast Tea-tree as it will improve the amenity of the area, including providing better views. Some people also backed the staged approach we're taking towards the restoration works.

Comments included:

"Any change that has a major effect on the current panorama must be handled carefully & at the appropriate speed."

"Coastal Tea-tree is not an attractive tree, all the planting on the open foreshore of Lorne was to be low growing, so not to obstruct views from Mountjoy Parade. Sadly, this has not been the case and the views are totally obscured now."

"These areas are part of the fabric of the history of Lorne. Used for play, used for art, used for shelter."

"The amount of removal, while staged, risks changing the entire feel of area especially in the vicinity of the swing bridge."

Our response:

The community's feedback revealed some confusion about the areas from which Coast Tea-tree will be removed during the habitat restoration works. We want to reassure the community that we will not be removing Coast Tea-tree from the entire Lorne foreshore. We'll only remove it from areas with conservation value as outlined in our Coastal Vegetation Strategy. Highly modified areas with little conservation value (particularly along Cypress Avenue to the Surf Life Saving Club) will not have Coast Tea-tree removed. We have updated our project map (see [page 5](#) of this report) to clearly show where Coast Tea-tree will be removed and where it will not be removed.

We expect the canopy of the new vegetation to match the current Coast Tea-tree height within five years. All sites on the Lorne foreshore where we undertake large-scale woody weed removal are replanted using indigenous species. These species will support both ecological outcomes and community values through restoring habitat as well as providing the same or similar screening, windbreak, and shade functions that Coast Tea-tree now provides. [CLICK HERE](#) can see what a restored habitat site may look like.

Our response continued:

We acknowledge there will be changes to the amenity value of this area of the Lorne foreshore where habitat restoration is occurring. These changes are welcome to some community members, but not to others. To alleviate the impacts of the change, we have amended the way we are conducting the works in a couple of ways:

- **Prompt Replanting.** Our standard approach after weed removal is to allow sites to naturally regenerate. However, in response to community concern about amenity impacts on the Lorne foreshore, we will begin replanting within a month after Coast Tea-tree removal. This will ensure the visual impact of weed removal is minimised as much as possible.
- **Staging the works.** To further reduce amenity impacts we are undertaking the habitat restoration works in a slower, staged manner. We're pleased to have received some community feedback that supports this approach.

These stages are represented on the maps on page 2. Stage 1 of works will be undertaken in August 2023. The team will monitor regrowth at these sites and then look to implement Stage 2 of removal in future years. We will only activate Stage 2 once the rehabilitated area of Stage 1 reaches approximately 120cm in height. This process could take between one and three years, depending on climatic conditions.

HABITAT IMPACTS

There were concerns expressed in the feedback that removing Coast Tea-tree could result in a loss of animal habitats for species that currently depend on them. Several responses specifically highlighted that the works will likely have a detrimental impact on the threatened Rufous bristlebird and asked whether the Coast Tea-tree should be left because of the structure it provides. A few people suggested that the Authority should replace Coast Tea-tree as they die, rather than remove them all at once as planned for each stage.

Comments included:

"Please don't remove healthy trees that are contributing to the natural environment of Lorne. It is totally unnecessary and just plain destructive. Develop a plan that replaces them as they die. Work with nature not against it."

"GORCAPA are doing landscape cleanups, and invasive Tea tree has been nominated as a weed species that needs tending to."

"I think it the height of human arrogance to dictate what native species should have the right to grow - to be there - while another should not."

"Please don't rush in to remove tea tree and other non-indigenous vegetation without full appreciation of the effects on wildlife and coastal erosion."



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COASTAL EROSION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

A key concern expressed throughout the engagement process was that the restoration works would reduce the resilience of the Lorne foreshore to coastal erosive processes, such as high tides and storm events, that climate change may worsen.

Comments included:

"It will be difficult to safeguard the dunes along the coast at Lorne if all the non-indigenous vegetation is removed leaving it open to increased erosion."

"Our overwhelming concern is for the minimisation of coastal erosion."

"The coastal tea has a critical role in stabilise the foreshore, with climate change and higher sea levels and tides we must not be destabilising the foreshore based on the farcical claim the tea tree is a weed."

Our response:

This habitat restoration program does not include the removal of vegetation from the primary dune system (dunes that are closest to the high tide mark and ocean). The primary dune system is the area of the coast that provides frontline protection from coastal processes. The map on [page 5](#) shows the locations for removal.

We recognise the removal of some Coast Tea-tree from the embankment adjacent to the Erskine River Estuary may raise concerns. Whilst this area is not identified as an erosion point under the Planning and Environment Act 1987, we will employ a cut and paint removal method which maintains soil integrity whilst indigenous species establish.

Even though it's not relevant to these specific habitat restoration areas, it's worth noting that removing weeds from dunes and replacing with indigenous dune vegetation will recreate stronger, more resilient dune systems that can better adapt to coastal processes and a changing climate. A healthy, dynamic system will lose and gain sand, and the shape of dunes will change, in response to coastal conditions and processes.

WEED REMOVAL OBJECTIVES APPLIED ACROSS LORNE

Some community members asked questions in relation to the approach we are undertaking to remove Coast Tea-tree. There was uncertainty regarding the one-in-three approach outlined in the Coastal Vegetation Strategy.



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Our response:

Each site where we manage weeds is assessed based on amenity, conservation and cultural values. Based on this assessment, each site is prioritised assigned a low, medium or high priority ranking (see Part 1, page 24 of the [Coastal Vegetation Strategy](#) for a description). This prioritisation, coupled with individual site characteristics, inform our management approach.

The approach we are taking on the Lorne foreshore as identified in the map on [page 5](#) is staged removal with immediate revegetation.

In North Lorne, our Coastal Vegetation Strategy states that 1 in 3 Coast Tea-tree will be removed. The objective is framed this way to achieve a 30%* reduction of Coast Tea-tree during the five-year period of the Coastal Vegetation Strategy and takes into consideration significant site constraints (namely accessibility and topography), current staff resourcing and a low priority rating. However, it is an ongoing objective, with the aim being that all Coast Tea-tree will be eradicated, not just 1 in 3.

To clarify, if three Coast Tea-tree are in a row, we are not removing 1 out of those 3. Rather, we are removing 30% across the site.

*The Coastal Vegetation Strategy objective for Coast Tea-tree is combined with Sallow Wattle. The five-year objective is to reduce Coast Tea-tree and Sallow Wattle by 40%. This reflects a 30% reduction of Coast Tea-tree and 10% of Sallow Wattle.

EVIDENCE AND MONITORING

Some feedback appreciated the scientific basis for the works, while others stated that there was a lack of evidence to justify the works. Concern was expressed that without monitoring of the works it will be hard to measure their success in restoring habitat. It was suggested that we monitor the works, and that the community could potentially assist to resource monitoring via a citizen science monitoring program.

Comments included:

"GORCAPA has limited resources, which is a continuing concern for us. We note the organisation's need to rely on goodwill and partnerships for ongoing research and essential data gathering. We would like the type of evidence that you have to evaluate the impact of your strategy here to match what you have in Aireys Inlet."

"The GORCAPA coastal veg people do a good job within their constraints, and that their thinking on ecological matters is in keeping with science and developing practice."

"Are you basing this scheme on previously successful ventures or is this entirely experimental with no known outcome?"



Our response:

Through our engagement we have shared the scientific basis for the works and provided external sources on which our strategic documents and policies are based. We work to the best scientific data and methodology available at the time and will adapt and change our methodology if, and when more accurate information becomes available. This also includes learnings our staff uncover as they undertake works across our management estate.

Coast Tea-tree removal has been conducted across this coastline for over 25 years. Our Conservation team and community conservation groups have observed a significant increase in habitat diversity, and consequently increase in indigenous fauna to areas where Coast Tea-tree is removed and indigenous vegetation reinstated. There are many examples of this across our coast, [you can reference in this video](#).

We acknowledge that there has been a lack of monitoring of our conservation works to date. We are establishing a protocol for monitoring works that will be replicable across habitat restoration sites.

For the upcoming Coast Tea-tree removal works, we're initiating a flora monitoring program which will capture the changes in vegetation over time. This will help Authority staff and the community better understand the changes that occur through habitat restoration. We'll share monitoring results on our website.

We're also developing a fauna monitoring program. This work will help us monitor the impact of works such as Coast Tea-tree removal on endangered and threatened animal species that depend on indigenous habitat.

Citizen science would be a valuable contribution to increasing our understanding and providing critical data. We're happy to work with any local community groups to explore this option for monitoring data collection.

HOW WE ENGAGED WITH YOU

Several participants appreciated the increase in engagement in 2023 with the Lorne community on the habitat restoration works. However, some felt that the level and type of consultation was not sufficient. Frustration was expressed that we were not engaging to allow for the community to decide whether Coast Tea-tree is to be removed or not.

Feedback at the community conversation sessions indicated that the knowledge shared by Authority staff and the chance to be listened to was appreciated. However, some attendees felt disappointed they could not influence whether or not the habitat restoration works would occur.

Several survey responses noted an improvement in the 2023 engagement approach, conducted before the Coast Tea-tree removal, compared to the engagement process in 2022, which occurred after the Coast Tea-tree removal. Some people expressed their thanks to the Friends of Lorne who have worked hard to disseminate information on the works with their members and the wider Lorne community.



Comments included:

"We appreciate how, in response to community concern, GORCAPA has gone the extra mile to increase the amount of information flow to the community in Lorne."

"I find I am disenfranchised. When at a meeting to discuss the issue the audience is presented with a note for more removal."

"Not sure why it is needed and have not seen clearly put propositions on maps and with photos by GORCAPA".

Our response:

We appreciate the broad and frank feedback on the way we have engaged on habitat restoration works in Lorne. This feedback helps us as an organisation to better understand the way that the Lorne community would like to be engaged on works that impact coastal vegetation and the associated community held values.

We're grateful to the community members who participated in this engagement process and to the Friends of Lorne for generous assistance in disseminating and sharing information among their networks. In response to the community's suggestion for more accessibility, we'll ensure future engagements include both online and in-person community conversations. The habitat restoration works we are undertaking on the Lorne foreshore are guided by the Coastal Vegetation Strategy. This strategy was developed through its own robust community and stakeholder engagement process. This is why (combined with using best practice and independent conservation methodology) throughout this engagement process we have not asked the community whether we should or should not do the works. We've focussed on sharing knowledge about habitat restoration, understanding and hopefully easing community confusion and concerns. We have also sought to better understand how the community wishes to receive communications on habitat restoration works and be involved in site maintenance and revegetation works. We apologise if community members were confused as to the engagement purpose.

We're pleased to see that our 2023 engagement approach is viewed as a better fit for the Lorne community than our 2022 approach. This new approach was implemented in response to community feedback on our 2022 engagement.

NEXT STEPS

Your valuable input has helped us shape a habitat restoration program which better meets the Lorne community's needs. In mid-August 2023 we'll conduct habitat monitoring of the Stage 1 project sites and then remove Coast Tea-tree. In September 2023 we will host a community planting day to revegetate the sites.

In line with community feedback on communication preferences, we'll share information on these activities via social media, site signage, the Surf Coast Times and the Lorne Independent.

Our Conservation Team will monitor and maintain the revegetated sites. We'll keep the community informed about the monitoring results and any further habitat restoration to be undertaken at Stage 2 sites over the coming years.

REFERENCES

E. Mitchell and B.A. Wilson (2007), Detection and habitat use of the Rufous Bristlebird (*Dasyornis broadbenti*) in coastal heathland, in south-western Victoria, Australia, *Emu-Austral Ornithology*, 107:4, 327-334.



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Get in touch

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The project team can be contacted at: haveyoursay@GreatOceanRoadAuthority.vic.gov.au



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