

Tarwin River Precinct Plan



**VENUS BAY
COMMUNITY CENTRE**

May 2019

Executive Summary

The Tarwin River has been identified by the community as the most important “asset” of the region and a “**gateway to Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay and Walkerville**”. Community participation in the consultation for this project has been significant and the drive to improve the amenity, function and access to river frontage is of very high importance to all.

Tarwin Lower is seen as the local service town, with significant population growth being experienced in the twin town of Venus Bay. Residents from both towns have participated in the project and see the need to ensure a strong connection between the townships, ease of access to shops and local businesses, recreational opportunities and facilities that cater for the growing tourism market.

Essentially the rural farming community relies on the tourism growth to support local business and services. There is concern about empty shops and sustainability of the area, so the community would like to enhance the attraction of the river as well of the livability of the area to help the area to thrive.

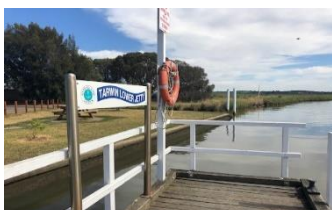
Community education about the river health and bank, native vegetation and weed control, ownership and Council service levels have been important parts of the process. There is clear policy and legislative requirement for river protection, infrastructure costs can be restrictive and there are a range of views about what should and can be done that in some instances are in conflict.

This research and consultation report aims to provide a clear and concise summary that the community can utilise as a framework to focus advocacy, volunteering and community education. Local land managers and agencies can refer to this work to better understand the issues impacting on the community, visitors and local business.

There is no doubt that increased maintenance, a range of small scale infrastructure improvements and some longer term management strategies will significantly benefit the district and build a stronger and better connected community.

Acknowledgements

The Venus Bay Community Centre would like to acknowledge Michelle Harris from GippSport Community Solutions who was the lead independent consultant engaged to complete this project. The Centre would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay communities, the many community groups and their members, the local agency staff and other stakeholders who have supported this project.



Engineering advice and the development of the existing conditions and concept plans was provided by Brosnan Engineering.

VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

Funding for this project was provided by South Gippsland Shire Council Community grant and the Venus Bay Community Centre provided in kind and financial support for project management, administrative support and printing.

Methodology & Scope

The following key steps were completed during the development of this research project to ensure effective consultation:

- Funding was received by South Gippsland Shire Council and an independent consultant was appointed to undertake the project.
- A start up meeting was conducted with the project manager and consultant in December 2018.
- A detailed consultation/ stakeholder list was developed as well as advertising to ensure broad community engagement.
- Extensive research, consultation and an industry review were completed.
- A number of site inspections were conducted.
- A presentation at the South Gippsland Shire Community Forum in Tarwin Lower was made followed by a community forum to present the Draft report.
- A draft project report was provided to all stakeholders for review and input.

The project area has been defined in the concept plan and existing conditions. In summary it extends from the boat ramp car park through to the last fishing platform on the Inverloch- Venus Bay Road only along the river side. The project did not include the road area which is managed by VicRoads.

Due to the limited funding available for this project, only concept level plans and engineering advice has been provided. This study has identified a number of areas where further investigation is required.

The Tarwin River precinct is of significant cultural heritage. Detailed research and planning will need to be undertaken prior to any infrastructure projects being undertaken or the development of interpretive signage.

This project was funded by a South Gippsland Shire Community Grant and a broad range of staff have been engaged to provide information to inform this project. This is a community led initiative and will require the ongoing work of a community organisation to advocate for the projects identified in this plan.



Consultation Findings

Prior to the project commencement, a background paper was developed by the Venus Bay Community Centre to outline and inform consultation for the project. A copy of this issues paper can be found in **Appendix 2**.

The detailed list of organisations and individual community members who were consulted during this project can be found in **Appendix 3**.

The summarised findings of all research and consultation has been used to inform all this report while ensuring that individuals are not identifiable.

During consultation for this project, detailed consultation was also being undertaken by South Gippsland Shire Council for the Venus Bay Activity Centre plan and a number of other master plans. Every effort was made to inform the community about the different projects running concurrently and project managers ensured that relevant information for the various projects was shared to the appropriate people.

During consultation for this project, the Tarwin Lower community were working together to advocate for a range of issues in Tarwin Lower, some of these were considered as part of this project as part of the Tarwin River Precinct Plan. However, some of the issues were outside of the scope of this project. Feedback provided during consultation, if outside of the scope was provided back to relevant authorities but not included in this report.

A significant commitment was made to ensure that there was opportunity for the whole community to be involved in this project. In some instances, there was a broad range of opinions provided on the same topic. This report aims to present the range of views and how these align with legislative requirements or future funding opportunities.

It is likely that further consultation will be required to make decisions about some of the issues when the opportunity arises. A good example of this would be the re-location of the tennis courts, there is strong community interest to relocate the courts however not by the tennis facility users. The project would be of significant cost and a future decision will need to be made subject to the funding opportunities available or future use of the tennis courts.



VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

Local Context

Demographic Profile

The official population of South Gippsland 28,936 (ABS estimated resident population). The 5 most populous towns are Leongatha (5,654), Korumburra (4,469), Mirboo North (2,324), Foster (1,842) and Nyora (1,527).

Tarwin Lower

In 2016 there was 358 residents living in Tarwin Lower with a median age of 53. Tarwin Lower's population from 1911 - 2011 jumped up and down a few times but has remained steady between 2011 - 2016. Languages other than English are spoken in 6 households.

15 people in Tarwin Lower reported needing assistance in their day to day lives due to a disability. A smaller proportion of children attended Government Primary Schools than Victoria's average. There are 172 people in the workforce in Tarwin Lower with a higher proportion of people in full time work. There are 248 dwellings with 79 percent of them occupied.



Venus Bay

Venus Bay had a population of 944 at the 2016 census however it has become a popular holiday retreat and this swells into the thousands during holiday periods. In Venus Bay an average of 6 people in each holiday home in peak season has the potential to increase the population to over 7,600 people without accounting for day visitors

The town is split into three 'estates'. The First Estate is home to the only shopping strip in Venus Bay, consisting of a general store, pharmacy, surf shop / hair dresser, cafe, take-away shops, real estate agents, caravan park and a restaurant. Three of Venus Bay's five surf beaches (No. 1, 2 and 3 beaches) are in the First Estate, with the Venus Bay Surf Lifesaving Club located at the No. 1 beach.

The two towns are referred to as "Twin Towns" due to the sharing of infrastructure and services as well as their close proximity. Development of both towns is currently limited as there is no sewage system servicing the area and its introduction is unlikely in the short term due to the development costs.

The area is serviced by one local primary school and a recreation reserve in Tarwin Lower and largely function as small country towns until the peak tourist season. There are very high levels of participation in community volunteering with a very broad range of community facilities, services and groups being managed by volunteer organisations.

VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

Supporting Documentation

A literature review was completed of relevant documentation to support the development of this project which includes the following;

- Population demographics
- The Tarwin Lower – Venus Bay Community Directions Plan
- South Gippsland Shire Council Plan 2017-21 (Revised)
- SGSC Paths & Trails Strategy 2018
- SGSC Blueprint for Social Community Infrastructure 2014-2029
- SGSC Sustainability Strategy 2016-2020
- SGSC Art, Culture & Creative Industry Strategy 2017-2021
- WGCMA Regional Catchment Strategy 2013-2019
- WGCMA Tarwin Lower Flood Study 2007
- Flood Safe - Flood information for the Tarwin River at Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay
- Community sport participation trends

Information as relevant has been considered and referred to throughout the report.

Catchment Management

Management of the water way and river system is the responsibility of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.



The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) has one of the most diverse natural resource management regions in Australia. It extends from San Remo on the coast in the west to Lakes Entrance in the east and to Mount Howitt high in the Victorian Alps.

The vision statement for the West Gippsland region is:

“Catchment Health - Gippsland’s Wealth - The people of Gippsland recognise the importance of our ecosystems, natural resource base, unique natural features and landscapes found within the region. Our inspired, knowledgeable, capable and resilient communities will ensure these continue to underpin the environmental, social, cultural and economic wealth of the region.”

The Regional Catchment Strategy takes into account international agreements and key pieces of Australian and Victorian Government legislation including the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, Water Act 1989, Planning and Environment Act 1987, Climate Change Act 2010 and Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010.

VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

The WGCMA recognises that floodplains provide significant social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits to our region. The inherent functions of our floodplains to convey and store floodwater should be recognised and preserved to minimise the deterioration of environmental values and the long-term flood-risk to floodplain production, assets and communities.



Bunurong Coastal Landscape Priority Area

Tarwin Lower is located within the is characterised by estuarine and coastal environments containing extensive intertidal rock platforms and subtidal rocky reefs, which are home to diverse ecological communities. It contains fossil sites of international and national significance and areas of cultural heritage sensitivity. The seagrass and saltmarsh communities found within the landscape priority area provide habitat for migratory waders, resident birds and native fish. The coastal and marine parks and reserves are valued for the recreational opportunities they provide and the threatened species they support.



Projects identified by the community during this consultation need to be considered within the context of the WGCMA strategies and policies as the authority that we need to approve any work related to the river or the adjacent areas.

Issues and Opportunities

This table is a summary of the key themes raised during consultation. These included stakeholder interviews and community consultation.

Theme	Description	Relevant Agency Policy/ Strategy
Rubbish	Household rubbish is being dumped along the riverside, especially from holiday homes. During peak periods the bins are overflowing, smell, rubbish blows into river, and the seal a loop bins on fishing platforms being stuffed with rubbish. There are volunteers managing the Seal a Loop bins and other rubbish collection. The Parks & Gardens team completes routine maintenance and there is a Clean Up Australia Day activity which gets around 6 volunteers. It is a long term problem, more bins needed, more collection needed, fishing lines in river of concern. Rubbish in reeds is hard to clean up.	Council has a Waste Contract in Place and it can be difficult and expensive to vary the contract. Increases in services have been provided which is felt to have made a difference. WGCMA have advised the removal of rubbish bins/ Seal a loop may be appropriate best practice. Friends of Venus Bay said they installed Seal a Loop devices and they maintain them/ want them to stay as a priority.
Weed Removal	Weeds are an issue, unsightly and impact on native vegetation. Feedback provided that Council do not use the most appropriate practices to manage weeds and it is hard to motivate volunteers for this type of work.	Council have a weed management strategy in place. WGCMA have funding to support weed removal.
Re-vegetation/ Trees	Some community members want vegetation removed to improve access and sight lines to river. There are significant trees and they are ageing and need replacement. Vegetation is extremely important to bank stability. Landcare very interested in planting and have volunteer labour available. Interest in more shade trees. Trees limbs/ lightning/ fire - safety concerns. Some interest in colour and exotic species but these would not be appropriate on river bank. Native home of Koala's. Need to stop cars parking on river banks to limit damage to vegetation and improve amenity. Biodiversity is very important.	CMA will not support any vegetation removal. There used to be bollards to stop parking, community asked council for them to remove them about 10 years ago. Community education and partnerships are needed to better understand why the vegetation is needed and how to enhance the area for all.
River Banks/ River Health	The river is the greatest asset. Some misunderstanding in the community about the river being tidal and its role. River health is not currently monitored. Some community would like to see structures installed but this is not suitable. Interest for access to river for swimming. Concern about health of seals and platypus which have been seen in the river. There are water sports being conducted who would like access improvements. No erosion currently, however the community is concerned about degradation due to parking. There is a desire to be able to view the river and feel connected.	See WGCMA Catchment Management Strategy
Concerns about Flooding	Concerns have been raised about flooding over the road. Ideas for possible solutions have been raised. There is a flood management plan in place which is the responsibility of key agency staff to continue their important work in this area.	Flood Management Strategy

VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

CFA	Both the Community and CFA have raised the need to relocate the Current CFA facility. The facility is not fit for purpose and community members would rather have that space available for open space and access to the river.	CFA/ State Government policy and funding priorities.
Tennis Courts	Overwhelming community consensus that they would like to see the 3 tennis courts relocated to the recreation reserve. This would return the area to open space and remove fencing. Also provides more opportunity for parking and activities. The tennis club committee is not affiliated or run programs. 20-30 annual ticket holders plus casual summer use. Tennis club is presently against the relocation. Recreation Reserve Committee is open to a relocation.	Club/ Land Manager South Gippsland Shire Council Tennis Facilities Plan
Recognising Cultural Heritage	All groups have provided feedback that they would like to consult with and better understand the Cultural Heritage of the site.	Traditional Owners/ Land managers
Pathways and Road Crossings	People cause informal tracks to river where there are no access points. Shared pathway ending at long table. Informal track along riverside is not connected and is being washed away behind tennis courts. Pathway on other side of road needs improvements, blockage of hotel. Complex engineering required to design crossings and the warrants for VicRoads might not exist despite growing traffic volume. Support for a wider shoulder on road for parking and bike riding. Decrease speed limit in town.	VicRoads / Traffic Engineers for crossings. Council paths and trails strategy does not projects identified
Parking	Peak parking issues occur around 6 times a year when the market is held at the Hall. Informal parking along the road side is the main option. Bollards to stop parking on grass areas were removed in the past. Difference in opinion about bollards about a preferred style- artistic/ simple. Informal parking damages surfaces, vegetation and impacts amenity. Parking near fishing platforms due increases the issues with litter/ damage. There is a need for more parking at boat ramp. Need for long vehicle parking in town. It is felt that designated parking would help people understand what to do.	VicRoads road requirements, Council Traffic Management study
Street Lighting	Some interest in street lighting improvements, on road lighting exists but community would like more. Perhaps consider feature lighting in precinct to improve amenity and safety.	VicRoads/ Council street lighting policy
RSL Monument	Looks in disrepair. No user group/ RSL to help look after it. Council have done some works to improve it but worried to do anything major without consultation. There is a lone pine that needs to be protected.	No policy/ document in place to explain roles and responsibilities.
Information/ Signage	There is a lot of unsightly signage that doesn't have impact i.e. don't rubbish. Language barrier of visitors. Need for more educational signage.	Develop signage theme in line with Venus Bay projects or Tarwin Flora Park.

VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

Town Entrance	Strong interest for a town entry sign for pride of place-gateway to Venus Bay and Walkerville	VicRoads road reserve
Fishing Platforms/ Jetty's	No condition report on them but needing repairs, work is done routinely by WGCMA and Council. One has been removed. Interest in installing a new one that could have boat access and a swimming ladder that gets over the water. The main jetty is too high for the canoe club to access the water. There is concern that increasing access would also increase rubbish issues. No access to a platform in the centre of town.	WGCMA installed them and would need to provide approval for changes.
Boat Ramp	Slippery due to tidal mud/ silt, unable to launch canoes. Unsure what an appropriate solution would be.	Any redesign would have to consider relevant standards.
Long Table / surrounding area	Council is currently maintaining the long table. Parks and Gardens report that the BBQ is hardly used but rubbish is a problem.	There is an opportunity for a community to take a leadership role to increase utilisation and amenity.
Toilet Blocks	Two in precinct, one at boat ramp needs upgrading. Another toilet block at Fisher Reserve. Pooping in bush is an issue. Local water sports club's would like access to a storage area and improved changerooms.	Council maintaining the facilities.
Community Art	Interest has been shown for improving amenity of the precinct by installing community art projects. These could be bollards or standalone pieces.	Council Art Strategy
Additional Park Furniture/ Town Square	Interest for more park furniture and Parks & Gardens would like these on concrete pads. Adopting the new Venus Bay theme could be an option. Friends of Group don't recommend grass areas, prefer native vegetation for open space areas.	Parks & Gardens Service level requirements



Identified Projects

The following series of projects have been identified as realistic and important by the community to be implemented using a priority order from Very High through to Low which will also be impacted upon by funding opportunities and relevant investigation and required approvals. We have also considered ease of implementation as part of the prioritisation.

Project Name / Details	Indicative Cost	Project Partners	Priority
<p>1. Connect informal pathway along the riverside Complete design work for connection of the informal gravel trail on riverside to connect all key areas along the precinct. It is a priority to repair the section behind the tennis court which is currently unsafe. Create planting/ barriers so that informal track to river are blocked to protect river bank.</p>	Depending on scope of work. \$50-\$100,000	SGSC WGCMA Landcare	Very High
<p>2. Creation of new fishing platform near the tennis courts Repair existing infrastructure, better connect to pathways, design a new platform that improves access to river for swimmer and water sports.</p>	Maintenance-ongoing Design- \$3,000 Construct-\$50,000	WGCMA SGSC	High
<p>3. Installation of bollards and formalise parking area Protect grass areas along river bank with bollards. Consider how artistic style could be incorporated. Undertake a traffic management/ parking study to determine how to formalize parking along roadway or in alternate areas of town.</p>	Bollards- \$20,000 Traffic / Parking Study- to be determined by Council	SGSC VicRoads	High
<p>4. There is a need for road crossing point- location to be determined Lobby for investigation to design appropriate crossing points potentially as part of the traffic management study as in dot point 3.</p>	Study/ Design/ Construction Cost to be determined.	SGSC VicRoads	Medium
<p>5. Develop a new town entry sign/ other interpretative signage throughout area Consider how art work could be incorporated into the detailed design. Educational themes identified include River Health, Environmental values, cultural heritage, parking & fishing education. The town entry sign would recognize the town as a Gateway.</p>	Design Signage installation costs \$10- \$30,000	Community led SGSC VicRoads Information experts	High
<p>6. Upgrade of the boat ramp and toilet block near boat ramp Boat ramp- Repair existing infrastructure, connect area to pathway, design a new one if needed. Toilet Block- Plan for a toilet block upgrade. Consider how clubs could be better serviced for changerooms and storage. Investigation needed for appropriate septic solution.</p>	Cost dependent on design and solution needed Boat Ramp Toilet Block	SGSC Clubs Fisheries WGCMA	Medium
<p>7. Ongoing weed removal and tree planting along river bed Opportunities for volunteer managed projects, grants through Landcare/ CMA partnership. Community planting of appropriate species. Education about why bank stability is important. Vegetation will improve amenity and shade. Weed removal support can be provided through WGCMA and SGSC staff with educational/ community support. It is important to work on shared goals.</p>	Ongoing maintenance program.	WGCMA SGSC Landcare Friends of VB Peninsula	High
<p>8. Improving the RSL monument Identify a group that can take on a maintenance/ advocacy role, plan for minor improvement works</p>	Ongoing maintenance, maybe a grant to upgrade	RSL SGSC Interested community group	Medium

VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

<p>9. Upgrade and increase the amount of park furniture Look to improve the amenity of the long table BBQ area and increase the amount of park furniture with consideration given to the local theme, impact on the vegetation and maintenance implications. Consider how local art projects could be incorporated. Consider how lighting could be incorporated to enhance safety and amenity of the area at night.</p>	<p>Range depending on types and amount of furniture \$10-\$30,000</p>	<p>SGSC Community Organisations</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>10. Future possible relocation of the tennis courts and CFA Develop a concept plan for town square if CFA and Tennis re-locate. A landscape plan will be needed to look at how the area could be used for festivals/ markets, passive recreation, a new fishing platform and how to create a better connection with the river. Advocate for the development of a new CFA facility as an important priority for the district.</p>	<p>Landscape Plan \$20,000 Relocation costs to be determined Construction of new area- to be determined</p>	<p>CFA Tennis Club SGSC</p>	<p>Low</p>

The numbering and listing of projects is reflected on the Precinct Concept Plans.

Other projects

In addition to the projects identified on the table above we have also identified operational/ management improvements or campaigns that have been included in the table below:



Project Name / Details	Indicative Cost	Project Partners	Priority
<p>Recognising Cultural Heritage A cultural heritage study will be required, which is outside of the scope of this project. Investigation may be required before infrastructure projects are completed.</p>	<p>To be determined</p>	<p>WGCMA SGSC</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Management of Rubbish Ongoing review of community need by Council when determining the waste management contract. Develop a community education campaign to better support Clean Up Australia Day. Promote how to report illegal dumping, ensure that bins are in highly supervised areas. Pride of Place may improve attitude towards littering in the longer term. Support the groups who already do a fantastic job volunteering currently to collect rubbish.</p>	<p>Council contract review and promotion by the community. Possibly a change in signage or bins.</p>	<p>SGSC WGCMA</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>River Usage Community education about river health and banks. Policing/ education about of fishing and licenses and speed limits. Consider how to better cater for water sports with future infrastructure projects and how to promote participation in programs.</p>	<p>Campaign or consideration given</p>	<p>SGSC Fisheries Community</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Increased maintenance to improve amenity of area Increase work being done by volunteer organisations Work with Council to design a more effective maintenance program</p>	<p>Better utilise existing resources</p>	<p>All</p>	<p>High</p>
<p>Parking Management/ Education Undertake a traffic management/ parking study but in the interim, build capacity of the community to understand what options exist for parking. They infrequent need and infrastructure cost. Signage about parking may improve how people use spaces.</p>	<p>Build awareness and maximize space available</p>	<p>SGSC</p>	<p>Medium</p>

VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

Implementation

The identified projects as outlined in the previous section have identified a broad range of opportunities that will be most effective if delivered as a partnership between the local community organisations and relevant agencies. The graphic below aims to highlight that the community is central to all projects. There is a need to educate, build capacity, provide support to and engage with the local community organisations and individuals to bring about successful outcomes.



The local agencies will ensure compliance with the legislative and policy requirements, provide funding and resources to assist project implementation. The capacity of these agencies is limited, but with strong community leadership there will be increased likelihood for success.

It is hoped that the consultation for this project will feed into an updated Community Directions Statement for Tarwin Lower – Venus Bay which will further strengthen the support for projects to be implemented. The community will also need to determine the best way to communicate implementation of this plan. This will be discussed at the community workshop and updated to include options.



VENUS BAY COMMUNITY CENTRE

Recommendations and Conclusions

This report should be referred to as a framework for advocacy and community views as relevant for the development of agency strategies, plans, policies or funding initiatives.

The community can use the plan to bring community organisations together for shared projects and to apply for funding or increased levels of service.

The community need to understand the environmental and cultural values of the site and adopt the plan to “Protect, Preserve and Enhance” the Tarwin River Precinct.

Through implementation of this strategy, there should be improved outcomes for local business through increased visitors and access to the river.

It is recommended that the plan be reviewed by the community in 5 years in 2024.



Appendices

1. Concept Plans and Existing Conditions
2. Project Information Sheet January 2019
3. Consultation List
4. Tarwin Lower Plant Species list



Disclaimer of Liability

The information contained in this report is intended for the specific use of the key stakeholders that have provided input into this research & consultation project. All recommendations by GippSport Community Solutions are based on information provided by or on behalf of the Council, Agency staff, Land Managers and local community, and it has relied upon such information being correct at the time this report was prepared.

Readers should note this report might include implicit projections about the future, which by their nature, are uncertain and cannot be relied upon. They are dependent on potential events or technical assessments, which have not yet occurred.