
COOLART WETLANDS AND HOMESTEAD RESERVE

FUTURE DIRECTIONS PLAN



AUGUST 1998

© Crown (State of Victoria) 1998

A Victorian Government Publication. This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1986*.

Published in August 1998 by Parks Victoria
387 Cotham Road, Kew, Victoria 3101.

Printed on 100% recycled paper to help save our natural environment

FOREWORD

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Reserve is an important feature of the Parks Victoria network of environmental and cultural assets.

Coolart has a long and successful history of conservation management and community involvement in the protection and enhancement of its intrinsic heritage and environmental values.

This success will continue under the management of Parks Victoria with its commitment to excellence in environmental performance and expertise in delivering visitor services.

This Future Directions Plan provides the strategic management direction for Coolart for the next 5 years. Over this period Coolart will consolidate its role as an important cultural and environmental tourism venue on the Mornington Peninsula.

The plan will be implemented with the continued support of the Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust and the Friends of Coolart.

We would like to acknowledge the work of the project team on this plan and to particularly thank those people from within and outside Parks Victoria who contributed information and advice.

Mark Stone

Chief Executive Officer

Parks Victoria

Peter Osborn

A/Chairperson

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	FUTURE DIRECTIONS	2
2.1	The Role of the Reserve	2
2.2	Vision	2
2.3	Visitor and Tourism Values	3
2.4	Environmental Values	3
2.5	Cultural Heritage Values	4
3	RESERVE WIDE STRATEGIES	5
3.1	Marketing	5
3.2	Visitor and Tourism Services & Facilities	7
3.3	Environmental Management	8
3.4	Cultural Heritage Management	9
4	MANAGEMENT ZONE STRATEGIES	10
4.1	Zone 1: Visitor and Tourism Services	10
4.3	Zone 2: Wetlands	11
4.4	Zone 3: Woodlands	12
4.5	Zone 4: Farmland	12
4.6	Zone 5: Foreshore and Merricks Creek	13
5	IMPLEMENTATION PLAN	14
5.1	Implementation	14
5.2	Performance targets	14
5.3	Priorities and resource estimates	15
6	TABLES	
1	Performance indicators	16
2	Capital works priorities	17
3	Recurrent works priorities	19
4	Discretionary service priorities	19
7	APPENDIX 1	21
7.1	Environmental risk management strategies	21
	APPENDIX 2	23

7.2The Project team	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY	24
MAPS	
1 Future Directions Plan	

1 INTRODUCTION

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Reserve (Coolart) is located on the Mornington Peninsula, on the northern shore of Western Port at Somers, approximately 65 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. Coolart is Crown land reserved for Public Purposes (Conservation and Education Purposes) under the Crown Land Reserves Act (1978). Within the Reserve are important built and natural features including a variety of historical settings, the Homestead, gardens, outbuildings, farmland and farm buildings.

The wetlands environment, lagoon and Ibis colony represent one of Coolart's key visitor attractions and are promoted for nature based recreation and education uses. The Reserve contains five vegetation communities, including an area of remnant coastal Banksia Woodland. Aboriginal sites of significance have also been discovered on the property.

This plan identifies strategies to elevate other attractions of the Reserve, most notably the Homestead, to provide a much needed rejuvenation and appreciation of its cultural heritage and environmental values to a broader visitor market.

The Future Directions Plan will assist the Reserve in defining its role within Parks Victoria and set the strategic management directions over the next 5 years. Parks Victoria (a merger of Melbourne Parks and Waterways and the National Parks Service) became the Committee of Management for the Reserve in March 1996. The Minister for Conservation and Environment appointed the Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust, including members of the former Committee of Management, to be an advisory body for Parks Victoria. The effective role the Friends of Coolart have played in protection, restoration and enhancement of visitor experiences is also recognised.

The plan encompasses all of the 87.5 hectares of the Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Reserve. Coolart is bordered by Merricks Creek along its southern boundary, Somers School Camp and Lord Somers Road along its eastern boundary, a short section of Balnarring Beach road along its western boundary and Luxton drive and privately owned farmland along its northern boundary. Abutting areas of Balnarring foreshore, Somers Education Camp, Merricks Creek and privately owned farmland are also addressed for their impacts and interaction with the Reserve.

A two stage process was undertaken in consultation with Reserve management and staff, the Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust and Corporate divisions within Parks Victoria. Stage 1 produced a background report which detailed the current uses and visitor trends based on the limited survey information available, the status of environmental and cultural values and identified potential actions and opportunities. Many ideas were tested and two research reports, an Economic and Market Analysis and a Heritage Conservation Analysis provided additional value to the process.

Stage 2, the Future Directions Plan for Coolart, recognises the need to identify a clear vision and role for the Reserve, to be responsive to changing visitor needs and recreation patterns, to integrate the Reserve within the Regional tourism context, and to develop strong marketing and business management to ensure its future viability.

2 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

2.1 The Role of the Reserve

Coolart will continue to be managed to protect and enhance its environmental and cultural heritage values while being promoted to attract an increase in visitation. There is a balance between these values with both contributing to the total experience of the Reserve. The important environmental values of the flora and fauna of the lagoon, wetlands and woodlands are accessible for public enjoyment and learning experiences. The cultural values of the Homestead, outbuildings and various landscape features provide visitors with a sense of the lifestyle of Coolart's previous owners, ie. as a Victorian country retreat of the late 1800s and evolution of the property as a working farm.

At present, Coolart is not well known within the Victorian network of parks, gardens, bays and waterways. In 1996, a Parks Victoria Community Perception Monitor survey indicated only 21% of respondents were aware of Coolart when prompted, the fourth lowest response in a survey covering 40 different settings. Unaided responses in awareness indicated no respondents were able to name Coolart when asked about parks and reserves in Victoria. With visitation declining steadily from 40,150 in 1989 to 23,300 in 1997 amidst an increasing day trip visitation to the Mornington Peninsula, it is critical that Coolart identifies a clear role and marketing strategy to increase visitor awareness, numbers and maintain high levels of satisfaction.

Coolart will be promoted to become a high profile Cultural, Environmental and Recreational Tourism venue on the Mornington Peninsula, closely linked with Parks Victoria's other environmental and cultural venues. As such it will contribute to regional tourism within the "Bays Island and Peninsula Tourism Region" and add to the Mornington Peninsula's attraction for all visitor segments but most particularly local, Melbourne, regional and country Victoria visitors.

It will be recognised for excellence in environmental management, habitat creation and wildlife viewing experiences. The Reserve

attracts wetland birds throughout the year and supports a large ibis colony seasonally. The woodlands provide habitat for numerous animals including koalas. Protection and enhancement of these environmental values is a major focus of management and will guide the types and extent of activities appropriate for the Reserve. Parks Victoria recognises the strong environmental education role the Reserve has provided in the past and currently fulfils. Opportunities to outsource the delivery of this service will be explored.

The Homestead is one of the main attractions for visitors to Coolart and it provides the best opportunity to create and market a new focus to expand the attractions of the Reserve. A partnership with a commercial tourism operator will provide a much needed "rebirth" of this magnificent building, providing expanded visitor services and the potential to rejuvenate interest and appreciation of the diverse attractions of the Coolart Reserve.

Critical to the future success of the Reserve is its ability to attract increased visitation and improve business efficiency. Management strategies will need to be linked to addressing concerns relating to low awareness, declining visitation, increased competition from alternative tourism venues, and maximising financial returns per visitor. This will ensure that Coolart is able to operate on a successful and sustainable basis into the future. Refer to Map 1 which shows the Future Directions for Coolart.

2.2 Vision

The Vision defined for Coolart Wetlands and Homestead is as follows:

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead, an environmental and heritage coastal reserve where visitors can enjoy and appreciate native flora and fauna, recreational experiences and the cultural significance of an historic homestead in a gardens and farmland setting.

To achieve this vision we will:

-
- Ensure the protection and management of the natural and built environmental features of the property (including wildlife)
 - Ensure the facilities of Coolart Wetlands and Homestead meet visitor needs and provide a quality recreational experience
 - Manage visitor impact to ensure the ongoing quality of visitor experiences while protecting and enhancing the sensitive environmental and historic areas
 - Promote and link the diverse attractions of Coolart Wetlands and Homestead with regional tourism strategies, encouraging short stay and day trip visitation
 - Encourage the provision of a high standard of educational and interpretative services about the values of the Reserve by external providers
 - Work with, encourage and support the Friends of Coolart and other volunteers in their contributions to Coolart Wetlands and Homestead.
- The Visitor Centre and picnic area, including the high quality souvenir and gift shop enables contact with staff and volunteers for first hand information about the Reserve and upcoming events. The shaded barbecue and picnic area is close to amenities, the Homestead and Garden
 - The Luxton Lagoon and Wetlands provide opportunities for the public to closely view birdlife from the hides on the lagoons and the trail system. The 90 seat wetland observatory is a high quality facility with one way glass overlooking the wetlands. The observatory is currently used for audio-visual presentations on the history and natural features in the Reserve, ranger talks, education programs and cultural activities
 - The extensive trail system through the wetlands and woodland allow visitors to experience the Reserve's natural environment and view flora and fauna, including koalas. Excellent views of Western Port may be gained from points along the woodlands trail and a bridge provides access over Merricks Creek to the Western Port foreshore
 - The farmland and farm buildings present visitors with both historical and modern aspects of farming. The extensive paddocks and livestock grazing provide a rural setting linked to the history of the property. Historical features include the Woolshed and the tools and machinery displayed in the Old Machinery Shed. The agro-forestry enterprise is an example of alternative landuse techniques on rural properties.

2.3 Visitor and Tourism Values

The Reserve offers a diverse range of experiences and settings which will be promoted and enhanced to ensure visitors enjoy both the heritage and the environmental features of the Reserve within a quality tourism experience.

The Homestead, garden and outbuildings allow visitors to experience and appreciate the heritage value of the Reserve and life of its previous owners. The historic buildings provide a high quality aesthetic setting for activities on the property. Picnicking is promoted in the gardens which display historical landscape architecture, featuring various mature exotic trees and shrubs. The Homestead and gardens are the venue for a range of events and exhibitions. To enhance these values and expand visitor services within the homestead, Parks Victoria will seek a partnership with a commercial tourism operator through an Expression of Interest (E.O.I.) process.

2.4 Environmental Values

The ambience and character generated by the native vegetation, together with the wetlands and native wildlife, create a natural setting that is enjoyed by visitors.

- The Luxton Lagoon, ibis colony and wetlands environment represent one of Coolart's key visitor attractions
- The Reserve forms part of the wildlife corridor along the Western Port coastline. It also contributes to the region as a wildlife sanctuary and is managed to protect and

enhance its environmental values

- There are over 200 native fauna species recorded within the Reserve, including koalas, bats, possums, echidnas, swamp rats and 170 bird species
- The Wetland areas provide feeding and roosting areas for bird species listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (FFG) and international migratory bird agreements. Thirteen species listed under these international agreements have been recorded in the Reserve. FFG listed species that regularly use the Reserve for feeding on the various water bodies are the Great Egret and the White-bellied Sea Eagle
- The Luxton Lagoon is an important breeding area for a large colony of Australian White Ibis. An estimated 500+ breeding pairs of ibis seasonally inhabit the lagoon
- There are five vegetation communities represented in the Reserve including an area of remnant Coastal Banksia Woodland. Over 30 ha of the Reserve is covered with indigenous vegetation
- The natural features of the Reserve facilitate the study and appreciation of birds, plants and animals. This is considered to be an important component of visitor experiences and educational use.

2.5 Cultural Heritage Values

The significance of Coolart derives from a number of themes and sources: its history, associations with important individuals, agricultural activities, the garden, landscape and archaeological value and its habitat and conservation pursuits. These themes are evidenced in the form of buildings and structures, garden features, fences and gates from various historic periods, extensive habitat and conservation developments, grazing and agricultural activities, and archaeological remains. Individually and collectively all these strands contribute to the overall significance of the property - it is the amalgam which is significant (Extract from the Conservation Analysis).

- The majority of the existing buildings and

garden (with the exception of the more recent buildings) are listed under the State Heritage Act, 1995

- The Homestead and outbuildings enable interpretation and provide an insight into the lifestyle of a wealthy family's retreat in the late 1800's in Victoria and Australia
- In the 1890's the Homestead Garden consisted of squared off garden beds incorporating fruit trees and vegetable gardens which was subsequently altered by successive owners and displays a rich collection of trees and shrubs including several unusual species. It encompasses a range of forms and landscape character including open lawns, shrubbery's, hedges, rose garden and orchard
- The African Button Flower, *Dias cotonifolia*, in the garden is classified by the National Trust for its value as a significant tree
- The Luxton Lagoon is of very high significance to visitors as one of the heritage features built by the previous owners of Coolart. The property, with the help of owner Tom Luxton, was proclaimed in the Government Gazette as a wildlife sanctuary on 20 October 1937. This enabled Coolart to be preserved for the function of maintaining a habitat for many species of flora and fauna
- The lagoon is classified by the National Trust for its landscape values
- Two sites of Aboriginal significance have been identified within the Reserve. A surface artifact scatter site was identified west of the original driveway, north of the Homestead, and a midden and surface artifact scatter site is located on the north side of Merricks Creek, north of the old wooden bridge.

–

4

3 RESERVE WIDE STRATEGIES

The key strategic directions for the Reserve have been identified as:

- Marketing
- Visitor Services and Facilities
- Discretionary Services
- Environmental Management
- Cultural Heritage Management

3.1 Marketing

As mentioned, recent survey information has established that Coolart is not well known in comparison to other parks, gardens, bay and waterways managed by Parks Victoria. The transfer of management to Parks Victoria has created an opportunity to increase the profile of the Reserve through Corporate marketing initiatives and cross promotion between venues. Raising awareness of the Reserve is a critical step in any strategy aimed at increasing visitation. There is a need therefore for a detailed marketing plan to address the core objectives of identifying the key attractions or product offer, identifying target markets, raising awareness, increasing visitation and increasing economic yield.

The marketing strategy will need to be responsive to the Peninsula's regional tourism context. The *Bays and Peninsulas Regional Tourism Development Plan, 1997* and the Mornington Peninsula Tourism Forum *Tourism Development Plan 1995*, provide an important background and contextual framework within which strategies can be formulated.

In 1997, the Peninsula region attracted 14% of the total Victorian day trip market and this proportion was expected to rise. Given Coolart's location in relation to the south eastern urban growth corridor, and its easy accessibility via the South Eastern freeway from Melbourne, the Reserve is well placed to draw on an expanding tourism market. Roy Morgan Research has identified "Visible Achievers", "Socially Aware" and "Traditional Family Life" as the key market segments within the region, these being traditional high yield markets, and linked to one of the regional

strengths and growth sectors, history/heritage orientated tourism.

For Coolart to re-establish a strong tourism role within the region, strategies need to emphasize the Reserve's key strengths as distinct from attractions which contribute to the overall setting. It is suggested within the Tourism reports that a "something for everyone" campaign is often ineffectual and that "product differentiation" linked to existing regional strengths is a key strategic focus. It is in this context that the outcome of the E.O.I. process seeking expanded visitor services in the Homestead is most critical. New services could provide a key attraction which will underpin a new revitalised marketing strategy.

The E.O.I. should aim to attract product development which links with the ambience of the heritage and rural setting of Coolart. It is suggested the careful combination of added value experiences such as quality food services, period furniture within the Homestead, and the possibility of self contained accommodation may provide the rejuvenation desired more so than any single product offer.

The option of promoting a trading name or marketing name for the Reserve as distinct from its formal title may need to be considered as part of an overall strategy to communicate an expanded service offer. Alternatively shortening the name to simply "Coolart" and ensuring the marketing and promotion creates a name association with the expanded offer could also be considered. This would be a sensitive and significant strategy and should be given due consideration should it arise as an option through the outcome of the outsourcing process.

Strategies for Coolart need to also challenge tired perceptions of the Peninsula as a "summer only" destination. The Reserve offers quality visitor, environmental, and cultural attractions which are not exclusively weather dependent. The outcome of the Homestead E.O.I. may provide a quality food service which can then add to the Reserve's all year appeal. Linking with other non weather dependent tourism

attractions, such as wineries, is clearly advantageous to increasing awareness as a precursor to increasing visitation. Marketing will need to focus on attracting short stay links with other venues as well as day trip options.

It is also noted that marketing strategies need not always focus on expensive brochuring and advertising. It is often stated that “word of mouth” marketing is a very effective means of promotion. As such, ensuring quality experiences and positive images is vital to the success of coordinated campaigns, especially given Coolart’s high repeat visitation trend.

Strategies

- Following the outcome of the E.O.I. process, develop a Marketing Plan that encompasses the following aspects and which links with relevant key directions identified as above within the *Bays and Peninsulas Regional Tourism Development Plan*:
 - Define the key attractions or product offer which will form the basis of the marketing strategy to existing and potential new markets
 - Undertake visitor research (eg. Exit surveys) within Coolart to further define visitor groups demographics and preferences beyond the regionally generic Roy Morgan segments
 - Promote and advertise the Reserve to the identified target markets
 - Utilise striking visual/photographic images in promotion material to communicate the picturesque nature and significant faunal values of the Reserve
 - Monitor the appropriateness of the current entrance fee structure, especially in relation to any new business opportunities which may arise in outsourcing of the Homestead
 - Review the aims and appropriateness of events within the annual calendar. Ensure events link with regional strengths and are managed by professional commercial operators in liaison with staff
 - Identify relevant tourism agencies and publications to link, promote and liaise with. Most particularly, as planning

progresses with the Stony Point - Phillip Island Ferry link, ensure marketing strategies promote opportunities for a coastal touring route including Coolart as a significant visitation experience

- Consider cross promotion with other Mornington Peninsula attractions that offer a heritage experience such as the Tyabb Packing House, the Briars, Arthurs Seat Precinct and other quality, complementary experiences eg. wineries
- Implement pro-active media strategies to raise the profile of Coolart including editorials and feature articles
- Investigate the marketing strategies employed in cool climate tourism destinations eg Daylesford/Spa Country, Tasmania, to extend visitation throughout the year and challenge the ‘summer only’ image of the Peninsula
- Consider promoting the Reserve through a trading name as distinct from its formal title, as one means of re-positioning the Reserve as a key tourism venue to new markets
- Explore outsourcing the development and delivery of educational resources that are relevant to the current primary and secondary curriculum to increase school group visitation
- Continue to promote repeat visitation through the support of the Friends of Coolart and encourage participation by other local groups.

3.2 Visitor and Tourism services and facilities

In a recent Parks Victoria “Parks Service Audit”, Coolart rated highly in the adequacy of provision of appropriate, quality services. As such, it is unlikely to attract significant capital funding as a Parks Victoria priority in the short term. However, as a medium term goal, an expanded range of visitor and tourism facilities/services which enhance the existing

visitor service assets should be planned for to accommodate an anticipated increase in visitation.

Coolart has also been identified within a recent Accessibility Audit as being well suited to achieving a high level of access for people with disabilities. The site is currently regarded as partially accessible and works are nominated within the report to improve access.

The target for annual visitation within the next five years is 30,000, an aim which seeks to reverse the steady decline from the peak visitation of 40,150 in 1989. Coolart will need to continue to provide and enhance quality visitor experiences while protecting environmental and cultural values.

Strategies

- Prepare an Expression of Interest and subsequent lease for the Coolart Homestead to provide options for the “rebirth” of the Homestead as a destination in its own right. The outcome should aim to expand the current “offer” within the Reserve, attract new markets and minimise current operating costs. Consider proposals in relation to key strengths identified within the regional tourism focus to ensure compatibility and opportunities for drawing on existing Peninsula tourism markets
- Direct capital funding towards providing new facilities which address gaps identified in basic service levels, and those which contribute to aims of increased visitation, visitor satisfaction and business efficiency
- Develop the picnic and barbecue facilities to cater for increased visitor numbers to the Reserve including an additional shelter suitable for use for weddings and other group events
- Undertake periodic customer research in the Reserve to provide visitor information and comparative data with other Cultural Tourism venues
- Identify work priorities arising from the recommendations in the Accessibility Audit for the Reserve conducted in 1998

- Develop an Interpretation Plan to improve and update interpretation materials and signage throughout the Reserve. Ensure the plan includes recommendations for the upgrade of the Grimwade photographic collection
- Enhance wildlife viewing opportunities from the trail system through the wetlands and woodland
- Review perimeter security to facilitate policing of entry points.

3.2.2 Discretionary services

There are a range of special events and exhibitions that add value to visitation and experience. These build on the principal heritage and environmental values of the Reserve. They aim to enhance the visitor experience, increase awareness and visitation, increase the revenue raising capacity of the Reserve and contribute to maintaining high visitor satisfaction.

Parks Victoria seeks to utilise the expertise of professional event managers within its diverse venues. Coolart offers an excellent setting which could be marketed as a significant venue for appropriately selected events.

Strategies

- Ensure that any new discretionary services are assessed against the following criteria:
 - add to the recreation and tourism opportunities offered in Coolart
 - seek to attract new user groups
 - seek to boost use of the setting at non peak times i.e. mid week, non summer
 - are cost neutral, and preferably able to generate income
 - maintain the objectives and character of the Reserve and zone in which it occurs
 - are of high quality and professionally managed
 - do not compromise or threaten the environmental and heritage values of the Reserve and,

- do not exclude existing users of the Reserve's basic service level by occupying key areas at peak times.
- Promote the booking of the proposed new shelter, stables and wetland observatory for large groups
- Investigate the viability/need of catering and additional food services for visitors and for special functions and events once the Expression of Interest process is resolved
- Review organised events such as the Jazz Concert, Peninsula Prom, Art Gallery and Wood turning Exhibition to ensure they meet the criteria as stated above and provide effective marketing of Coolart.

3.3 Environmental Management

Coolart includes a diversity of habitat and landforms, both natural and man-made, that contribute to its high environmental value. Environmental protection and enhancement is a vital aspect of management as it provides a balance between conservation protection and access for visitors to view and enjoy the values in the Reserve.

Strategies

- Prepare an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) for Coolart:
 - The environmental values analysis and strategic environmental risk assessment have been prepared as part of this project. The EMP will identify values, threats and priorities thus enabling environmental strategies, actions and targets to be set
 - Research the historical and current records of the diversity and abundance of flora and fauna in the Reserve and the region to understand the trends over time. Utilise this information in preparing environmental management strategies for Coolart.
- Investigate opportunities for tertiary institutions or qualified agencies

undertaking detailed flora and fauna surveys to assess and establish the environmental significance of Coolart. Compare the existing diversity of fauna with potential diversity for the vegetation communities within Coolart

- Implement the Risk Management Strategy (refer to Appendix 1). Key strategies include:
 - Undertake indigenous vegetation community mapping and assessment of vegetation quality
 - Control of noxious weeds and significant environmental weeds in all areas of environmental value with zone 3 being a high priority
 - Liaise with DNRE to manage the Reserve's koala population to minimise overgrazing of vegetation in zone 3
 - Develop and implement a coordinated program of rabbit and fox control
 - Manage the vegetation around the lagoon margins and islands to minimise the impact of the ibis colony.
- Continue community involvement in environmental management through the Friends of Coolart
- Improve interpretation of environmental values to add to the educational role of Coolart and increase visitor satisfaction
- Promote opportunities for environmental studies and research in the Reserve by Somers School Camp and primary, secondary and tertiary students.

3.4 Cultural Heritage Management

Coolart has recently been assessed for its Cultural Heritage Values in a "Conservation Analysis and Conservation Policy" Report, January 1997. This plan provides conservation analysis, policy and strategy recommendations. The intention is to provide direction in the future use, care and conservation of Coolart. The plan acknowledges the dynamic and constantly changing complex of Coolart and recognises there will be future demands for increased or different visitor facilities. The

conservation strategy provides guidelines to manage these demands and changes in a manner which does not diminish, and preferably enhances the significance of the property.

Strategies

- Review and adopt approved recommendations from the Allom Lovell and Assoc. Conservation Analysis Report and the Garden Conservation Study by John Hawker
- All future conservation and development works which affect elements of significance should be carried out having regard for the principles of the Australian ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (The Burra Charter)
- Utilise and adapt the historic buildings for interpretation or compatible uses in accordance with adopted conservation policies
- Prepare a catalogue of the garden plant collection and a maintenance plan for its enhancement
- Prepare and implement a “collections and display” policy
- Consult with appropriate professional conservation practitioners or staff prior to any alterations to the historic structures and features
- Carry out an archaeological survey on sites of high archaeological potential prior to any works or proposals that may involve ground disturbance.

4 MANAGEMENT ZONE STRATEGIES

While the key strategic directions provide overall guiding principles for the Reserve, it is also possible to distinguish management zones within the area where more site specific actions may apply. The Reserve has been divided into four management zones. A fifth zone encompassing the Balnarring Spit and Western Port foreshore, managed by the Balnarring Foreshore Committee of Management, is also considered due to environmental and recreational opportunity links with Coolart.

The purpose of the zones is to identify similar management areas and assess the appropriate type and siting of activities or works within the Reserve.

4.1 Zone 1: Visitor / Tourism Services

This area encompasses the entrance driveway and arboretum, the visitor centre, picnic area and the principle heritage features of Coolart which include the Homestead and outbuildings, the farm buildings complex and Luxton Drive. The zone is centrally located in the Reserve, west of the Lord Somers Rd. entrance.

Role

- The entrance driveway provides visitors with a welcoming first impression and a sense of arrival at an environmental and heritage venue
- The Visitor Centre and staff office provides the entry point for visitors and a high quality souvenir and gift shop
- The Visitor Centre 'Breezeway' entrance provides information about the Reserve, orientation maps and materials and the starting point for visitors to explore Coolart
- The main picnic area provides barbecue facilities and shelter in close proximity to the visitor centre and amenities
- The Homestead is a key attraction, restored as a Victorian country retreat. It is accessible to all visitors and is currently utilised for interpretation, entertainment, functions, exhibitions, meeting venue and as

a base for the Friends of Coolart. Its future role will be subject to the outcome of the E.O.I. process

- The barracks and other outbuildings provide interpretation of the history and development of the property in addition to appropriate functional uses
- The stables, woolshed, farm area and associated buildings demonstrate the evolution of the property as a working farm.

Key actions

- *Investigate sealing the road surface at the entrance and abutting the Somers School Camp to minimise dust problems for neighbours*
- *Undertake landscaping to create further shallow wetlands along the entrance driveway to add to the environmental values and the sense of arrival at Coolart*
- *Designate bus parking in the northern bays of the car park*
- *Provide an updated orientation map of Coolart and event signage outside the visitor centre in the 'Breezeway'*
- *Improve orientation, and interpretation signage at the visitor centre to clearly direct visitors to features at the Homestead, Gardens, Observatory, Picnic Area, Farm Buildings, Amenities and the walking trails leading to the wetlands, woodland and beach*
- *Develop picnic shelter and barbecues capable of accommodating large groups and special functions within an appropriate location. The shelter is to be complementary in design and materials with the visitor centre*
- *Designate the enclosed farm paddock north of the car park as an informal active games area*

- *Conserve the heritage values and character of the Homestead when adapting it for compatible uses. Highlight these values in the future uses of the building*
- *Prepare an “Expression of Interest” for use of the Homestead to meet the key objectives of increased visitor services, numbers, and effective business management. Seek opportunities which expand the current tourism attractions and provide a key opportunity to rejuvenate Coolart’s popularity. Maintain the existing Devonshire Teas and self service tea and coffee in the dining room until new services are introduced*
- *Maintain and enhance the ornamental garden as an important visitor attraction. Utilise the Garden Conservation Study by John Hawker as the basis for a garden maintenance plan*
- *Soften the visual impact of the workshed to be more sympathetic with the historic surrounds*
- *Explore with the Friends Group the ideal location for the craft and plant shop and a headquarters for the Friends of Coolart*
- *Interpret or adapt the Barracks and outbuildings, garden and farm buildings for visitor use whilst conserving their value, character and integrity, in accordance with the adopted conservation policy*
- *Provide improved visitor access to and interpret the woolshed as an important part of the working farm*
- *Protect and preserve those pieces of farm machinery that are of sufficient historical value*
- *Continue to use the stables for group events and maintain the existing picnic facilities.*

4.3 Zone 2: Wetlands

This area encompasses the two major wetland areas of the Luxton Lagoon in the northern area of the Reserve, and the wetlands and garden dam in the central west.

Role

- The Luxton Lagoon and extensive constructed wetlands provide an inter-connected series of wetlands and habitat for indigenous flora and fauna, including breeding areas for the Australian White Ibis colony and other bird species
- The wetlands observatory, bird hides and trails provide high quality public access to viewing of wetlands and education opportunities.

Key actions

- *Continue to improve the habitat quality of the wetlands through weed control and revegetation. Increase screening vegetation to reduce visitor disturbance of birdlife. Enhance the habitat diversity of the wetland in front of the observatory to attract bird species in close proximity to visitors*
- *Facilitate continued sustainable breeding of Ibis by enhancing the lagoon flora. Revegetation with Swamp paperbark and Swamp Gum on the lagoon margins and islands and extend the width of the perimeter planting along the north western edge of the lagoon*
- *Improve directional and interpretative signage for the walking trails through the wetlands*
- *Install a heating and cooling system in the wetlands observatory to increase and diversify visitor use of facilities throughout the year.*

4.4 Zone 3: Woodlands

This area encompasses the southern woodland bounded by Merricks Creek and extending the length of the Reserve between Balnarring

Beach Rd. and the Somers school camp. The woodland includes remnant vegetation and revegetated areas.

Role

- The woodlands provide an important habitat area for indigenous flora and fauna which also comprises part of the coastal wildlife corridor
- The walking trail access through the bushland setting provides wildlife, particularly koala, viewing opportunities for visitor enjoyment of the natural environment.

Key actions

- *Implement environmental risk management strategies;*
 - *Survey flora to identify the extent and intactness of vegetation communities and weed infestation, including the Balnarring Spit*
 - *Liaise with DNRE to develop a koala management strategy to minimise the impact of koala overbrowsing of remnant manna gums*
 - *Implement a weed control strategy targeting noxious and environmental weeds.*
- *Upgrade the existing trail surface, provide additional seats along trails and improve directional and interpretive signage*
- *Investigate opportunities to direct scientific research into the flora and fauna of the Reserve by university students and other qualified researchers*
- *Investigate the construction of a tree top platform with views over Merricks Creek and Western Port to provide improved viewing opportunities on the woodland walk.*

4.5 Zone 4: Farmland

This area encompasses the farmland which is divided into three sections; the pastoral land in the north-east corner of the Reserve, the agro-

forestry plantings in the north-west corner of the Reserve, and an area south of the visitor services precinct adjacent to the garden dam.

Role

- The open paddocks provide an important buffer zone and water catchment for the Lagoon, a feeding area for Ibis and habitat for grassland birds
- Provides remnants of the history of farming of the property and contributes to the pastoral landscape
- Demonstrates a variety of alternative land uses. The farmland contributes income towards the management of Coolart through leasing of the paddocks for livestock and agro-forestry plantings
- The garden dam provides water for the garden and adds to the wetland habitat.

Key actions

- *Retain the open character of the paddock near the garden dam to maintain landscape and sea views over this paddock from the driveway, and to maintain an important feeding area*
- *Continue to lease the grazing paddocks*
- *Continue maintenance of agro-forestry plantings in short term. Undertake review of its success in achieving objectives of demonstrating sustainable agriculture and financial return. Dependent on review, consider alternative land use options.*

4.6 Zone 5: Foreshore and Merricks Creek

This area encompasses the Balnarring Spit east of the foreshore camping area. This area is not part of Coolart Reserve but is managed by the Balnarring Foreshore Committee of Management. It is being considered in the context of this plan because of its accessibility from the Reserve, similar environmental management issues and opportunities to link beach based recreational opportunities.

Role

- The Coastal dune vegetation and the beach provides habitat for fauna and comprises part of the coastal wildlife corridor
- The beach provides nature based recreation opportunities.

Key actions

- *Liaise with the Balnarring Foreshore Committee of Management and others on common objectives such as environmental, recreational and coastal management*
- *Include the Balnarring Spit in environmental survey and planning to promote integrated environmental management of Coolart and the foreshore.*

5 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

5.1 Implementation

This Future Directions Plan provides the framework for management of the Reserve for the next 5 years. Implementation of the plan will require rigorous pursuit of varied funding opportunities beyond recurrent budget allocations. These avenues may include the following:

- Parks Victoria capital funding
- Parks Victoria environmental research funding
- sponsorship from community organisations and private business
- volunteer community involvement such as the Friends of Coolart, and
- Heritage and Environmental grants.

Other current Parks Victoria initiatives which may provide avenues for funding include:

- Accessibility Audit
- Risk Management Capital bids.

5.2 Performance Targets

Monitoring and Review

Ongoing monitoring and review of this plan is essential for its success in meeting the Reserve vision.

This process is particularly important in relation to new information and new opportunities which may arise from visitor surveys and the outcome of the Homestead Expression of Interest. For example, visitor survey information would assist in more accurately targeted marketing campaigns and determining of capital project priorities in response to visitor needs. Similarly, the outcome of the Homestead E.O.I. process may provide new services which potentially alter visitor profiles and markets and which may re-position Coolart within the regional tourism context. Depending on the nature of services offered, a review of the current fee for entry policy may also be required. Regular reviews of

progress in implementation, incorporating new information, will ensure the continuing relevance of the plan.

- The plan will be reviewed annually by Parks Victoria and the Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust. The timing of the review and reporting is to be linked with annual business planning and budgeting cycles. The first annual review will need to closely consider the outcome of the E.O.I. process and review/refine strategies specifically affected by the new offer
- The plan will be comprehensively reviewed within five years.

Performance Indicators

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead is currently a fee for entry venue and performance targets need to reflect this important aspect of management. The following financial indicators (table 1) will assist in measuring the performance of the Reserve over a period of time and provide comparisons in relation to other Cultural Tourism venues managed by Parks Victoria and other properties included in Parks Victoria's benchmarking program. Additional performance indicators relating to business efficiency are also included. These will provide staff with a means of assessing in more detail the operational efficiency of revenue and profit margins relating to shop sales.

In addition to financial performance indicators, the following measures will provide indicators of business performance:

- annual visitation
- customer satisfaction
- brand awareness
- environmental actions

5.3 Priorities and resource estimates

Works under the capital budget

Table 2 outlines the Capital works funding priorities for Visitor Services, Environmental Management and Cultural Heritage Management. The indicative cost and the potential funding sources are also shown.

Works under the recurrent budget

There are a number of actions recommended in the plan that will require funding through the Reserve's Recurrent budget (Table 3). The annual business plan for the Reserve will need to prioritise the allocations of funds and identify other sources of funding to supplement the recurrent budget.

Discretionary service provision

Table 4 provides a summary of the existing discretionary services and new proposals that have been identified for market testing and/or implementation.

TABLE 1 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

FINANCIAL INDICATORS	1995/96 ACTUAL	2002/2003 TARGET
Total Net Cost per visit (The recurrent budget less the income generated divided by the number of visitors. Increasing visitation will drive this measure down. This measure takes account of income generated by the Reserve)	\$7.60	This target will be influenced by income generated by the E.O.I. and increases in visitor numbers. (To be determined)
Income generated as % of recurrent expenditure (The main income source is entrance fees. Entrance fees average approx \$2.80-\$3.00 per visitor after the numbers of event and school visitors etc are taken into account)	40%	To be revised once E.O.I outcome / income determined. Entry fees may be revised
Visitor Statistics (a) Total visitors per year (b) full, concession, 1/2 price, school children per period	new indicator	new indicator
Revenue (a) total revenue for Reserve per period	"	"
Margins (a) gross margin % shop sales (b) gross margin % kiosk	"	"
Average transaction value per period Shop + kiosk sales ÷ no. of visitors	"	"
Operating profit	"	"
Net cost per visitor	"	"
NON FINANCIAL INDICATORS	1995/6	2002/2003
Total Park Visits. The target for five years in the future is 30,000 to reverse the decline experienced in the 1990's. A further increase would be aimed for in the following 5 year period to extend visitor numbers to 40,000 [Ⓐ]	22,950	30,000
Brand Awareness Parks Victoria Community Perception Monitor	Unaided - 0% Aided Prompt - 21%	Unaided - 3% Aided prompt - 30%
Total hectares managed (There are no proposals to increase the size of the Reserve in the plan)	87.5	87.5
Visitor Satisfaction (Appropriate visitor surveys will be undertaken periodically in the Reserve)	High - internal surveys TQA - 87.9	Maintain High satisfaction - periodic Visitor surveys
Environmental Management. This will lead to specific management targets	Condition of Asset Assessment completed	Implementation of Environment Management Plan
Cultural Heritage Management (The recommendations in the Heritage Conservation Analysis will lead to a Heritage Conservation Plan for the Reserve)	Capital works conservation program established Heritage Conservation Analysis and Conservation Policy completed	Development of the Reserve within the framework of the Conservation Analysis

TABLE 2 CAPITAL WORKS PRIORITIES

ACTION	RANK	EST COST	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
VISITOR AND TOURISM SERVICES			
To construct a large undercover shelter and two double electric barbecues. The shelter to be complementary in design and materials with the visitor centre.	1	30,000	Parks Victoria capital program- (Achieve Basic Service Level) Sponsorship from community organisations and/or private business.
Interpretation and educational materials and signs: Orientation Board/ Map at Visitor Centre/ House/ Observatory - Big Map, Big Photo and ID charts/ Crake Hide - Interpretative signage for fauna / Minsmere Hide - ID charts, Interpretative signage, keep board/ Farmacyard - Old machinery, Woolshed/ Barracks - Possible wildlife description, touch tables/ Outbuildings - original function/ Stables - Old machinery	2	15,000	Parks Victoria capital program- (Extend Basic Services) Sponsorship from community organisations and/or private business. Volunteer community involvement such as the Friends of Coolart and Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust
Trails (construction and resurfacing). Resurface existing trails - main trail loop between the homestead and bridge over Merricks Creek and connect to Wetland trail system.	3	10,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services)
Heating and cooling System in Wetlands Observatory. Install adequate heating and cooling system.	4	12,000	Sponsorship
Investigate sealing the road surface at the entrance and for a short distance to minimise dust problems for neighbours.	5	20,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services)
Improve the appearance of the workshed to blend in with the historic surrounds.	6	2,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services) Volunteer Assistance
Directional signs and seating along the trail system.	7	10,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services) Volunteer community involvement such as the Friends of Coolart
Viewing Tower. Construct a viewing tower on the Woodland walk with views over Western Port and Phillip Island.	8	30,000	Sponsorship from community organisations and/or private business. Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services)
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIONS			
Undertake indigenous vegetation community mapping and assessment of vegetation quality as part of an Environmental Management Plan for the Reserve	1	4,000	Parks Victoria environmental research funding
Revegetate the lagoon and associated wetlands to relieve degradation of vegetation by the ibis colony.	2	15,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Risk Management)
Relocate the north western boundary fence of the lagoon and revegetate the lagoon margin.	3	5,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services) Volunteer community involvement such as the Friends of Coolart
Undertake landscaping to create further shallow wetlands along the entrance driveway to add to the	4	10,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services)

environmental values and the sense of arrival at the Reserve.			Volunteer community involvement such as the Friends of Coolart and Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust
CULTURAL HERITAGE ACTIONS			
Continue Homestead and outbuildings repairs (exterior and interior).	1	50,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Asset Renewal)
Continue Homestead improvements (interior). Decorating upstairs rooms includes : Painting, Curtains, Wall repairs, Open fire places, New lighting suitable for exhibitions, and Furniture for the Homestead.	2	30,000	Parks Victoria Capital program. (Asset Renewal) Dependent on outcome of E.O.I, negotiation with Lessee
Garden improvement and restoration works	3	20,000	Parks Victoria Capital program (Extend Basic Services) Volunteer community involvement such as the Friends of Coolart and Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Trust

TABLE 3 RECURRENT WORKS PRIORITIES

ACTION	COST AND RESOURCES	TIMELINE
Direct Resources to Environmental Risks - Refer to Appendix 1: The only action that requires additional resources is Weed Control.	\$3,000 p.a. Additional cost for materials and labour. Necessary for environmental weed control	Ongoing
Develop Marketing Strategy to promote the Reserve.	To promote and market the Reserve consistently over the next 5 years. Cost to be determined once strategy developed.	Ongoing
Improve orientation material at the Visitor Centre.	Within current budget	Year 1
Selective revegetation of grazing paddocks.	Within current budget	Ongoing
Interpretation Strategy for the Reserve	\$4,000. Reserve staff member for 4 weeks work	Year 1
Utilise the John Hawker Garden Study, which includes a full catalogue of plants in the ornamental garden, for ongoing maintenance and development works.	Within current budget	Ongoing

TABLE 4 DISCRETIONARY SERVICE PRIORITIES

DISCRETIONARY SERVICE	COMMENT
Special functions in the Homestead and the Gardens for large groups, eg. weddings.	The existing service of wedding photos using the Homestead as a backdrop has the potential to expand to cater for wedding functions. Options will be assessed in line with outcomes of the E.O.I. The provision of a new shelter, suitably designed for large group events, also provides opportunities to attract groups.

Art and Craft exhibitions in Homestead and Garden.	In the short term, continue the range of exhibitions which add to visitor experiences and generate revenue, awaiting the outcome of the E.O.I.
Events and Festivals.	Continue the major attractions such as the Jazz Festival which raise the profile and promote Coolart to a wide audience.
Booking sheltered areas for large groups - Wetlands Observatory, Stables and proposed new shelter.	Continue to book sheltered areas for large groups and promote shared use of the wetlands observatory with community and environmental groups.
Friends of Coolart Craft and Plant Shop.	Continue to support the Friends activities such as the plant and craft shop.
Outsource the delivery of programs and management of School use of Coolart for education purposes.	Continue the use of the Reserve by Somers Children's School Camp and market the diverse environmental and historical features and facilities of Coolart to schools, particularly in Melbourne.
Grazing Lease.	Continue to lease the paddocks for appropriate farming activities such as grazing agistment, in keeping with the agricultural use of the property.
On-site cabin accommodation.	Assess the viability of providing on-site accommodation based on market gaps identified for the Peninsula in quality mid-range, self contained accommodation.

7 APPENDIX 1

An Environmental Management Plan will be prepared for the Reserve which will identify the values, risks and then environmental priorities. In the interim the following key risks have been identified and may require action in the short term.

7.1 ENVIRONMENTAL RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

RANK	RISK	MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
1	Weed Invasion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an indigenous vegetation community and mapping intactness assessment of all Areas of Environmental value (including the Balnarring Spit) to locate the most intact remnant vegetation and the distribution of noxious and significant environmental weeds which will then guide the weed control program • Control Blackberry in all areas. Blackberry is a regionally controlled weed under the Catchment and Land Protection Act • Control Sweet Pittosporum in all Areas. The spread of Sweet Pittosporum in areas outside its natural distribution is listed as a potentially threatening process under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act • Develop a program for control of significant environmental weeds in zone 4 as a priority • Priority environmental weeds for control in these areas include: Smilax, Polygala, Dolichos Pea and Cape Ivy.
2	Vegetation decline - Manna Gums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with DNRE to investigate options for management of the Koala population • Develop a program for periodically erecting tin guards on a proportion of the trees to allow them to recover. Monitor the results • Plant Manna Gums in Zone 3 to provide a replacement canopy for the future.
3	Vegetation decline- Swamp Paperbarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When water levels permit, increase the size of the islands in the lagoon and revegetate • Plant more resilient vegetation e.g. Swamp Gums • Trial the provision of supplementary nesting material to take the pressure off the Paperbarks.
4	Honey Bees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with neighboring land holder to investigate the possibility of reducing or phasing out the hives • Investigate with DNRE the requirement for the apiarist to hold a permit for use of the Reserve.
5	Pest Animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a coordinated program of rabbit and fox control with adjacent land holders. Monitor nest boxes and eradicate young pest birds.
6	Human Disturbance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase screening vegetation around the wetlands in Zone 2. • Ensure trails and viewing points are clearly defined • Continue to provide visitor interpretation and education emphasising appropriate visitor behavior • Maintain policy of small school groups with high supervision ratio • Monitor the impacts on bird life of any increase in visitation.
7	Herbicide drift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that contractors are appropriately qualified to conduct environmental weed control • Monitor contractor performance.
8	Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate a community streamwatch monitoring program for the creek.
9	Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain slashed firebreaks. Prepare Fire Management Plan.
10	Cats and Dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a community education program to encourage responsible cat and

		dog ownership • Undertake trapping and disposal of stray cats with the local council.
--	--	--

APPENDIX 2

7.2 The Project team

The Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Reserve Future Directions Plan was developed by a core project team drawn from Parks Victoria.

Project team members

Joe Mumford	Project Manager
Borys Kouzmenko	Project Officer
Des Lucas	Park Supervisor
Brian Thomas	Ranger in Charge
Conrad Annal	Ranger
Jenny Thomas	Ranger
Karin Bradbury	Ranger
Jane Harford	Planner

Review Process - June 1998

Frances Horsley	Planning Officer
Rob Black	Business Manager
Peter Teesdale	Ranger in Charge

7.2.1 Acknowledgments

The Project Team would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following people from within the former Melbourne Parks and Waterways, now Parks Victoria:

Brett Cheatley
John Grinpukel
Carina Watson
Kate Kloss
Joan Aaron

and members of the Coolart Trust

Marion Taylor
Peter Osborn
Fran Henke
Harold Weber
Peter Newman
Nigel Caswell

Also the former Chairperson, Gordon Cameron, during the initial stages of this plan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Coolart Reserve, (1991). *Draft Management Plan*.
- Allom, Lovell & Associates. *Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Conservation Analysis and Conservation Policy*.
- Connell Wagner Pty Ltd, (1998). *Accessibility Audit of National and State Parks*.
- KPMG, Management Consulting, (1997). *Bays and Peninsulas Regional Tourism Development Plan*.
- Melbourne Parks and Waterways. (1995). *A Guide to Priorities for Melbourne's Open Space Network: Mornington Peninsula*.
- Mornington Peninsula Tourism Forum, (1995). *Tourism Development Plan , Vol 1*.
- Parks Victoria. (1997). *Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Setting Performance Report*.
- Schapper, Jan. (1980). *Environmental Design: A Case Study - 'Coolart'*. A project submitted for Master of Landscape Architecture, Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Melbourne.
- Urban Consulting Group. (1996). *Economic and Market Analysis: Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Reserve*.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Reserve is located on the Mornington Peninsula, on the northern shore of Western Port at Somers, approximately 65 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. Within the Reserve are important built and natural features including a variety of historical settings, the Homestead, gardens, outbuildings, farmland and farm buildings.

This Future Directions Plan will assist Coolart to continue to manage for,

- environmental excellence
- protection of cultural assets
- enhancement of visitor experiences and increased visitation.

The vision for Coolart identifies the key attractions of the Reserve, and the diversity of settings which contribute to the overall visitor experience:

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead, an environmental and heritage coastal reserve providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy and appreciate native flora and fauna, and the cultural significance of an historic homestead in a gardens and farmland setting.

Reserve Values

The Reserve offers a diverse range of experiences and settings which enhance visitors' enjoyment of the key heritage and environmental features of the Reserve within a quality tourism experience.

Visitor and Tourism Values

- The Visitor Centre and picnic area provide visitors with a sense of entry, orientation, interface with staff and volunteers, and picnic facilities within a relaxing garden setting
- The Homestead, garden and outbuildings provide visitors with an appreciation of the heritage values of the reserve
- The Luxton Lagoon, ibis colony and wetlands represent one of Coolart's key visitor attractions. The Luxton Lagoon and

wetlands provide visitors with opportunities to closely view birdlife from the hides. The observatory is a magnificent facility overlooking wetlands and providing interpretive information and audio visual presentations

- The farmland and farm buildings present visitors with both historical and modern aspects of farming.

Environmental Values

- There are over 200 native fauna species recorded, including 170 bird species
- The wetlands provide feeding and roosting areas for bird species listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, and international migratory bird agreements
- There are five vegetation communities represented in the Reserve including an area of remnant Coastal Banksia Woodland.

Cultural Heritage Values

- The Homestead and outbuildings enable interpretation of and provide an insight into the evolutionary stages of a rural farming property, and lifestyle of a wealthy family's retreat in the late 1800's in Victoria
- The African Button Flower, *Dias cotonifolia*, in the Homestead garden is classified by the National Trust for its value as a significant tree
- The Luxton Lagoon is classified by the National Trust for its landscape values
- Two sites of Aboriginal significance have been identified within the Reserve.

Key initiatives

The Future Directions Plan, Map 1, shows the intent of the five management zones and some of the key initiatives recommended in the plan. The Reserve is divided into five zones based on visitor activities, experiences, built and natural features.

Visitor and Tourism strategy

- Develop a Marketing Plan to promote Coolart as an outstanding visitor and tourism destination offering environmental, heritage and recreational features. Ensure plan is closely linked with regional tourism strategies
- Provide expanded visitor services within the Homestead and associated buildings, providing a key attraction to stimulate a rejuvenation of the Reserve
- Promote Coolart through a range of professionally managed events and exhibitions
- Provide additional visitor facilities to cater for an increase in visitor numbers
- Further develop educational opportunities for school groups from the adjacent camps and especially from Melbourne schools.

Environmental strategy

- Prepare an Environmental Management Plan for the Reserve
- Implement works to address identified Environmental Risks (Appendix 1)

- Continue community involvement in environmental management through the Friends of Coolart
- Promote opportunities for environmental studies that will assist the management of the Reserve e.g. Somers School Camp and research by University students.

Cultural Heritage strategy

- Retain, restore and enhance the existing heritage values of the Reserve. Any alterations should be designed in accordance with the recommendations of the Heritage Conservation Analysis undertaken in parallel with this plan
- Future change and development should not diminish the existing significance of the property - it should reinforce, build upon and enhance that significance appropriate to its continued use for educational, environmental, recreational and tourism purposes.