

Community ‘Rally Round Our Dunes!’ to send strong message for urgent action to save Inverloch Surf Beach



The resilience of the Inverloch community is being tested by the rapid, on-going erosion of the surf beach and its dunes. While the Victorian Government’s Cape to Cape Resilience Project is developing a long-term adaptation plan for the Inverloch coastline, if action is not taken soon, there won’t be a beach to save. Important ecological values will be lost and adjoining community infrastructure and residences will be under serious threat.

After years of beach monitoring, reports, a documentary, interviews and discussions with authorities, South Gippsland Conservation Society’s Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project team reckon it’s time for the Bass Coast community and its visitors to make a stand and show how important a healthy surf beach is to the future of Inverloch.

The Society’s new President, Ed Thexton, caught up with Philip Heath, leader of the Society’s Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project, to find out more about the issue and the upcoming Rally.

Ed Thexton: For people not familiar with the situation, can you tell us, how has Inverloch's coast changed over the last decade?

Philip Heath: Up to 70 metres of the vegetated dunes that existed behind the 2-kilometre-long Inverloch Surf Beach in 2012 have been swept away. This is the most rapid change recorded along the Victorian coastline in European historical times.



Inverloch Surf Beach 2004 and 2021

At Wreck Creek, west of the Surf Lifesaving Club, there is only one metre of dune left between the ocean and the creek, with the estuarine lagoon system behind the dune under imminent threat. At Flat Rocks, at the western end of the beach, 80-year-old Coast Banksias are being undermined and are falling into the sea.

In the past ten years, over 8 hectares of dune vegetation have been lost, equivalent in area to 4.5 MCGs. This represents almost half of the total area of vegetated dunes that existed in 2012.

From being a wide, gently-sloping beach backed by more than 100 metres of vegetated dune, the surf beach is now much narrower, with little or no dry sand at high tide. It is strewn with fallen and dying vegetation, backed by a thin strip of steeply eroded dunes. Access tracks through the dunes have had to be closed and the surf lifesaving club lookout tower relocated three times.

Studies conducted for our [*Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project*](#) highlight the significant ecological, geomorphological, Indigenous cultural heritage and economic values of the dunes, all of which are rapidly being lost. The dunes provide biodiverse habitat for threatened and vulnerable flora and

fauna. The vegetation is also an important east-west biolink to the adjacent Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park.

The vegetated dunes also create a natural setting for the surf beach, and are a significant factor in its popularity. Critically, the dunes provide a buffer for residences on Surf Parade and beyond.



Wreck Creek Coastline 2021 and Flat Rock Coast Banksias 2021

Ed Thexton: What's causing the dramatic changes in Inverloch? Is there a climate change dimension to what's occurring?

Philip Heath: Our research indicates that the main contributing factors are increases in the frequency and intensity of erosion-inducing storms and bigger ocean swells, combined with rising sea levels.

Storms are now occurring so frequently that the dunes don't have time to recover, as may have occurred previously. In addition, sand eroded from the surf beach has been pushed into Andersons Inlet, where it cannot assist with surf beach replenishment.

These factors are very likely linked to climate change, which we expect will be confirmed by the current Victorian Government *Coastal Hazard Assessment*, due to report in early 2022.

Urgent climate action to minimise future impacts is absolutely critical to saving our beaches not only on the Bass Coast, but around Australia and world-wide.

Ed Thexton: What action would you like to see from the Victorian Government and its Agencies?

We were very pleased when Victorian Government funding was announced in October 2019 to address Inverloch Surf Beach erosion, with the initial focus on preparation of a *Coastal Hazard Assessment* to identify feasible management strategies. This is important work that will form the basis of a long-term adaptation strategy for Inverloch and adjoining sections of coastline, and the Society is continuing to provide input arising from our beach monitoring and other research undertaken for our *Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project*.

However, two years on from the funding announcement, the *Coastal Hazard Assessment* will not report until at least the end of March 2022. Meanwhile, the surf beach dunes have eroded a further 10 metres since the announcement, equivalent to one quarter of what's left. If the current rate of beach erosion continues, the dunes will be gone in 4 years. Once the dunes are gone, we will lose the beach, as the dunes are a reserve supply of sand for the beach.

This situation highlights the urgent need for short-term dune renourishment to 'hold the line' while the long-term response is being finalised, and then designed and funded, which could take several more years. The dune renourishment program should aim to re-establish the dunes to where they were in 2018 in order to 'buy some time', particularly at the Wreck Creek and Flat Rocks sections of coastline. The renourishment needs to be completed in early 2022, before the onset of the autumn and winter storm swells. Our research indicates that wet sand fencing and dune revegetation would be effective in complementing the dune renourishment.

The approach of providing short-term protection while longer-term planning is underway has been followed at other at-risk Victorian beaches, such as Apollo Bay, so we can't understand why there seems to be so much reluctance to do the same at Inverloch.

Ed Thexton: Why is it important for the community to support the ‘Rally Round Our Dunes!’ event? What’s planned for the big day?

Philip Heath: The rally is an opportunity for Bass Coast locals and visitors to come together to demonstrate how much they value Inverloch Surf Beach and its dunes.



After ten years of sustained coastline erosion, now is the time for those who love Inverloch Surf Beach to call for funding for both short- and long-term action to protect remaining environmental and community values, and to minimise future impacts. Loss of the beach and its dunes would have a devastating impact on residents, visitors and the local economy, as well as the natural environment.

The Rally will kick-off with a short welcome beside the Surf Lifesaving Club at 10.30am, after which we will walk to the surf beach with banners and form a line marking the dune location in 2012, before the current erosion began. Media has been invited and the Rally will be filmed. The event will wrap up by 12.30pm.



Ed Thexton: If you could send a message to the state and federal governments about the issue, what would it be?

Philip Heath: Inverloch Surf beach, the town's greatest asset, is under serious threat. Funding is urgently required to save the beach: firstly, to enable dune renourishment works to proceed in early 2022; and secondly, to rapidly implement the long-term adaptation plan recommendations arising from the current *Coastal Hazard Assessment*.

Ed Thexton: What else is happening with the Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project over this summer?

Philip Heath: We have a number of other initiatives on the go over the summer.

The team has refreshed our *Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project* exhibition and it's open for all to view at the Bunurong Environment Centre in Inverloch.

We'd love people to come in and have a look, and while their there, sign our petition calling on all levels of Government to commit additional funding for urgently required beach protection works. The petition can also be signed on-line at the [Friends of the Earth Melbourne](#) website, on the [Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project](#) page of the Society's website or on the Society's [Facebook](#) page.

We also have an extensive social media campaign underway, with assistance from the Friends of the Earth Climate Action team.

Our volunteers will be continuing our beach profile monitoring over the summer, and we will be presenting Inverloch Beach Erosion sessions as part of the Society's Holiday Education program at the Bunurong Environment Centre.



What can I do?

- **Attend** 'Rally Round Our Dunes!' to highlight how much you value Inverloch Surf Beach and its dunes - register via this [online form](#) and on [Facebook](#)
- **Visit** the *Inverloch Coastal Resilience Project* exhibition at the Bunurong Environment Centre and sign our petition
- **Follow** the South Gippsland Conservation Society on Facebook.

