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PPG is a non-profit organisation devoted to the conservation of the natural environment in the Peel Region of Western Australia

Manager of Governance

Shire of Murray

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RE: HERRON POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Shire of Murray should be commended for its very elaborate and well-considered Management Plant for Herron Point reserve.

I was very keen to endorse many of the recommendations of the proposal until I took a visit to Herron Point in February, spoke to the caretaker, spoke to some visitors and explored the area which had some unseemly sights of refuse, debris and substantial evidence of human trampling. Hence, I would like to raise some significant concerns before I comment on aspects of the new Management Plan.

One of the advantages of enjoying Herron Point is its ready accessibility from Forrest Highway, but also one of its disadvantages is its ready accessibility!

In the fairly recent past Herron Point was relatively more "remote" when access required a drive down the South West Highway and then a number of turns along local roadways. Now, from the Perth metropolitan area it is too easy to get to; a straight run down the Forrest Highway on a Friday night with available fast food at the nearby petrol station, which supplies you with all those red plastic take-away spoons which are easily discarded and which were ubiquitous on the Herron Point foreshore on my recent visit.

Despite the many readily available rubbish bins, which the Shire of Murray should take due credit for providing these appropriate facilities, the bins on inspection were only a quarter full while the car park and surrounds were awash with human debris, and horse manure in the car park itself. A car tyre was prominently visible in the adjacent wetlands.

I had an ample conversation with an elderly camping couple from Bundaberg QLD and another couple from Perth who thought Herron Point was an amazingly beautiful spot on the Harvey Estuary but spoilt by the huge influx of noisy, unregulated day and midnight trippers who filled up the car park, overflowed the toilets and were having a substantial alcohol-fuelled crabbing party until 5am.

Having a caretaker on site is not only very good planning but also an absolute necessity given the huge influx of numbers. The caretaker explained how the car park and environs simply cannot accommodate the influx of a hundred cars, and hence about 400 people, on many peak weekend nights during the months of crabbing season. Reportedly the sight is manageable with 30 cars (and population 100) but in tripling or quadrupling that, the human impact on the area breaks down. The toilets overflow, cars bank up behind the gravel road and there is a trail of debris with plastic waste tossed in to the nearby wetlands and estuarine system. But more than this, the weight of human numbers makes it very difficult to police the area. Apparently, Fisheries officers can't keep up with the influx of several hundred crabbers with their cooking pots and grinders. The caretaker described it as "a rape of the environment", without due policing to call people into account. This was not just his opinion but corroborated by some interstate visitors who I interviewed on locale. They loved the spot but said it was a shame, and indeed a crime, that large family groups could descend on the area and take fish and crabs of all sizes and in large numbers with impunity.

Of course, we would like many people to enjoy the natural environs of Herron Point, get out in nature, keep fit and appreciate the wonders of Australiana. BUT this is only going to work if Herron Point is well regulated and well policed. For example, four or five hundred people cannot suddenly descend on the Serpentine Falls National Park and do what they like. Lane Poole Reserve in Dwellingup is reasonably well policed. Last time I was there at the very popular Baden Powell water spout I saw no human refuse whatsoever despite fifty people enjoying the sight in the 2 hours that I was there. With this in mind, an entry fee to the Herron Point reserve may need to be considered in the future if visitor numbers continue to increase.

For the new upgrade at Herron Point to work there needs to be a substantial increase in Department of Parks and Wildlife, Shire ranger, and Fisheries enforcement personnel to ensure dedicated monitoring and policing. A DPaW ranger station would be good to think about in the future.

Before the proposal goes ahead it might also be valuable to have a traffic counter on the incoming road. I was totally surprised and somewhat shocked to hear about the huge numbers of people that visit Herron Point on a summer weekend. The challenge is how do you manage 400 or 500 people who are all keen to extract something from the estuary on a summer's weekend but who also bring with them the refuse and debris of our fast food, plastic, convenient throw-away society? Sadly, I've seen where our throw-away society throws things; into the estuary and adjoining wetlands. The new management plan does talk about more frequent inspections, but I don't think this goes far enough.

On a more positive note there are some very commendable aspects of the proposed plan. It is important that the plan has acknowledged that the "majority of the reserve comprises conservation category wetlands" and is a "significant migratory bird feeding area". Moreover, it is a Ramsar-listed wetland which has significant Federal Government treaty obligations. Hence the new provision of boardwalks, dedicated walk trails and some restrictive fencing to limit unauthorized pedestrian access are valuable adjuncts to visitor management.

The same applies to the adjacent Kooljerrenup nature reserve where the plan for dedicated walk trails through native vegetation to provide a "bushland experience" also assists in limiting new path creation by those meandering, but not so thoughtful, bushwalkers. Kooljerrenup nature reserve is one of the few remaining habitats in the south west of WA where the very rare native spider orchid *Caladenia Heugelii* can be found, and in recent years was a major study site by the then Conservation and Land Management botanists, who engaged in a significant number count for this endangered orchid. Hence, Kooljerrenup reserve needs to be managed and monitored with due diligence.

Upgrading, but not increasing, the bridle trails in the area is also consistent with the overall management plan. But I would suggest the installation of appropriate signage requesting responsible use of these trails along with geo-location information (such as the recently introduced BEN innovation in response to shark attacks off our local beaches : Bush/Beach Emergency Numbers) to assist in the circumstance of a severe accident. It is a little-known fact that since the year 2000, more Australians have been killed by horse related incidents than by any other animal; marine or terrestrial. We may fear spiders, snakes and sharks but they come a distant second or third to horses in regard to human fatalities. An emergency plan for a severe horse related accident on the site would be wise.

The installation of interpretive signage in regard to local fauna and flora is very much endorsed by our group. People, in general, are more likely to protect the environment if they understand the local environment and its inhabitants. Hence interpretive signage has a very valuable educative importance, and enhances the experience of the casual visitor or tourist. Visitors may be very interested to know that the wetlands and estuarine environment at Herron Point are habitat to a large number of migratory and local bird species (some of which have “protected” status). We often underestimate the importance of eco-tourism to our local economy, but the money that tourists spend on visiting our natural environs can then greatly contribute to the sustainable facilities that we wish to install as part of our upgraded plans.

As well as the proposed signage our group would also recommend a relevant sign in regard to dolphin rescue as currently erected in other parts of the Peel-Harvey estuary. I have recently been informed that there have been several dolphin strandings in recent years in waters adjacent to Herron Point, hence appropriate signage with exact geo-location information would be highly valuable.

In summary, upgrading all the facilities, paths and trails at Herron Point is a rational response to the area’s increasing popularity, especially as the area is becoming known to national caravaners and is recommended on some camping websites. However, the biggest challenge to this beautiful site on the Harvey Estuary is how to provide the human resources to appropriately manage, monitor and police the ever-increasing number of visitors that will descend on this area and its environs, when it has already outstripped its current management capacity.

Yours sincerely
Melvyn J. Tuckey
Committee Member
Peel Preservation Group (Inc.)

cc. Robin Clarke MLA, Member for Murray / Wellington