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Developing Sustainable Communities:
The Case for Port Phillip Heads Historic Towns, Sorrento and Queenscliff

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Abstract

The Victorian towns of Sorrento and Queenscliff are located either side of Port Phillip Heads. Using these towns as case studies, this paper examines what happens to historic coastal townships caught up in the phenomenon of sea change. Both towns are currently facing huge planning battles and are trying to argue a case for heritage in the rush for expansion and modernisation. Newcomers like to emulate the metropolis in the seaside towns. Planners in the metropolis are asked to make decisions by developers who are thwarted by local municipalities. These towns encapsulate something of the dilemma that comes with a demographic shift from the metropolitan centre to coastal townships and demonstrate that the transition from urban life and built environment does not translate without cost to a fragile coastal environment.

It is place itself that has attracted humans to Sorrento and Queenscliff over centuries. The seascape, the landscape, the environment drew the indigenous peoples here centuries ago. It provided abundant food and was inspiring. Europeans came at the very beginning of the 19th century seeking new lands. By the late decades of the 19th century Europeans discovered the seaside and its health giving qualities and built substantial Victorian edifices to house the influx of visitors and holiday-makers who arrived by ferry. However, not until the second half of the twentieth century did development begin to intrude significantly on the landscape. And by the twenty-first century evidence is mounting that development is destroying the sense and character of place, which initially enticed people to come here.
It is necessary to articulate the heritage values of these two townships which have quite separate identities but share geological formations and histories over centuries. It is necessary to adopt a holistic approach to place when examining the changing relationship between the built environment and the landscape over the past two centuries. Today both towns have extensive heritage overlays, yet these have not protected them from development or inappropriate building construction. The respective municipal councils have put planning overlays over the towns and their surrounding coastal areas, but these too have not protected the fragile environment from residential over development. This paper documents the impact of a number of these changes and looks to how state and local governments can go beyond rhetoric to proactively engage with the communities at Sorrento and Queenscliff to implement a sustainable future for these towns, mindful of their heritage.

1. Introduction

The Victorian towns of Sorrento and Queenscliff are located either side of Port Phillip Heads. Using these towns as case studies, this paper examines what happens to historic coastal townships caught up in the phenomenon of sea change. Both towns are currently facing huge planning battles and are trying to argue a case for heritage in the rush for expansion and modernisation. Newcomers like to emulate the metropolis in the seaside towns. Planners in the metropolis are asked to make decisions by developers who are thwarted by local municipalities. These towns encapsulate something of the dilemma that comes with a demographic shift from the metropolitan centre to coastal townships and demonstrate that the transition from urban life and built environment does not translate without cost to a fragile coastal environment.

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Mornington Peninsula Shire (MPS) is located in a boot-shaped promontory which separates Port Phillip and Western Port Bays, over 40 kms to the south east of Melbourne (Figure 1). The Shire covers an area of 723 sq kilometres. It is almost surrounded by the sea, with coastal boundaries exceeding 190 kilometres. The Shire has a mixture of urban areas, resort towns, tourist development and rural land. The Peninsula is one of the major holiday and retirement areas for Melbourne. It includes the industrial and port area of Hastings, as well as natural attractions like the Mornington Peninsula National Park fronting Bass Strait, which extends from Cape Schanck to Portsea and adjoins the Point Nepean National Park. The main industries include iron and steel manufacturing and building construction. The Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Biosphere Reserve is a part of the world-wide
network of biosphere reserves recognised by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) through its Man and the Biosphere Program. It includes areas of great biological diversity, wetlands, remnant indigenous vegetation, endangered birds such as the hooded plover, sites of geomorphological significance, highly scenic landscape values and sites of historic importance. According to their website the MPS is 'committed to a sustainable peninsula', on economic, social and environmental grounds.¹ The historic town of Sorrento is in the Point Nepean Ward, one of eleven wards in the Shire, and located on the Nepean Peninsula at the tip of the Mornington Peninsula. Sorrento can be considered the sister town to Queenscliff located on the opposite side of Port Phillip Heads, across the notorious rip.

![Figure 1. Port Phillip and surrounds showing Queenscliff and Sorrento](image)

The Borough of Queenscliff occupies a unique and special place in Victoria. Situated at the tip of the Bellarine Peninsula (Figure 1), the Borough is comprised of two townships, Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale (QPL) with approximately 3000 permanent residents. The Borough is the oldest and smallest of all Victoria’s municipalities, covering a total area of 13 square kilometres. It is unique by nature of its location. The Borough is almost totally surrounded by water, either coastal (Port Phillip Bay and Bass Strait) or wetlands (Swan Bay). Most of these areas are classified as maritime national parks. Port Phillip Bay and the Bellarine Peninsula, a total area of 7000 ha, is a Ramsar site (No 266) and is therefore a
wetland of international significance. The nearest major population centre of Geelong is 35 kms away. The Borough relies heavily on tourism for its livelihood. While a proportion of visitors are drawn by it scenic beauty and environmental significance, the majority visit because of the towns’ tourist attractions, particularly their beaches and historical buildings. The latter are concentrated in Queenscliff, which Henshall Hensen et al describe as the ‘historic jewel in the crown’ of Bellarine Peninsula attractions.

According to the Mornington Peninsula Visitor Information Centre, a staggering 58% of the 3.8 million visitors to the Peninsula visit the town of Sorrento each year. Comparative data for the Bellarine Peninsula and the Borough of Queenscliffe is not readily available but the town’s tiny information centre recorded over 75000 visitors in 2007.

As in other historic places, the ‘tensions between conservation and exploitation’ and the ‘imperatives for sustainability of the asset’ must be confronted and managed. In order to do so we must be mindful of the integrity, sustainability and viability of these historic towns and understand the tensions that manifest themselves when owners, developers, entrepreneurs, governments and local communities clamour to be heard. These places have the ability to tell us something about who we are as people, to tell us about our history and where we have come from. Fabric and intangible human values are at stake.

Tourism is seen as a necessary evil in these coastal towns. Tourism is largely seasonal, and while it contributes to their economic viability, the environmental impact is considerable. Too many people use and abuse the fragile ecosystem. Parks Victoria struggles to cope with repairs to infrastructure needed in the national parks at the end of each summer season. Physical impacts are exacerbated when affluent holiday-makers decide to buy property in these areas and replace traditional weekenders with McMansions. Population pressures – sea change growth plus unsustainable consumption – are having a detrimental affect on the natural and cultural heritage in these two historic towns and their environs. Peter Stone, in
his article ‘A marriage of convenience? Heritage and tourism working together’, documents the exponential rise of the tourism industry world-wide and the unequal partnership between heritage and tourism, paralleling the very unequal partnership between heritage and development exemplified by our case studies. Canberra and Sorrento can be seen to have been having a polygamous relationship with tourism and development, these partners once wooed and feted have now become overbearing.

In suggesting a methodology to establish carrying capacity in these peninsulas and their historic towns – we are mindful that its implementation has practical and political consequences. Increasing visitor numbers and population pressures are particularly concerning because of the fragility of the peninsulas on which the towns are located – this leads to a grave risk of irreparable damage from inappropriate use and overuse. At the height of the summer season overcrowding is a major problem, infrastructure cannot cope, people’s behaviour is at its worst, environmental damage is manifest and visitor satisfaction declines.

2. Background to Queenscliff and Sorrento as historic towns

The first Europeans to settle briefly on the eastern fringe of Sorrento at Sullivan Bay in 1803 were a group of convicts, settlers, mariners and officials. The country proved inhospitable and Lt-Col David Collins moved it to Van Diemen’s land in early 1804. Over ensuing decades, pastoralists, lime burners and fishermen eked out an existence on the Nepean Peninsula. It was not until 1863 that the Victorian Parliamentarian Charles Gavan Duffy began purchasing land at Sorrento, and it was he who in 1872 bought 600 acres along the Port Phillip beach front from Point King to the Sisters, and subdivided the land, creating desirable cliff-top properties with water views. In 1870 the entrepreneur, George Seth Coppin, saw the potential of Sorrento as a resort for day trippers and holidaymakers. In 1871 the population of the Nepean Peninsula was 98. Coppin floated companies which developed infrastructure (Ocean Beach Road connecting bay to ocean), transport (ferries from Melbourne to Sorrento) and accommodation (hotels): thus it was that in 1875 the...
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landmark four storey limestone Continental Hotel was built on Ocean Beach Road on the rise into the town. However Coppin also ensured that land along Bass Strait from London Bridge to Cape Schanck was reserved as a nature park. The township of Sorrento has heritage overlays, as do numerous historic properties, and the Nepean Peninsula is subject to planning and environmental overlays.

The Borough of Queenscliffe was created in 1863 and is the only Borough in Victoria to have retained an elected council since its establishment. Covering only 13 square kilometres, it is also the smallest borough in the State, and therefore its historic buildings represent a high percentage of the urban landscape. Willingham (1986) listed 37 buildings and places of interest. Architectural styles range from vernacular to Romanesque Revival. More than 50% of Queenscliff is covered by a heritage overlay. Point Lonsdale, however, has a much smaller, although not insignificant, heritage overlay. The environmental overlays are similarly impressive.

In the 19th century Sorrento was serviced from Queenscliff – Queenscliff was the grander and more important of the two towns. In the later 20th century and now in the 21st century Sorrento's closer proximity to Melbourne has meant easier access and consequently greater pressure from development.

In 2002 the Nepean Conservation Group put out a colour brochure ‘Conserving the Character’ to highlight the natural and cultural heritage values of the Nepean Peninsula, encompassing the towns of Sorrento, Portsea and Blairgowrie. The brochure contextualises the natural character, a little of the history and built heritage, and suggests ways of restoring and maintaining this place by conserving the vegetation, by replanting indigenous species and considering the environment when building. Since then the peninsula has been catapulted into a development frenzy which has seen land and house prices skyrocket. As part of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council’s (MPSC) strategic plan, Council and the
Sorrento Township Planning and Consultative Committee are undertaking a comprehensive review of the Sorrento township, 'working to develop a vision for the future that is shared throughout the community, while also addressing “nuts and bolts” issues such as infrastructure capacity, pedestrian safety, heritage protection, development controls, parking, and traffic calming.' Community input has been asked for in relation to the Place Making Recommendations prepared by Village Well. Of particular relevance to this paper are the recommendations with regard to ‘balanc[ing] heritage values with new development’. Many residents would see this as an attempt to close the gate after the horse has bolted! Nonetheless the Council sees that ‘by working together with a bold new vision and plan, we can tackle the challenges that development pressures, climate change and energy costs … bring … and build a resilient, sustainable and vibrant town centre for Sorrento’.9

The towns of Sorrento and Queenscliff provide an opportunity to tell the stories of place and people, to educate and engage the visitor and sea changer alike, and ‘in rare cases to inspire or change the visitor’s way of seeing and thinking’.10 Heritage must be recognised as ‘cultural capital’ in these towns, that is it appreciates in value over time. This is not a new concept. The European Charter of the Architectural Heritage, adopted in 1975, regards historical buildings, that is architectural heritage, as

… a capital of irreplaceable spiritual, cultural, social and economic value. Each generation places a different interpretation on the past and derives new inspiration from it. This capital has been built up over the centuries; the destruction of any part of it leaves us poorer since nothing new that we create, however fine, will make good the loss. Our society now has to husband its resources. Far from being a luxury this heritage is an economic asset which can be used to save community resources.11
David Suzuki makes it plain that ‘In the environmental area, every defeat is forever and every victory is temporary. We end up fighting the same battles over and over again’.12 This holds true in the areas of natural and cultural heritage in these two historic coastal towns.

3. Case studies

Coastal towns, particularly ones with unique historic and environmental features can be vulnerable to undesirable change in a many ways. Just four of these are examined in the following section through a number of case studies. The assault on the historical buildings of Queenscliff and Sorrento is exemplified by the fate of two prominent hotels, the Ozone and the Continental respectively. The loss of the original sense of place in the two towns can be visualised by the change that is underway in their respective land/water interface. In Queenscliff, the old harbour, once the shelter of the town’s commercial fishing fleet, is in the process of being redeveloped to accommodate the pleasure boats of Melbourne and Peninsula residents. In Sorrento, harbour redevelopments have been staved off on a number of occasions, the last resulting in the development of a safe boat harbour at Blairgowrie in 2000. The most obvious impact of the coastal townships is in the private residential market. Development habits and desires that have often been nurtured in capital cities are imported to the 'sea change' destination without sensitivity and with devastating impact. Queenscliff and Sorrento are no exception. Large scale housing developments, often for ‘second housing’ or individual unsustainable houses built in inappropriate locations, threaten the natural heritage. Some detail of these changes and their significance is considered below.

3.1 The Ozone and Continental Hotels

Queenscliff is renowned for its magnificent hotels, such as the Vue Grand, The Royal and The Queenscliff Hotel. Their history and that of the Borough's numerous guesthouses, past and present, has been recorded in detail.13 The Ozone Hotel usually ranks among the 'Big 4' in terms of its significance. The Ozone Hotel (Figure 2) (originally named the Baillieu Hotel after its builder, James Baillieu) was constructed in 1882. Willingham described the building
as an ‘imposing three storey hotel, … in a transitional “boom style” classical style’, believing it to be one of the two ‘most impressive architectural monuments in Queenscliff’. Others describe the building as a ‘blend of French Renaissance and Italian Renaissance palazzo styles’.

According to Hill the ‘pre-eminent hotels were ostentatious architectural statements designed to identify with a “Queen of the Watering Places”’. The hotel was named after the paddle steamer of the same name, which brought visitors to the town from Melbourne in the 1880s. After extensions, the hotel had over 100 rooms, and proudly boasted its location in proximity to Princes Park and the beach. In 1980, the building was listed on the Australian Heritage Register, and in 1995 it made it onto the Victorian Heritage Register.

In 2005, the owners of Ozone announced a $5 million plan to convert the hotel into eight luxury apartments, two apartments and a separate two-storey shop and residence. Queenscliffe Council rejected the application for a planning permit on the grounds that the changes threatened the building’s heritage values. The then Chief Executive Officer is quoted as saying ‘It’s more than the building itself, it’s the setting and what’s around it, and particularly the precinct it’s in’. Queenscliffe residents seemed to agree and more than 200 people signed a ‘Save the Ozone Hotel petition’. Local opposition to the development and its heritage listing were not, however, sufficient to protect the building. In mid-2005, Heritage Victoria advised the Borough of Queenscliffe that it had granted a permit for the development. The decision was supported on appeal by the then Minister for Planning, Rob Hulls. Heritage Victoria argued that since the exterior of the building was to remain unchanged, its cultural significance was unaffected. Similarly, the new two-storey building did not detract from the original building’s cultural significance.
In 2006 the Nepean Ratepayers Association, the Nepean Conservation Group and the Nepean Historical Society called on their members to fight two major development proposals in the Sorrento township because they were considered to be destructive of the character of place: 21 Constitution Hill Road, a multi story residential proposal adjacent to the landmark historic Continental Hotel (Figure 3), and 108 Ocean Beach Road, a mixed use (supermarket) development in the heart of Sorrento’s historic main street.
21 Constitution Hill Road is on a prime location in Sorrento on top of a high sand dune, adjoining the 1875 Continental Hotel, which is among the first buildings in the township and understood to be the highest limestone building in Australia. It is listed in the Planning Scheme and by Heritage Victoria. Objections to 21 Constitution Hill Road included failure to meet significant planning requirements including Urban Design, Heritage, Commercial, Subdivision, Cultural Heritage Places and the Sorrento Historic Precinct policies; exceeding the mandatory eight metre height limit by 5.2 metres, encouraging further overheight development throughout the Sorrento township by setting a prejudicial precedent; flying in the face of other permits already issued for the construction of units adjacent to and behind the Continental Hotel which maintain the eight metre height limit. This proposal would undo the combined efforts of Council and other developers to maintain the landmark features of the Continental Hotel and restrict significant views of the building. Because of its proximity, the general bulk and scale of the proposal are detrimental to the landmark features of the Continental Hotel. The proposal detracts from the distinctive Continental Hotel skyline from Constitution Hill Road, corner of Ocean Beach Road and Point Nepean Road, the bay and other viewpoints over Sorrento, such as Webster’s Lookout. After consulting with the community, the developer bypassed Council and went to Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal (VCAT).\(^\text{18}\)

VCAT granted the permit to build the multi-story residential apartments at 21 Constitution Hill Road, ‘a relatively straightforward development of no great magnitude’, except that Council and community opposed it. Heritage overlays were considered to be general in their definitions and this proposal was considered not to have a major impact on historic values. It was suggested that the existing heritage policies should be applied with considerable flexibility to the commercial precinct.\(^\text{19}\)

Objections to 108 Ocean Beach Road included the proposal exceeding 12 metres in height; covering 98% of the site; no building setback from Ocean Beach Road; architectural language, scale, height and bulk of building inappropriate and disrespectful of adjoining...
heritage buildings; and planning regulations and controls ignored by the developer. In overruling the Responsible Authority and granting the permit (with few amendments) for this mixed use development, VCAT saw the supermarket as the most contentious part of the application, and recognised ‘complex factors at play’, including ‘the town’s heritage qualities’. But VCAT argued, the proposal fell within the ‘urban scale’ ‘low rise commercial development’ mentioned in the Sorrento Historic Precinct Policy (Clause 22.17) and further contributed towards ‘the diversity of building styles’ which documented different periods of Sorrento’s development.20

3.2 Coastal towns and their harbours

One of the principle reasons that coastal towns have attracted the attention of those wishing to make a lifestyle change is their proximity to water; limitless horizons, ever-changing seascapes, clean air and unspoilt beaches all attract retirees, second-home buyers and genuine sea-changers alike. The interface between water and land masses is a natural focus for development and its preservation is vital if the spirit of the place is to be preserved. Harbours, jetties and their surrounds become gathering points for newcomers. Proposals for marinas seem to be an integral part of the sea change process. Queenscliff, and to a lesser degree Sorrento, are experiencing this phenomenon.

Queenscliff is known for its picturesque, although slightly run-down harbour (Figure 4). Its size and scope developed to serve a small commercial fishing fleet, whose peak was in the 1930s when over 150 men worked in the industry from the town.21 This number has declined significantly and at present there are very few commercial boats based in Queenscliff, fishing primarily for demersal or seabed fish like flathead. A small charter boat industry for tourist fishing also operates from the harbour.
Over recent years, there have been a growing number of people seeking berths for their boats in the Queenscliff harbour, resulting in a substantial waiting list. Moves to develop the harbour began in the late 1980s. The first plan generated more than 500 submissions and was abandoned. Pressure to redevelop the harbour grew and in 2000 a development process was initiated. The Queenscliffe Council, to its credit, hired an external facilitator to work with representatives of all interested parties such as environmentalists, business, residents, and the fishing and boating industries. Various redevelopment concepts were discussed over several months and eventually the town's residents voted on two options. Although there were many local objectors to any development from the outset, the process had been inclusive and democratic. However, once approval had been gained, the developer made modifications to the agreed concept plan. These included a substantial increase in the size of the available boat storage. Of the proposed modifications, one councillor was quoted as saying 'it’s not a refinement [of the concept plan] - it's not modest - it's a makeover'. The councillor added that the scale and scope of the proposal were not compatible with the village scale and ambience of Queenscliff. ‘We do not want retrospective recognition that Queenscliff was another example of the problem of overdevelopment and commercialisation in coastal towns’. 
Over the years Sorrento has staved off marina developments, but other proposals on the Nepean peninsula could not be stopped. The resources of the Nepean Conservation Group were stretched too far to stop the safe boat harbour being built at Blairgowrie, the tiny sister town to Sorrento, a few kilometres along the coast. In the Environmental Effects hearings the character and significance of place presented by the local residents was ignored as outside the terms of reference. Experts argued that there would be no adverse impact from changed wave patterns. Legislative frameworks were deemed flexible: a special case was argued for the Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron and the planning laws and local overlays were changed in order that the safe boat harbour could be built.\(^{24}\) The berths are expensive and the knock on effects of development are now having a major impact land side: vacant land has all but disappeared; the 1950s weekender has been replaced by large houses (Figure 7).

3.3 Housing developments

Large scale housing development proposals pose the greatest threat to the original character of coastal towns. Driven by the growing market for housing in these locations, developers have bought land and sought to gain planning approval to build new housing at an unprecedented scale compared to previous decades. The Bellarine and Mornington Peninsulas are exemplars of this activity.

Stockland Proposal Bellarine Peninsula

The most well-publicised and controversial of the proposed developments in the Borough of Queenscliffe is the Stockland proposal. Their site is a 192 hectare piece of land that is located on the western boundary of Point Lonsdale. Unfortunately the land sits in the City of Greater Geelong, and is not subject to the control of the Borough of Queenscliffe, although the multiple impacts of any development in that location will be experienced by the latter. The developer proposes to build 590 houses, 170 retirement units and an aged care centre for 120 residents on their site. If successful, the development will increase the local population by one third. The proposal has sparked strong community opposition, such as a public meeting attended by over 400 people, and 71\% of 1559 door-knocked residents opposing...
the proposal. Residents are currently petitioning the Federal Minister for the Environment to extend the current Ramsar boundary to include the wetland area on which the housing development will be located.

**Nepean Peninsula**

In Sorrento the former public golf course, located between the Old Melbourne Road and the Nepean Highway was sold to developers and opened in stages so as not to flood the market with too much land all at once which would deflate prices. Most lots have been sold and developed, bringing metropolitan suburbia to Sorrento. More recently the caravan parks on the Old Melbourne Road and St Paul’s Road have been sold and are being developed as prime real estate. As recently as May 2008 the MPSC approved a ‘facelift’ for the Portsea Golf Club, including a new two storey clubhouse with 24 rooms of accommodation, a 144 space car park, and a new adjoining subdivision of 21 existing residential lots. While the loss of public amenity is of great concern, the environmental effects are devastating. The destruction of the natural heritage is most evident with the mass removal of vegetation, the exposure of unstable and fragile sand dunes; and the building of inappropriately scaled and unsustainable dwellings.

3.4 Individual houses: development by stealth

It is not just developers who threaten the character and integrity of the small coastal towns. Individuals who buy old houses and choose to demolish and rebuild, or simply those who renovate can be culpable. The latter may take the form of deciding to add an extra storey so that a view of the water is now possible, or simply enlarging the original ‘small’ house to a size more in line with current house size.

**Crows Nest in Queenscliff**

In 2004, the former army barracks in Queenscliff, located on prime foreshore land known as Shortlands Bluff, was demolished. This move followed the sale of the barracks by the
Commonwealth Government to a developer. The site was then divided into 24 blocks, seven of which have direct beach frontage. Their individual sale price was expected to be as high as $2.5 million. These prime blocks are located on the sand dunes and have an unimpeded view of the Heads and Point Nepean. Although the Borough of Queenscliff guidelines limits the size of houses to two storeys, no limits on the actual size of house are in force. By mid-2007, six houses had been built on the land but only one house had been constructed on any of the sites with direct beach frontage. This house (Figure 5) exemplifies the problem of unrestrained building in areas of natural beauty that is challenging the environmental integrity of coastal towns such as Queenscliff. As a spokesperson for the local community association said, ‘When you see multi-storey buildings appear on the vegetation line it spoils the whole effect of natural beach areas. We have fought long and hard to try and stop this’.28

![Figure 5. Inappropriately sized housing in areas of natural beauty in Queenscliff](image)

On the Nepean Peninsula this too is a major problem. Over the past decade the Nepean Conservation Group has dealt with thirty permit applications a month, these being the ‘worst’ case scenarios. In recent years the numbers of applications have increased exponentially and the NCG can no longer keep abreast of them. The main issues are size of development:
the footprint of boundary to boundary building is unsustainable; ecologically wasteful: complete clearing of blocks; impact of concrete slab construction on sand dunes is not sustainable in fragile coastal environments. Like developers, builders continually test the boundaries: once they get one proposal approved, then there is a precedent. The example of Wattamola demonstrates a loss of natural and cultural heritage, and a new development that is destructive of character of place (Figure 6). MPSC flies the 'sustainability' banner, yet on the ground relies on voluntary groups such as the Nepean Conservation Group, the Nepean Historical Society, or neighbours, to act as development watch-dogs. The MPS has privatised the issuing of permits, to companies such as Nepean Permits. If developments are in breach of permit conditions, building permits are issued retrospectively; or fines are imposed and landholders are required to revegetate their denuded properties, but the amenity of the area has been adversely affected, the character of place assaulted. Neighbourhoods, streetscapes and precincts cannot be compensated for the loss.

![Figure 6. Wattamola replaced by an inappropriately scaled house on the ridge-line on the boundary of the Mornington peninsula national park. A historic 19th century property sits to the right.](image)

4. Local government: the status quo

How are communities to defend their towns against the adverse effects of development? O'Hare has described the Queensland resort of Noosa as ‘an exemplar in terms of how it has
converted cultural capital into economic success as a tourist resort'. He believes that the community’s articulation of the area’s heritage was critical to this process. In the case of the Nepean Peninsula and Borough of Queenscliffe, there has been no shortage of community articulation, as illustrated earlier in this paper. However, this has not been successful in preserving the Ozone Hotel, the Queenscliff Harbour, the context of the Continental Hotel or the historic townscape of Sorrento and other important cultural and historic features of these towns.

Local councils are the obvious bulwark to defend their communities from over- or inappropriate development. Queenscliffe Council recognises the importance of its history to its future survival. In addition to the extensive historical overlay covering much of Queenscliff and some parts of Point Lonsdale, the Borough retains a Heritage Advisor to advise both Council and resident on proposals affecting the heritage area and buildings in the Borough. A Restoration Fund is also available and offers low interest loans for the improvement of local historic buildings or works. Arguments to protect the historical nature of the town are frequently made in planning applications. For example, a recent application to demolish the Queenscliff Nursing Home and replace it with 23 apartments and five shops was rejected by the council because it believed ‘the proposed construction would adversely affect the significance of the adjoining heritage places and be out of keeping with the character of adjacent buildings’. The application was referred to the VCAT, where the developers successfully argued their case. In its judgement, VCAT ignored the local decisions, and those who will have to live with the consequences of their ruling. In response, the Mayor of Queenscliffe, said that the decision ‘smacks of a metropolitan approach being applied inappropriately to a coastal village that owes much of its living to its heritage and lifestyle character’. Others have comprehended the value of their heritage: Winston Churchill said ‘The farther backward you can look the farther forward you are likely to see’. George B Hartzog, Jr, the former Director of the US National Park Service (1964-1973) argued that ‘[National parks and sites] are more than physical resources. They are the delicate strands of nature and culture that bond generation to generation’. While history is seen as part of the
identity of place in Queenscliff and Sorrento, invoking history or heritage values (natural and cultural) has not provided protection for these coastal towns.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Our view is that tourism and development are destroying ‘place’ at Sorrento and Queenscliff, particularly their natural and cultural heritage. This will ultimately threaten the survival of these towns. A methodology is needed to establish carrying capacity in these peninsulas and their historic towns. Evidence presented in this paper is the tip of the iceberg. Some new residential buildings are likely to be unsustainable simply because of their size and use of resources. Some commercial developments such as continuous cafe, restaurant, and clothing shop creation is not sustainable because these locations are highly vulnerable to high petrol prices, and other global events that will push up the cost of private transport such as emissions trading, carbon taxes and peak oil. These will lead to declines in tourism. Isolation compounded by public transport are key issues for these communities. In the wake of the 2008 State budget, the Mornington Peninsula Leader headlined ‘Give us a fair crack: Peninsula demands better public transport’.33

A more sustainable development strategy might be one focused on the towns’ strengths under a banner such as ‘Visions of the Past and the Future’. However, it would have to be complemented by an effort to increase independence through ‘localisation’. At present, for example, the Borough of Queenscliffe has no hardware shop. In both towns clothing outlets abound, galleries of various descriptions appear, and numerous cafes and restaurants cater to passing and seasonal trade. In this regard the towns have reached saturation point and many businesses fail to really establish themselves, let alone keep going for long. Currently Queenscliffe and the Nepean Peninsula have only a small fragmented ‘industry’ based on natural tourism. For example, although Queenscliffe boasts a RAMSAR site, there is no business that offers bird watching as an activity or canoeing on Swan Bay. These historic places offer ideal opportunities for education and interpretation. Here history, sense of place and sustainability research should work together to contribute to the growth of sustainable
communities at Sorrento and Queenscliff. A transdisciplinary study can contribute to our broader understanding of place, by being ‘holistic’, and covering all local resources (e.g. natural, commercial, people, cultural). It would need to project out over an extended period to accommodate demographic changes, as well as key developments such as global warming.

Heritage in Queenscliff and Sorrento is under siege not just from the ravages of time and neglect but by tourism and development. The voracious capacity for growth in these two sectors makes them a real danger to the sustainable management of heritage.\textsuperscript{34} This paper argues for a paradigm shift in the tourism industry and the development sector in favour of heritage conservation. Louise Honman, a former heritage advisor for the Borough of Queenscliffe, suggests one must be careful not to be too purist about heritage.\textsuperscript{35} The focus should be on the big heritage battles, not on arguments about house colours. Heritage colours were probably determined anyway by what was available, not by what people would necessarily have chosen. Sub-division issues, the removal of trees, and new and inappropriate structures (Figure 7) are far more important.

\textbf{Figure 7.} Property for sale land side of the Blairgowrie Safe Boat Harbour, May 2008.
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Property prices are driven up by heritage and scarcity values. Since expansion is not possible on a peninsula, house and land prices rise. Changes demanded by developers and affluent newcomers can lead to the levelling of dunes, and the destruction of habitat, resulting in a huge loss of cultural amenity. Town planners and heritage advisors are key people on the ground in local municipalities. Honman suggests that councils should move quickly to stop inappropriate developments, so all involved know that the councils mean business. Engaging with the developers gives them heart and confidence. The more time and money they invest the harder they will fight. [Under the current planning scheme and Rescode they can object, and if they are good enough and use the rules well, they can get projects through.] It is too much like a “tick-a-box” system. Character studies of place need to be in such a format that they are accepted as policy documents by bodies such as VCAT.

Communities need to review overlays: natural, environmental and heritage so that they have teeth: overlays act as guidelines which are in effect a covenant over place/precinct/town so that people who buy into the area know their obligations and rights. At the moment the ‘carrot’ and ‘stick’ incentives must apply. Overlays must set a maximum footprint for the built environment, recognising that we are custodians of this place not owners to do with it what we will. On the ‘stick’ side overlays must be implemented and enforced (policed). Fines should be used to act as deterreents to vegetation removal; building without a permit and breaching guidelines. On the ‘carrot’ side local municipalities should provide alternatives to the ‘McMansions’ by highlighting examples of sustainable architecture respectful of the coastal environment. Barbara Norman, past national president of the Planning Institute of Australia, vividly summed up the current struggle to protect Australia’s coastal regions. She wrote that ‘(T)he Australian coastline is littered with exhausted communities battling to save the character and environment of their townships’.36

6. Acknowledgement

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Endnotes

6 (Ref: Richard Cotter, Chapter 7).
13 QH/QHM (undated), Hotels and Guesthouses of Queenscliffe - memories of a bygone era. Queenscliffe Herald and Queenscliffe Historical Museum.
15 QH/QHM (undated), Hotels and Guesthouses of Queenscliffe - memories of a bygone era. Queenscliffe Herald and Queenscliffe Historical Museum.
17 The *Echo*, 2005.
18 The authors thank Ian Haskins, for access to documents archived with the NCG, in reference to Application for Review No: P2842/2005 vis a vis objections submitted by NRA, NHS and NCG, and submissions to VCAT prepared by S Custance & Associates for the same.
19 VCAT, Administrative Division, Planning and Environment list, ref. No. P2842/2005, permit application no. PL05/1577, 16.08.06.
20 VCAT, Administrative Division, Planning and Environment list, ref. No. P863/2006, Permit application no. P05/2056, 25.08.06.
22 Rip Rumour, 2005.
The average house size in the 1950s was less than 100 m², whereas today it is more than double this size.

“Queenscliff braces for bigger things”, The Age, 10 January 2005.

“Queenscliff braces for bigger things”, The Age, 10 January 2005.

Refer to Leah O’Brien, “Planning on the Nepean Peninsula” (Fifth Year Thesis, Unpublished, School of Architecture and Building, Deakin University, Geelong, 2002).


BOQ rejects Queenscliff Nursing Home development, Queenscliffe Herald, August 2007.

Council slams VCAT decision, Queenscliffe Herald, April, 2008, 2.


Louise Honman, personal communication, 17 August 2007.
