



Surfrider
Foundation
Australia

**Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast Branch
submission to the
Surf Coast Shire opposing the Spring Creek
Urban Growth Framework Plan**

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Background – Surfrider Foundation

‘Respect The Beach’

The Surfrider Foundation Surf Coast Branch is opposed to the Spring Creek Urban Growth Framework Plan

Surfrider Foundation Australia is one of the largest volunteer community based coastal environmental groups in Australia. Our motto ‘Respect the Beach’ encapsulates the environmental values of our branches and members worldwide.

Nationally the organization is active in the areas of conservation, activism, research and education.

Background – Surf Coast

The Surf Coast has some of the most beautiful beaches in Australia. These beaches attract millions of tourists and day visitors each year.

The beaches from Point Impossible to Point Addis provide an important social and recreational outlet for families and locals. They also provide habitat to a diverse range of animals and native wildlife.

The significance of our natural assets has been supported by the creation of significant marine and national parks within a 5 kilometre radius of Torquay.

The Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve compliments this series of parks by providing protection from development to one of the most iconic surfing beaches in the world.

Torquay supports a large number of environmental groups who dedicate significant volunteer hours to protecting and preserving our natural assets.

In summary caring for the environment is a key value for the community of Torquay and Jan Juc.

The Spring Creek Urban Growth Framework Plan

The Surfrider Foundation is opposed to the Spring Creek Urban Growth Framework Plan on the grounds that it will have negative social, environmental and community impacts on the coastal areas of Torquay.

Our main concern is its proximity to Bells Beach and Jan Juc. These two beaches have the potential to be accessed by 80% of the residents of the new development and this will place considerable stress on community assets (parking/beaches/toilets) that are currently 'full' 80% on hot days or days of peak surfing conditions.

Lack of Strategic Work

Further we are concerned that there has been a lack of strategic study work done by council into the potential social, environmental and community impacts of the Spring Creek development.

There has been no research put forward in the draft framework plan as to the social, environmental and community impacts of the development on Torquay/Jan Juc.

We believe that before council can consider any further development on the Surf Coast it needs to develop a comprehensive atlas of natural coastal resources. This atlas could then be used to assist planners in the impacts of new developments.

It will also help to identify key areas of ecological significance with a view towards ensuring biodiversity is protected and well managed.

This view is supported by the recent Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008 which states that, *'Land suitable for use and development along the coastal strip is scarce and competition is intense between different activities and land uses....*

.... With these challenges in mind it is important that the environmental, economic and social values of coastal resources are identified and the impacts of land use and development on these values are determined as far as practicable before decisions are made'.

We believe that all planning decisions on the coast need to be based on sound scientific evidence and grounded in an integrated approach to managing coastal and ocean resources that accounts for the interconnectedness of our marine ecosystems, economies, and cultural heritage.

Environmental Impacts

Healthy coasts and oceans provide us with very real benefits, including recreation, environmental, education and tourism opportunities.

Unfortunately, the benefits healthy coastal and ocean ecosystem provide are in many cases declining sharply because of the impacts of some human activities.

The Surfrider Foundation is concerned that the proposed development at Spring Creek will have significant environmental impacts on our natural assets:

direct human impacts – this development will destroy significant areas of native vegetation and impact on wildlife habitat. Spring Creek is currently home to a large population of kangaroos, echidnas, koalas, native birds and other wildlife.

Development in this valley will destroy habitat and greatly reduce options for food for many animals and birds.

The introduction of any cats and dogs will have a negative impact on native wildlife (ie/ cats hunt and destroy approximately 57 native birds per year).

Coastal water quality along the Surf Coast is threatened by pollution from numerous point and nonpoint sources, compromising the health of humans and marine wildlife, leading to beach advisories and closures, and contributing to increasing occurrences and severity of harmful and even toxic algal blooms that kill and contaminate marine life, including valuable shellfish.

Key challenges to protecting and improving coastal water quality as a result of this development will include:

- Runoff from lawns, streets, parking lots, and agricultural operations that add vast quantities of nutrients and other manmade chemical pollutants to coastal waters
- Combined sewer and stormwater overflow systems that discharge raw sewage into rivers and coastal waters during storm events
- Malfunctioning or poorly sited septic systems that allow waste to enter coastal waters .

It is important to note that in the last sixth months there have been 2 major sewage spills and a major industrial chemical spill that have impacted directly on Spring Creek.

Increased development of sensitive environmental waterways only increases the risk of an environmental disaster in the future.

Any increase in nutrient or pollutant levels in the creek will pose a potential health risk for swimmers and people who catch fish from the creek.

In peak floods these pollutants will flow from Spring Creek into the sea at Torquay Back Beach posing a further health risk to surfers and swimmers.

indirect human impacts – the development will greatly increase the number of people attending beaches in Torquay/Jan Juc. Our beaches are already ‘full’ during peak summer and/or surf periods. As the beaches become more crowded litter issues increase, traffic issues increase and the incidence of people ‘jumping fences’ and trampling on native vegetation increases.

Increased crowds in the water can lead to an increase in ‘surf rage’ which can manifest itself in any degree of anti social behaviour.

We are particularly concerned about the potential impact from the development on the Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve.

Bells Beach is the most easily accessed beach for 80% of the residents of the proposed development. At the moment there is urgent debate about the impact of tourists and visitors on the surfing reserve. Tourism buses in particular have created many litter and traffic problems in the reserve of late.

Any increase in visitor numbers to Bells Beach is likely to have significant negative human impacts from litter, damage to vegetation, impacts on stressed infrastructure and parking.

We believe that there is a limit to the number and type of visitors that go to Bells Beach and this needs to be investigated further before any new developments in the Torquay/Jan Juc area are approved.

Social Impacts

For many people in Torquay/Jan Juc going to the beach plays an important social and community role in their lives.

Going to the beach is a way of meeting people, catching up with friends and engaging with others in a pleasant natural environment.

Taking the family to the beach is an important pastime for many people in the town. It provides the one opportunity for many families to do something together on a regular basis.

Doubling the size of Torquay will halve the number of opportunities local residents have to go to the beach. This will have a serious impact on the time people spend at the beach and the time people spend with each other.

Doubling the size of Torquay will have significant impacts on the way people socially connect with each other and this could lead to potential health and wellbeing issues.

Overseas research has highlighted the importance of social connectedness and the environment.

These studies show that where you have a community with ready access to the natural environment you have a healthy community.

When community access to the environment is interrupted or denied you suddenly have a disconnection which can lead to stress at the individual, family or community level.

When surfers cannot find a car park or get to go to their favourite beach this creates a disconnection which over the long term can lead to stress and negative social and health impacts.

Protecting the social connectedness of our community is an important factor that needs to be considered when council examines not just the Spring Creek proposal but all future planning proposals.

Summary

In closing the Surfrider Foundation is opposed to the Spring Creek Urban Growth Framework Plan.

As the Victorian Coastal Strategy states:

‘The Coast provides significant social and cultural values for Victorians.

Coastal heritage encompasses places created early and recent settlers and includes customs, celebrations and special characteristics that build community pride and social cohesion.

Access to healthy natural environments is good for mental and physical health and well being.’

We believe that the proposed Spring Creek development will have negative social, environmental and community impacts.

It has the potential to increase human impact issues on the Bells Beach Surfing Reserve, Spring Creek waterway and many other beaches along the Surf Coast.

It has the potential to divide the community as people struggle to enjoy our coastal assets in the face of mounting pressures from tourism and development closer to Torquay (Armstrong Creek).

It has the potential to significantly impact the health and well being of many Torquay, Janj Juc and Surf Coast individuals and families who rely on our coastal assets for recreation and community connection.

We urge the council of the Surf Coast Shire to halt this development proposal and direct resources to conducting an audit of all coastal assets so that future planning decisions and proposals can be better informed.

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