



ECOLOGY
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Proposed Promontory Views Development, Yanakie - Statement of Biodiversity Values



Prepared for: Tom Tootell

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1 Background

The Promontory Views property comprises some 100 hectares, and is located on the Foster-Wilsons Promontory Road, just north of Wilsons Promontory National Park (WPNP). The property extends eastward from a ridgeline of Devonian granite – an outlier of WPNP bedrock, across a broad swampy coastal plain to abut the tidal marshes of Corner Inlet Marine and Coastal Park.

The property was historically cleared and used for grazing. Further, 'White Swamp', a large coastal lagoon occupying the coastal plain of this and adjoining properties, was cleared and drained for the Soldier Settlement program following the Second World War. This included the construction of a levee at the coastal edge to truncate natural channels and prevent tidal incursion.

Over the last 10 years or so, the property has undergone substantive change under the ownership of Tom Tootell. The key elements of this change include the reinstatement of tidal influence into 'White Swamp', and a revegetation program involving the planting of over 10 000 indigenous trees.

1.1 Key values

Corner Inlet Ramsar Site

The property adjoins the Corner Inlet Marine and Coastal Reserve, a gazetted Ramsar wetland of international importance, listed under the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran 1971).

A key objective of Ramsar is the 'Wise Use' of Ramsar sites and adjoining areas, to avoid a change to the 'Ecological Character' of the wetland. The current management of the property is wholly consistent with this objective. The reinstatement of tidal wetlands within the former 'White Swamp' and the extensive revegetation program not only add to on-site values, augment waterbird habitat – the key driver of Ramsar wetlands, but also provide an effective buffer to the Ramsar site from a possible change in land use on elevated sections of the property.

Reinstated tidal wetlands

These coastal wetlands occupy some 8 hectares and were constructed in 2008 (T. Tootell pers. comm.). The South Gippsland Shire gave permission to excavate to 600 mm following testing for acid sulphate soils (T. Tootell pers. comm.). A key element of these wetlands is the breaching of the existing levee to restore the tidal regime, which formerly sustained 'White Swamp'. The values attached to these wetlands are several-fold:

- provide waterbird habitat and high tide roosts. Species regularly sighted include: Royal Spoonbill, Australian White and Straw-necked Ibis, Cape Barren Goose, Red-capped Plover, Australian Pelican, White-faced Heron, several duck species, cormorants and migratory shorebirds including Bar-tailed Godwit (T. Tootell pers. comm.);
- assist with the restoration of coastal saltmarsh. A Saltmarsh Herbland of Beaded Glasswort *Tecticornia quinqueflora* currently fringes the existing wetlands. The maintenance of this community and development of other saltmarsh vegetation can be expected with the return of tidal influence, and the continuing absence of grazing by domestic stock. Saltmarsh is a listed community under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999;

- breaching of levees to re-establish saltmarsh on former sites. This is a key issue in relation to sea level rise and the capacity for saltmarsh and associated mangrove communities to migrate inland. On the South Gippsland coast, levees and adjoining private land reclaimed for agriculture are key constraints on this critical process to conserve these coastal wetlands under climate change. The Tootell property is an exemplar of lifting these constraints and letting natural processes unfold.

Revegetation

The scale of revegetation undertaken by a single landowner is impressive. In excess of 100 000 plants of local provenance have been planted across some 40 hectares. As mentioned, this contributes to a substantial buffer to the Ramsar site, but will progressively provide habitat for a broad range of terrestrial fauna, whose habitat has been mostly removed from the hilly terrain in the Yanakie area. Further, considering the property's close proximity (less than a kilometre) to the northern boundary of WPNP, there is a high potential for colonisation of the revegetated habitat by a wide range of bushland birds and several mammal species.

2 Summary

Over the past 10 or so years the landowner has made a considerable effort to improve the property's conservation values. While these improvements are presently clear, the closely proximate habitats of international significance - Corner Inlet Ramsar site and Wilsons Promontory National Park - provide a salient context as to the potential of these habitat initiatives. The property provides an urgently needed exemplar of habitat restoration of coastal wetlands, imminently threatened by climate change.