# 1. Planning

1.1 Summerland Peninsula Master Plan 11
1.2 Summerland Peninsula Business Case 11
1.3 Key Area Plans 11
1.4 Whole of Island paths and tracks assessment 12
1.5 Collaborative asset planning 12
1.6 Operational Five Year Plans 2012–2017 12

## 2. Conservation

2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets 13
2.2 Facilitate co–operative approaches to island–wide environmental management 13
2.3 Raise the capacity and profile of research 14
2.4 Integrate and measure organisational sustainability 14
2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making 14
2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation 14

## 3. Visitor attraction and experience

3.1 Extend immersive nature–based experiences 15
3.2 Strengthen the planning and delivery of interpretation 15
3.3 Increase the person–to–person communication of information 15
3.4 Extend education and training infrastructure 15
3.5 Use technology to increase the exchange of information 16
3.6 Optimise our visitor markets 16
3.7 Protect our market profile 16

## 4. Community

4.1 Increase the frequency and depth of communication with the local community 17
4.2 Develop a policy framework for proposed changes impacting on public access 17
4.3 Increase community participation, visitation and involvement 18
4.4 Strengthen connections with the local Indigenous community 18

## 5. Organisation

5.1 Build a strong organisational culture 19
5.2 Plan our workforce 19

## 6. Governance

6.1 Prepare an Issues Paper analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the current governance framework 20
6.2 Develop a position paper articulating the Board’s recommendation for a preferred governance framework 20
6.3 Advocate to Government and key stakeholders 20
Development of the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan 2012–2017 was developed by Phillip Island Nature Parks between April and November 2011. The process involved extensive internal and external consultation, including the Nature Parks’ Board, staff, stakeholders and the community.

The planning process included a Reference Group comprising 13 organisations of the Nature Parks’ stakeholders and the local community.

Development of the plan involved extensive community engagement including information dissemination in local media and online, a community survey, broad distribution of the draft plan, community information sessions and a five week period for public comment on the draft plan.

Glossary

The following meanings are recognised in the context of this plan:

**Visitor**
Extends to all those who interact with the Nature Parks, including tourists, local community members, sightseers, students, professional specialists, and those undertaking passive and active recreation.

**Conservation**
The Nature Parks practises the conservation of fauna and flora, land, water, air, Indigenous heritage, European history and community culture.

**Phillip Island (The Island)**
References to Phillip Island include Churchill Island.

**Phillip Island Nature Parks (Nature Parks)**
Designated land manager on behalf of Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), of over 1,805 hectares of Crown Land across several sites on Phillip Island set aside under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978. The area includes the Penguin Parade, Koala Conservation Centre, the Nobbies and Churchill Island visitor centres and a range of woodlands, coastal reserves and wetlands.

**Summerland Peninsula**
Includes the land from the current entrance to the Nature Parks adjacent to Green and Swan Lakes and extends the length of the peninsula to Seal Rocks. Also included is existing infrastructure at Summerland Bay (Penguin Parade and administration) and the Nobbies Visitor Centre.
Introduction from the Chair

The completion of the Summerland Estate buyback in June 2010 is testament to the vision and tenacity of consecutive State Governments over a 25 year period. Reinstating the Summerland Peninsula as reserved Crown Land presents Phillip Island Nature Parks, the Bass Coast community and the residents of Victoria with the opportunity to create a new era for the Nature Parks.

This Strategic Plan outlines the major steps to be taken in the next five years towards achieving a bold vision for the future of the Nature Parks, offering an enhanced, authentic and diverse visitor experience founded on the highest conservation principles and supported by a contemporary governance framework. An iconic destination in the making, the Nature Parks will structure its decision making and measure its success on a comprehensive framework demonstrating a critical balance between conservation, recreation and ecotourism.

The Victorian Government acknowledges the need to grow regional tourism including Phillip Island and the Nature Parks, as a priority nature–based tourism destination and a major economic contributor to Victoria in key strategies including: the 10 Year Tourism and Events Industry Strategy 2006–2016, the Regional Tourism Action Plan 2009–2012 and Victoria’s Nature–Based Tourism Strategy 2008–2012. Further, these strategies embrace a commitment from the State Government to invest in the upgrade of the Nature Parks’ infrastructure and experiences to better meet and anticipate future visitor expectations and to address issues associated with inappropriate and ageing infrastructure.

This Strategic Plan articulates Phillip Island Nature Parks Board of Management’s key objectives and directions for the period 2012 to 2017. It identifies the current challenges facing the Nature Parks and establishes the Board’s priorities in protecting and enhancing this unique asset for the benefit and enjoyment of all Victorians and visitors to come.

A key priority is addressing the risks posed by the aging infrastructure of the Penguin Parade Visitor Centre.

The Strategic Plan was developed in consultation with our community, key Government agencies and a wide range of the organisations and individuals who play a role, or have an interest in, the operations and future of the Nature Parks.

Reflecting on the many achievements of the Nature Parks, we acknowledge the tireless commitment of staff, volunteers and the local community as well as the partnerships that exist between the Board, the State Government of Victoria and Bass Coast Shire Council (BCSC). The intensity and productivity of these partnerships is only set to strengthen as we move forward together in tackling significant cultural and physical change. Where possible we will seek to interact and partner with the local community and local traders.

We have entered one of the most important stages in the history of the Nature Parks where we must recognise and embrace all that the future offers for all land under the Nature Parks’ responsibility. In particular, the Nature Parks understands the enormous responsibility it carries in respecting the sacrifice of the Summerland Estate landowners who gave up their homes for the long term protection of the little penguin colony and the sensitive coastal environment. The Nature Parks also acknowledges the significant investment made by successive Victorian Governments in the Summerland buyback.

Over the next five years the Nature Parks will work towards restoration of the peninsula’s fauna and flora and plan the creation of an iconic nature destination. During this phase, the Board commits to not make any recommendations regarding the current use of the South Coast Road.

The Nature Parks commits to an inclusive and sustainable future and we look forward to working together with staff, the local community and key stakeholders to achieve it.

I commend this Plan to you.

Dr Irene Irvine, Chair
Phillip Island Nature Parks
Our mission
To conserve and enhance the Nature Parks’ environment for current and future generations, achieving a balanced environmental, economic and social outcome.

Our vision
To be a world–recognised place of conservation excellence, providing outstanding and authentic experiences for all.

About Phillip Island Nature Parks
Phillip Island Nature Parks is a not–for–profit body created by the State Government of Victoria in 1996. Located in Western Port, 120 kilometres south east of central Melbourne, it comprises over 1,805 hectares of Crown Land set aside under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 “for the conservation of areas of natural interest or beauty or of scientific, historic or archaeological interest”.

The Nature Parks is part of the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Western Port Biosphere Reserve, and abuts the Western Port Ramsar wetland site. Phillip Island is part of Bunurong and Boon wurrung country, and the Nature Parks conserves important elements of the area’s Indigenous heritage, as well as historical sites of European settlement and agriculture.

Overseen by a Board of Management, our primary role is conservation of the Nature Parks’ natural and cultural assets, in particular Phillip Island’s colony of little penguins. We undertake an extensive environmental management program, informed by our research activities, and provide education and interpretation about Phillip Island’s flora, fauna and history.

We receive no recurrent operational funding from the State Government and generate revenue from ecotourism to fund our work in conservation. The Nature Parks has become one of Australia’s leading ecotourism destinations. 785,657 people visited our ticketed visitor centres at the Penguin Parade, Churchill Island and the Koala Conservation Centre in 2010–11, 55 per cent from overseas. A further 299,312 visited the Nobbies Centre (free entry), bringing our total number of visitors to 1,084,969 for the 2010–11 period. Many more visited Phillip Island’s significant natural coastal reserves, also managed by the Nature Parks, to enjoy recreation and sightseeing.

The Nature Parks is located in one of Australia’s fastest growing regions. The current population of Bass Coast Shire is expected to increase by 40 per cent over the next 20 years. We are the largest employer on Phillip Island.

In 2010, a 25–year program by successive Victorian governments was completed with the buyback of the Summerland Estate, a residential development which had impacted significantly on the Summerland Peninsula’s little penguin colony to the point that the birds risked extinction. The former estate is now incorporated into the Nature Parks, all infrastructure has been removed and the little penguin population is thriving.
For a more detailed map refer to map LEGL./10-005 on the www.penguins.org.au website.
Our aspirations for the future

Within 20 years, Phillip Island Nature Parks will be experienced and managed as a network of special “places” rather than a series of disparate sites. It will celebrate the special mix of land, sea, flora, fauna and human history found at Phillip Island.

The primary purpose of the Nature Parks – to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural assets in our care – will be clear in everything we do, from the way our buildings are designed, to our work practices and the messages we share.

We will be recognised for excellence in environmental management underpinned by long–term scientific research. Protection of Phillip Island’s rich biodiversity will be at the centre of our work and species once under threat or lost entirely to the island will flourish. Significant Indigenous and European heritage will be recognised and preserved, and delicate ecosystems protected. The island will be home to one of the world’s largest populations of little penguins.

People who engage with the Nature Parks will have opportunities to participate in our conservation work, and come to understand more about the need to look after our planet and actions they can take to do so.

The Nature Parks will operate within key precincts, each with defined ecotourism, recreation and conservation zones. The attributes of each precinct, and strategies for their management, will be carefully planned, documented and implemented.

The Nature Parks will be an internationally renowned ecotourism destination, attracting visitors not only to experience little penguins in their natural environment, but also other remarkable wildlife and habitats. People will spend longer at the Nature Parks and at Phillip Island, exploring habitats, landscapes, seas and heritage sites, visiting townships and staying locally.

Sustained demand for our deeply engaging, quality experiences will allow us to be financially robust, providing secure funding for our core activities and continuing to make a strong contribution to the local and state economies.

Buildings, wildlife viewing areas and access ways will sit sensitively within the environment, and minimise disturbance to wildlife, protect habitat, minimise energy use and waste production. They will accommodate visitors at peak periods without decreasing the quality of the experience.

The Summerland Peninsula will be our flagship. Its biodiversity restored, it will be a world–class example of conservation, recreation and ecotourism activities successfully coexisting. The Peninsula will remain free of invasive development, with sensitive infrastructure providing access to its unique coastal setting. While filled with activity, the Peninsula will continue to provide a sense of space and solitude. Similar to Wilson’s Promontory, it will be an iconic place for Victoria.

Our staff will work in an environment of trust and appreciation, supported by opportunities for training and development. We will be an employer of choice in our region. People of all ages will participate in learning programs drawing on the Nature Parks’ natural and cultural assets and our staff’s strengths, skills and experience in fauna and flora management, research, ecotourism and hospitality.

Achieving this vision is a long–term process. This Strategic Plan addresses the coming five year period, during which time we will take important steps towards realising the 20 year vision for the Nature Parks.
Our current situation

In the 15 years since our formation, Phillip Island Nature Parks has achieved significant gains for the ecology of Phillip Island. Through our research and environmental management, habitats have been enhanced and pest plants and predators reduced.

The little penguin colony, reduced to 18,000 birds in the 1980s, now exceeds 32,000 and no penguins have been killed by foxes on the Summerland Peninsula for two years. Protected bird species including cape barren geese, hooded plovers and short tailed shearwaters are stable and our koala breeding program is a continuing success. Churchill Island’s historic buildings and grounds have been preserved and enhanced.

Partnerships developed with volunteers and our community, Landcare, BCSC, DSE and other agencies have allowed us to achieve these outcomes. We have a skilled workforce with a deep knowledge of Phillip Island’s natural and cultural assets. The local community is protective of the Island and keen to be kept informed of the work of the Nature Parks.

Millions of people have visited the Nature Parks for recreation, ecotourism and education, and supported the economy of the region and state. The economic contribution of the Penguin Parade in 2010–11 was estimated to be $125 million to the Victorian economy, injecting $64 million into the Bass Coast economy. Our “3 Parks Pass” and new “premium” visitor experiences have succeeded in spreading visitation more widely across the Nature Parks. This also increases length of stay on Phillip Island, benefiting our community.

However, our long term viability depends on our capacity to reinvent the Nature Parks for the 21st century and beyond. To fulfil our core goal of conservation, we must also be economically effective by achieving a sustainable business model; and socially effective by fulfilling our responsibilities to the local community and the environment, including recognising recreational users.

Our primary conservation goal is intermeshed with economic and social imperatives: all must “turn” for the Nature Parks to fully meet its obligations

Our physical infrastructure is ageing, and some of the visitor experiences we offer – notably at the Penguin Parade and the Nobbies – do not reflect our conservation ethos nor meet changing visitor expectations. Visitor surveys taken at the Penguin Parade show levels of dissatisfaction with the current experience and facilities.

Despite the extraordinary advantage of our authentic setting and wildlife, the Nature Parks is not keeping pace with contemporary standards for quality nature-based destinations. The potential for visitors to immerse themselves and learn from the unique natural and cultural assets in our care is not fully realised. Opportunities to extend length of stay and develop quality experiences are limited by inadequate infrastructure. Projected increases in international tourism will place extra strain on our facilities.
The dominance of the Penguin Parade in the profile of the Nature Parks is a strategic risk. It is critical that we present a more integrated “whole of place” experience to maintain the destinations’ appeal should the little penguin population reduce or cease to exist.

The Nature Parks is reliant on revenue generated from ecotourism. We receive no recurrent operational funding from Government, and limited project and capital funding. Ecotourism revenue supports our conservation work, provides for recreational use, and stimulates the State and regional economy. It allows us to maintain existing infrastructure, however is not sufficient to provide for the major capital works required to achieve a truly outstanding nature-based destination at Phillip Island.

Over time, we risk losing market relevance and thus suffer a decline in visitation. If this was to occur, our financial viability would be compromised and our capacity to fund critical work in environmental management, research, education and recreation reduced. In addition, there would be significant economic consequences for the region and the State.

The Nature Parks faces other challenges. Global threats such as climate variation are ever present, and increases in our local and global population will increase pressure on the Parks’ ecosystems and capacities.

The Board believes that the governance framework on which the Nature Parks must build its future is not sufficiently robust. We operate under legislation which does not recognise the complexity of our work, nor provide a clear statement of purpose, roles or reporting requirements. In addition, the Nature Parks lacks the statutory capacity to efficiently respond to market fluctuations by setting its own entry fees.

Our social obligation as a manager of Crown Land has been insufficiently acknowledged. Better recognising the importance of recreational use, and connecting more deeply with our local and the wider community, will help address this.

Today Phillip Island Nature Parks stands at a turning point in its history. It is our aim to establish a pathway to our future which, as it evolves over the next two decades, will ensure the long-term sustainability of this unique place.
Our vision
To be a world recognised place of conservation excellence, providing outstanding and authentic experiences for all.
Five year strategies

This plan for 2012–2017 summarises the strategic–level priorities that we will pursue in the next five years. As strategic responses, these are largely new initiatives, or significant changes in previous activities. In parallel, we will continue to develop detailed planning documents for our established programs in environmental management, research, education and administrative areas.

Strategic imperatives

To move towards our future vision we must:

• Embed our core goal of conservation in the way we work, the messages we give and all experiences of the Nature Parks.
• Lay the foundations to reinvent the Nature Parks as an outstanding contemporary conservation destination, and the Summerland Peninsula as an environmental, recreational and ecotourism icon.
• Ensure our organisation has an appropriate governance framework and the partnerships to enable us to deliver and maintain our vision in the critical years ahead.

Lines of action

Our five year strategies fall into six lines of action:

1 Planning: We will provide the detail needed to outline our vision for the future and will involve the community and stakeholders in this process. We will pursue major capital funding to allow us to deliver the full potential of this special place.

2 Conservation: We will further strengthen the protection of the natural and cultural assets in our care. We will work with public and private sector partners, and build community awareness to achieve conservation gains across the whole island. We will build the profile and capacity of our research to underpin and sustain the conservation effort.

3 Visitor attraction and experience: We will move towards providing immersive, authentic experiences, allowing our conservation priority and ecotourism business model to sit comfortably together and more strongly share our core messages.

4 Community: We will deepen our engagement with our region and community, seeking to achieve trust through increased communication and transparency. We will develop stronger partnerships in the region and be clearer about roles and responsibilities.

5 Organisation: We will make sure our organisation is skilled and confident and that our staff feel supported and connected to each other.

6 Governance: We will advocate the formation of a new governance framework which is more appropriate for an organisation of our size, significance and breadth.
1 Planning

We have outlined the principles of the place and organisation we hope Phillip Island Nature Parks will be in the future. We now need to build in detail the steps required to achieve this vision.

During the timeframe of this Strategic Plan, we will undertake thorough planning to crystallise feasible options for moving forward, involve our staff, community and stakeholders and scope other resourcing requirements.

Many areas of the Nature Parks require detailed planning and the establishment of clear goals for conservation, interpretation, access and infrastructure and the creation of better linkages to build a sense of a whole “place”.

Among our most important goals over the next five years is to create a compelling case to the State Government for public investment to allow the Nature Parks to deliver on the full potential of the Summerland Peninsula, beginning with the building of a new Penguin Parade Visitor Centre.

1.1 Summerland Peninsula Master Plan

1.1.1 Build on the principles established in the Summerland Peninsula Strategic Framework (completed September 2011) to develop a detailed Master Plan for the precinct. Including landscape treatment; options for the future of the Penguin Parade and Nobbies facilities; siting of access ways, viewing areas and interpretation; transport options, in particular walking and cycling; recreational use and access; budgets and resourcing requirements.

1.1.2 Engage and consult with stakeholders and the wider community.

1.1.3 Adopt the principle of sustainability in planning, design and materials and prioritise the wellbeing of wildlife.

1.2 Summerland Peninsula Business Case

1.2.1 Develop a business case seeking funding from the Victorian Government for public investment in capital works, based on demonstrating the environmental, social and economic benefits to be delivered by the fulfilment of the Summerland Peninsula Master Plan.

1.3 Key Area Plans

1.3.1 Apply the principles established in the Summerland Peninsula Strategic Framework to develop Key Area Plans for other main areas of the Nature Parks. Include the definition of recreation, ecotourism and conservation areas; habitat and wildlife management; interpretive themes; infrastructure planning; parking and transport; carrying capacities; walking track linkages; Indigenous sites; the identification of appropriate new ecotourism products and recreation experiences.

Key Area Plans will also address elements specific to each area:

1.3.2 Churchill Island: potential for a museum-standard exhibition space; curation of the historic collections; expanded customer service facilities; Indigenous heritage; European heritage; enhancement of the Biosphere Reserve and Churchill Island Marine National Park; Fishers Wetland story and recreation use.

1.3.3 Koala Conservation Centre, Oswin Roberts Reserve and Ventnor Koala Reserve: road entrance review; Koala Management Strategy; bird viewing experiences; recreational strategy.

1.3.4 Cape Woolamai: significant Indigenous site preservation; improved integration with Life Savers’ operations; short-tailed shearwater protection and nature viewing potential.

1.3.5 Rhyll Inlet, Transfer Station site and wetlands: migratory birds strategy; enhancement and use of Transfer Station site; use of Conservation Hill including the existing dwelling; enhancement of the Ramsar site.

1.3.6 South Coast areas including Pyramid Rock, Berry’s Beach, Forrest Caves and Sunderland Bay: hooded plover protection strategy; recommendations to address the Scenic Estate land parcel in collaboration with BCSC and Parks Victoria.

1.3.7 North Coast areas including Ventnor West: hooded plover and short-tailed shearwater protection strategy and Indigenous site preservation.
1.4 Whole of Island paths and tracks assessment
1.4.1 In partnership with BCSC, complete the island–wide mapping of existing walking and cycling trails, identifying gaps and potential linkages across Phillip Island.
1.4.2 Work with Phillip Island residents, local farmers, coastal communities, the Phillip Island Tourism & Business Association, BCSC and other relevant authorities to investigate the feasibility of walking tracks along the south coast of Phillip Island and explore opportunities to link existing tracks. Identify potential impacts on sensitive habitats, wildlife and farming.
1.4.3 Work with Phillip Island Bicycle Users Group, Phillip Island Pony Club, BCSC and private landowners to evaluate the viability of increasing access for cyclists and horse riders on appropriate tracks and areas.

1.5 Collaborative asset planning
1.5.1 With BCSC and DSE, evaluate the current management of infrastructure at beaches and public areas, including car parks, toilets, paths and boardwalks, and explore ways to increase efficiencies and make responsibilities clearer.
1.5.2 Work with BCSC to evaluate future demands for recreational access, in particular to key beaches, and develop strategies to improve management during peak periods.

1.6 Operational Five Year Plans 2012–2017
1.6.1 Develop five year plans for the key areas of the Nature Parks’ work: environment, research, marketing and ecotourism, education, technology, asset management and human resources workforce.
1.6.2 Undertake a process of consultation to inform the public regarding the developing of the environment management plan.
2 Conservation
We have achieved significant gains for the environment through our research-led environmental management programs. However, we recognise that work remains to be done and that there are global and local threats which may impact on the Nature Parks’ future.

Fauna and flora do not recognise jurisdictional boundaries, so cross-tenure co-operation, as well as working more closely with farmers and other private landowners, is important to advance island-wide approaches to natural resource management.

The research that underpins our environmental work is a key strategic asset for the Nature Parks; however the capacity and profile of our scientific studies and their important outcomes could be significantly increased.

We will encourage increased environmental awareness and responsibility across the community and embed more deeply our conservation ethos in the way we work, our infrastructure and processes.

2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets
  2.1.1 Implement strategies for environmental management which are consistent with the principles of the Victorian Coastal Council’s Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008.
  2.1.2 Build our resilience to climate variation and our capacity to manage environmental hazards by investigating the likely impacts of these risks to the environmental, social, cultural and economic assets of the Nature Parks as well as monitoring these impacts.
  2.1.3 Assess the potential to create buffer zones, protecting sensitive areas from the impacts of climate variation or population pressures.
  2.1.4 Research the viability and impact of reintroducing Indigenous fauna and flora to the Summerland Peninsula and other suitable areas of the Nature Parks.
  2.1.5 Develop strategies to manage the effects of future increases in recreational and ecotourism visitation on the Nature Parks’ environmental values.
  2.1.6 Apply the Nature Parks’ expert coastal and marine knowledge to advocate for environmental protection relating to local and regional developments.
  2.1.7 Enhance the enduring protection of the Nature Parks through National Heritage listing and, as a long term aspiration, evaluate the achievement of World Heritage Listing.

2.2 Facilitate co-operative approaches to island-wide environmental management
  2.2.1 Together with the community and BCSC, assess funding options for an island-wide flora and fauna strategy, setting priorities for pest plant, animal management and revegetation programs across Phillip Island. Work with Landcare, farmers and other landowners to explore inclusion of private land in the strategy.
  2.2.2 Move towards an integrated coastal management strategy for Phillip Island, working with DSE, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Parks Victoria, Westernport Water, BCSC, Melbourne Water, local coastal management organisations, non-government organisations and private landowners.
  2.2.3 Continue to work with DSE, BCSC and farmers to refine an island-wide management approach for vermin and feral animals – including increased research into rodents and cats, and continue to move towards a fox free island.
  2.2.4 Continue to work with DSE, BCSC, farmers and interested conservation groups to explore management strategies for the increased populations of mammals such as swamp wallabies and native birds including little ravens and cape barren geese.
2.3 Raise the capacity and profile of research

2.3.1 Develop a business case for the development of a defined research entity to enhance capacity, increase visibility and generate external recognition of the research function.

2.3.2 Explore ways to increase awareness of the research which underpins the Nature Parks’ conservation work through interpretation and visitor experiences.

2.3.3 Extend our world recognition as experts in little penguins to include wider migratory and seabird issues and management.

2.3.4 Collaborate with Victoria University and Monash University towards the delivery and application of Magnetic Particle Technology to wildlife rehabilitation for oiled seabirds.

2.4 Integrate and measure organisational sustainability

2.4.1 Evaluate global environmental certification schemes to enhance operational efficiencies and increase corporate social responsibility.

2.4.2 Within the limitations of existing infrastructure, reduce our total carbon footprint by 10 per cent by the end of 2012 and set targets for longer term reductions.

2.4.3 Design new infrastructure utilising sustainable materials, maximise energy and water efficiency and minimise waste.

2.4.4 Reduce solid waste in food and beverage services by 80 per cent through compostable packaging and changes to management practices. Collaborate with BCSC and the Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group to achieve this target.

2.4.5 Explore transport options to reduce carbon emissions within the Nature Parks, including green–powered vehicles, visitor shuttles, cycling and centralised parking systems and, where feasible, establish targets and measure gains.

2.4.6 Increase opportunities for staff and visitors to encounter and be actively involved in waste reduction and recycling programs across the Nature Parks.

2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making

2.5.1 Establish a Conservation Impact Assessment process to inform internal decision making across all areas of our activities. Criteria could include environmental impact, ethical sourcing and the degree of compliance with conservation principles.

2.5.2 Review retail and commercial products, and assess the financial viability of sourcing items that are sustainable, ethical and locally produced.

2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation

2.6.1 Work with appropriate partners including BCSC, Landcare, Friends Groups, the Barb Martin Bushbank and Coast Action in supporting community awareness programs and encourage environmentally responsible and sustainable practices across Phillip Island.

2.6.2 Increase two–way communication about the way environmental risks impact on Phillip Island’s wildlife, in particular nesting and roosting birds, so residents learn about conservation practices and the Nature Parks can address community needs.

2.6.3 Work with BCSC to identify methods to encourage responsible pet ownership and reduce the impact of domestic animals on wildlife and delicate habitats.

2.6.4 Work with the Phillip Island & District Historical Society, the local community, and BCSC to extend understanding of local history through the establishment of a Phillip Island Heritage Trail.
3 Visitor attraction and experience

Providing quality opportunities for visitors to experience the Nature Parks’ special places and wildlife in their natural habitat is central to our goals. Our aim is that every visit made – whether for ecotourism, recreation, education or volunteering – will increase a visitor’s knowledge and understanding about the work we do and encourage people to implement conservation actions in their own lives.

We are moving the Nature Parks from an attraction focus to one of immersive, authentic experiences that are respectful of wildlife and contribute to the protection of natural ecosystems. Enhancing the ways we share our knowledge with people who visit the Nature Parks through interpretation and education will help us achieve this.

The Nature Parks’ major source of revenue is from our ticketed visitor centres, so maintaining our profile as one of Australia’s significant ecotourism destinations underpins our financial viability. By providing experiences that emphasise the authentic natural values of this place, delivered through environmentally sensitive modern infrastructure, our conservation priority and ecotourism business model will sit comfortably together.

Over the next five years we aim to increase overall paid visitation, particularly through the anticipated significant growth in Chinese visitation to Victoria, and through the establishment of a new Penguin Parade Visitor Centre. We will strive to maintain market share of the domestic tourism sector and build intrastate visitation drawing on Victoria’s rising population levels.

3.1 Extend immersive nature–based experiences

3.1.1 Increase the delivery of appropriate high yield, immersive experiences, particularly on the Summerland Peninsula as habitat remediation programs proceed.

3.1.2 Evaluate options to develop a whole–of–island scenic boat experience. Assess infrastructure requirements, and work with the Phillip Island Tourism and Business Association to consider possible business models and private sector partnerships.

3.2 Strengthen the planning and delivery of interpretation

3.2.1 Commission an interpretation plan for the whole Nature Parks including: identifying the core message that every visitor should receive; developing major interpretive themes for the whole Nature Parks, as well as site–specific interpretive themes; and interpretation methodologies.

3.3 Increase the person–to–person communication of information

3.3.1 Expand the Volunteer Guide Program to support the delivery of information and visitor assistance at the Penguin Parade, Koala Conservation Centre, Churchill Island and, in the longer term, the Summerland Peninsula, including “roving” guides and regular guided walks.

3.3.2 Recruit Indigenous rangers to deliver specialist Indigenous experiences.

3.4 Extend education and training infrastructure

3.4.1 Evaluate the pre–feasibility of developing education facilities at the Conservation Hill dwelling, to be managed by the Nature Parks or through a private sector partnership.

3.4.2 Pursue the development of increased purpose–designed facilities for the delivery of education programs.

3.4.3 Develop a learning plan to utilise the new Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre to deliver training for other natural resource management organisations and bodies.
3.5 Use technology to increase the exchange of information

3.5.1 Increase web-based delivery of educational, research and visitor information, prioritising the redevelopment of the Nature Parks’ website and the application of online devices and social media.

3.5.2 In partnership with key educational stakeholders and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, explore applications of technology to extend the reach of educational programs into classrooms and to connect students with wildlife (e.g. live-stream of the activity taking place inside a little penguin burrow).

3.6 Optimise our visitor markets

3.6.1 Implement strategies to capitalise on key international markets with Tourism Victoria, specifically the growing Chinese market aligning with Tourism Victoria’s China 2020 Strategic Plan.

3.6.2 Collaborate with Destination Gippsland, Destination Phillip Island and Phillip Island Tourism and Business Association to identify opportunities within the Chinese market and other emerging international markets, including India and South America.

3.6.3 Work with Tourism Victoria and Destination Phillip Island to support the development of a Regional Tourism Board for the Phillip Island region, and work with the Board following its formation.

3.6.4 Identify tactical marketing approaches for all visitor markets which support the delivery of strong conservation messages.

3.6.5 Pursue strategies to draw on the high levels of projected growth in the populations of south-eastern Victoria and Melbourne to increase intrastate visitation.

3.6.6 Work with local tourism operators to increase joint ticketing initiatives and enhance Phillip Island’s tourism.

3.7 Protect our market profile

3.7.1 Work with DSE to ensure Phillip Island remains Victoria’s pre-eminent location to experience little penguins, and that alternative locations, including the St Kilda Pier, do not impact on our market profile.
4 Community

The very existence of the Nature Parks is, in part, the result of direct action and long–term campaigning by members of Phillip Island’s community. Most recently, the successful completion of the Summerland Peninsula buyback program was achieved only with the participation of property owners within the former estate.

Many in the local community have a close involvement with the Nature Parks, including local volunteers and groups who support our work in environmental management and heritage conservation. However, local consultation has identified the need to strengthen our engagement with the community and provide more opportunities to understand and use the Nature Parks. We acknowledge the need for the Nature Parks to build trust and to listen to the community.

Significant growth through regional and local urbanisation and population means our role in balancing conservation, recreation and ecotourism is increasingly critical. As well as embedding recreational needs in our planning, we will enhance our communication, consultation and transparency in decision making.

Building on the 2010 Memorandum of Understanding with BCSC, we will develop a stronger and clearer partnership with local Government and increase the community’s understanding of our respective roles and responsibilities.

Our goal is for all those who care for Phillip Island to understand, regularly use and take pride in the Nature Parks.

4.1 Increase the frequency and depth of communication with the local community

4.1.1 Implement a program of community and stakeholder engagement including the creation of a dedicated community liaison role (commenced 2011), delivering increased information to the public and local media.

4.1.2 Ensure public engagement is built into the planning processes for the future of the Nature Parks.

4.1.3 Report to the community annually through a “Community Report” summarising the Nature Parks’ key activities and outcomes.

4.1.4 Increase the use of online technology to establish two–way communication, including social media and a dedicated community information section at www.penguins.org.au.

4.2 Develop a policy framework for proposed changes impacting on public access

4.2.1 Establish criteria for emergency, short, medium and long–term changes, including weightings for public safety, environmental risk and anticipated public impact.

4.2.2 Work with BCSC to establish a shared position on the assessment of risks, including the application of an evidence–based approach to decision making.

4.2.3 Engage and consult with the community as part of any consideration of long–term or seasonal changes to public access.

4.2.4 If long–term changes to public access are considered, clearly communicate to the public about the change, the reasons for it, and the timeframe for implementation.
4.3 Increase community participation, visitation and involvement

4.3.1 Assess the feasibility of programs to encourage local visitation to paid-entry facilities, such as complimentary passes, discounts or “bring a visitor” schemes and annual Community Open Days.

4.3.2 Increase opportunities for the community to become involved in the delivery of interpretation through the recruitment and training of volunteer guides.

4.3.3 Promote appropriate areas of the Nature Parks for use in community events, taking into account environmental impact. Encourage the community and our staff to be involved.

4.4 Strengthen connections with the Indigenous community

4.4.1 Implement a Reconciliation Action Plan.

4.4.2 Ensure factual and respectful representation of local Indigenous history and culture, including interpretation, visitor activities, retail product and ceremonies.

4.4.3 Develop key partnerships with Indigenous organisations and individuals.

4.4.4 Increase the level of local Indigenous content in interpretation, experiences and merchandise.

4.4.5 Introduce an Indigenous apprenticeship, trainee or scholarship program.
5 Organisation

The Nature Parks is the largest employer on Phillip Island, employing over 200 staff across a range of functions including environmental and conservation management, research, education, visitor services, marketing, food and beverage, retail, administration and facilities management. The Nature Parks recognises that its staff are a key part of the local community.

To deliver our vision for the future, we need to ensure our organisation is skilled and confident. We also need to establish the structures and processes which will support our staff and underpin our activities in the years to come.

The disparate nature of our operations means that our workforce can become fragmented. We want to encourage staff to better know and understand the goals and achievements of colleagues in other parts of the organisation. We will increase diversity among our staff and support the exchange of experiences to broaden their appreciation of different cultures.

We value and recognise the contribution of our staff and aim to become an employer of choice for our region.

5.1 Build a strong organisational culture

5.1.1 Use our shared values to underpin our work, our relationships and service delivery.

5.1.2 Instil an organisational culture of trust, appreciation and responsibility through shared experiences, learning and support systems.

5.1.3 Implement programs to help staff respect and understand the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse colleagues and visitors.

5.2 Plan our workforce

5.2.1 Create a dynamic organisational structure that will respond to changes in priorities.

5.2.2 Develop a robust five year workforce plan.

5.2.3 Measure our performance and implement integrated learning.

5.2.4 Partner with key organisations to share and increase our expertise and knowledge base.
6 Governance

Phillip Island Nature Parks is governed by a Committee of Management established under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 (CLRA). Questions arise as to whether this is a sufficient contemporary governance framework for an organisation of the Nature Parks’ scale and revenue. The Nature Parks has a responsibility for the management of significant natural and built assets on behalf of the State Government and operates one of Victoria’s most visited ecotourism destinations.

Beyond the responsibilities for land management defined under the CLRA, the Nature Parks lacks any clear statement of its core purpose or priorities. Neither are its roles such as research, conservation, education, ecotourism or community obligations, defined.

The CLRA also restricts our ability to respond to market fluctuations by not allowing the Nature Parks’ Board to determine entry fees for our ticketed visitor centres.

As the vision for the future of the Nature Parks is implemented, particularly the anticipated investment in the Summerland Peninsula, it is vital that the organisation has clarity of its purpose and responsibilities, and operates within an appropriate legislative framework.

6.1 Prepare an Issues Paper analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the current governance framework

6.1.1 Ensure the Nature Parks has a Statement of Expectations from the relevant Minister.

6.1.2 Prepare an Issues Paper identifying the challenges posed by the current structure and the areas where clarity of roles and responsibility is required, including:

- Core purpose
- Roles and responsibilities
- Board composition
- Reporting structures and protocols
- Management of regulations

6.1.3 Undertake a broad public and stakeholder consultation process as part of the development of the Issues Paper.

6.2 Develop a Position Paper articulating the Board’s recommendation for a preferred governance framework

6.2.1 Articulate the Board’s preferred option for a governance framework.

6.2.2 Submit the preferred position to Government for its consideration.

6.3 Advocate to Government and key stakeholders

6.3.1 Prepare a communications strategy to guide the Board and the organisation.
Development of the Phillip Island Nature Parks Strategic Plan 2012–2017

Confidential submissions were received from the following organisations and individuals:

Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>organisations</th>
<th>Phillip Island Pony Club</th>
<th>Phillip Island Tourism &amp; Business Association Inc.</th>
<th>Rhyll Trout &amp; Bush Tucker Farm</th>
<th>Southern Communities Planning Group, Phillip Island</th>
<th>Tourism Victoria</th>
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Individuals

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<tr>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Dr. Roz Jessop</th>
<th>Marcus Salton</th>
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<td>John E Barnard</td>
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<td>Donald Cameron</td>
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<td>Fergus and Chris Cameron</td>
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<td>Bessie Tyers</td>
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<td>Dr. Peter Dann</td>
<td>Rob Linford</td>
<td>Paula Wasiak</td>
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<td>Anne Davie</td>
<td>Tania Maddigan</td>
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<td>Jan Fleming</td>
<td>John McDougall</td>
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<td>Jill Grayden</td>
<td>Kay and Mohan Nair</td>
<td>Margaret Woods</td>
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<td>Deborah and Tony Holland</td>
<td>Dr. Rebecca Overeem</td>
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<td>Patsy Hunt</td>
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The Reference Group comprised of representatives from the following organisations:

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<td>Regional Development Victoria</td>
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Our vision
To be a world–recognised place of conservation excellence, providing outstanding and authentic experiences for all.

www.penguins.org.au