

Your Great Ocean Road

SAND DUNES – THE UNSUNG HERO OF A HEALTHY COAST



Ask anyone what comes to mind when they think of the Great Ocean Road, and it's a fair guess they'll mention the spectacular cliffs, framed by the sea.

It's an iconic image that has captured the attention of the millions of people from across Australia and the world who visit our region each year.

However, when it comes to the health of our coast, there's one unsung hero that doesn't get the headlines: sand dunes. Yes, sand dunes.

Did you know that the beaches and sand dunes along the Great Ocean Road are all perched over underlying rock? This is different to the deeper sand beaches and dunes found in Queensland at places such as K'gari (Fraser Island).

The dune systems that sit behind Great Ocean Road beaches play many vital roles in protecting our coastal environment.



Image: World Surf League/Lynch

They provide a buffer against the strong forces of the sea, particularly in winter when we typically see a damaging combination of large swells and high tides. Sand and dune systems naturally change over the year in an ongoing seasonal cycle, eroding away during winter but rebuilding over the calmer summer months.

Sand dunes are also an important ecological feature of our landscape, with less than 25% of pre-European native coastal vegetation remaining in in south-east and south-west coastal regions of Australia.

They support native vegetation, which is important in two ways: allowing natural dune processes to occur; and provide important habitat and food to insects, reptiles, birds and mammals.

While dune systems play such an important role in protecting our coastal environment, they are among the most fragile areas of our coast due to their composition. They are also generally situated in and around the most accessible and visited coastal locations, which compounds this risk.

As a result, in addition to attacks from the seas, dune systems are susceptible to a range of threats including human traffic, dogs and invasive plant and animal species.

That's why much of our conservation efforts are aimed at protecting dune systems, including rubbish and weed removal, invasive animal control, indigenous revegetation, maintaining dedicated beach accesses and creating exclusion zones for sensitive areas such as known hooded plover nesting sites.

Our Coastal Vegetation Strategy, launched late last year, outlines how we will achieve this – among other actions – over the next five years and

build on the success of the previous plan, which saw a 54% reduction in weed coverage, enough weeds removed to cover the MCG oval 50 times.

This progress cannot be achieved without the ongoing and significant contribution from our coastal champions – our volunteers, community groups and schools.

We recently joined forces with the World Surf League, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Surf Coast Shire and Jan Juc Coast Action ahead of the Rip Curl Pro to remove introduced species from dunes at Jan Juc Beach.



Image: World Surf League/Lynch

This was part of the WSL's We Are One Ocean program, which sees surfers contribute to environmental programs at world championship tour events across the world.

This is just one example of how volunteers are helping protect the Great Ocean Road coast. We are fortunate to have so many dedicated local volunteer groups and individuals who donate their time and effort all year round.

In 2021-22 alone, they helped plant 7000 indigenous plants, contributed 170 hours removing rubbish and 825 hours removing weed - and spent countless hours helping protect

hooded plovers over their breeding season.

Playing and walking on dunes kills the vegetation that holds them together and opens up bare sand which is eroded by wind and waves. You don't have to formally volunteer to help the cause – although we'd love you to! Anyone can help protect dune systems by avoiding playing on dunes and sticking to established paths, keeping their dogs from entering sand dunes, especially exclusion zones, which are well signed and fenced off.

There are also a couple of other important reasons to keep out of

sand dunes. Sand dunes are time capsules housing significant cultural heritage values which can be easily damaged.

Sand dunes can also pose a risk to public safety, especially where there is a steep incline, which can contribute to a dune collapse. Steering clear of these areas will prevent potential injuries from falls or being under the sand when it collapses.

By following these few simple steps, we can help protect our coastal environment and ensure a safe and enjoyable visit to the beach.

Jodie Sizer
CEO



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