

International Awards for Liveable Communities 2012

Whole City Section (Category A)

Submission from historic

Port Fairy

Great Ocean Road, Victoria



"Port Fairy is a phenomenal community full of committees and groups. We are talking about spiritual groups, service groups, educational groups, recreational groups, sporting, music and environmental groups, Council – you name it, we've got it!"

#### **Essie Warmuth**

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The Mayor, Councillors of Moyne Shire and residents of Port Fairy have prepared the following submission for consideration of the township of Port Fairy, Victoria, Australia, as part of the International Awards for Liveable Communities 2012 Whole City Section (Category A)

As this submission articulates, Port Fairy is unique. When it was suggested an entry be made to the LivCom Awards, the community immediately rose to the task of presenting the town in a way that identified its strengths on the international stage, as well as seeking out the intimate stories that make it such a special place for those fortunate to call Port Fairy home.

The feeling of the community to their town is perhaps best summed up in one memorable quote from a resident, in her statement that "We're in heaven here, and we know it!"

We hope you feel the same way after reading this submission and look forward to an opportunity for a delegation from Port Fairy on the Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia, to present to the judges in Al Ain in November, 2012.

Yours sincerely,

David Madden
Chief Executive Officer

Moyne Shire





Image: Family-friendly Port Fairy.

"The Port Fairy community is a really tight community filled with some amazing, creative, talented people.

Every day it seems as there are more and more people coming to Port Fairy who have come to create, in some way or the other. It feels like home for me. I have no desire to move."

### Introduction

# Port Fairy - a unique community

Port Fairy is an historic fishing village on the iconic Great Ocean Road in Victoria, Australia.

Situated at the mouth of the Moyne River, the township is surrounded by fertile volcanic plains whose rich, dark soils have sustained a buoyant agricultural industry for more than a century and a half.

One of the oldest settlements in the state of Victoria, Port Fairy is home to 2,600 people. However, it draws more than 200,000 visitors every year, making it the state's most popular tourist destination.

The Gunditjmara, Girai Wurrung and Djab Wurrung People are the traditional custodians of the land upon which Port Fairy is situated.

The area we now know as Port Fairy was named by British seaman, Captain James Wishart, after his cutter, The Fairy. By the mid 1830s, the streets of the fledgling settlement were filled with bawdy sealers and whalers drawn by the prolific seal populations and the annual migration of the so-called southern right whale.

Their efforts were so successful that the supply of whales was exhausted within a decade and the townsfolk turned their attentions to farming the region's rich soils.

In 1843, Sydney solicitor James Atkinson bought the Special Survey upon which Port Fairy sits today from the Crown. The town he laid out he named Belfast in honour of his Irish hometown. By 1857, 2190 people lived in Belfast, the port for which became of the busiest in the colony, secondary only to Melbourne.

Thirty years later, a special Act of Parliament saw the township renamed Port Fairy.

For much of its history, fishing and agriculture have been the township's economic mainstay. Today, however, it is tourism that drives the local economy.

In an era when many small Australian towns are losing services, facilities and investment, Port Fairy continues to experience record investment levels and property price increases.



An active arts community enriches the culture of this eclectic township. This, together with a diverse events calendar, helps to create a unique lifestyle experience that sees new residents mix happily with tourists and families with generational ties.

Port Fairy's sense of community is arguably its greatest asset. More than 50 community groups actively contribute to environmental, social, cultural, economic and developmental challenges.

And through all of this, Port Fairy remains a town with no traffic lights or parking meters. Walking or cycling the length and breadth of the village is not only possible, but preferable to driving.

Indeed, Port Fairy's natural environment is a part of this community's ethos. Whether it is one of the infamous southerly 'busters', a scorching summer northerly or an impossibly beautiful autumn calm, the rhythm of day-to-day life is set to the beat of the seasons and the elements.

"More than 50 community groups actively contribute to environmental, social, cultural, economic and developmental challenges..."



Image: Port Fairy's historic lifeboat – the only operational boat of its kind in Australia.

"I am an old-time resident of Port Fairy. Right around the compass, each wind has got its place and plays its part in the nature of the town. That hard, sou'wester, it rips and roars around the place. It blows northerly out of here. It's nasty, it's hot, it's uncomfortable. It brings heat waves and the occasional grassfire around the town. Occasionally we get easterly gales. There are nearly 30 wrecks around the bay from here, mostly because of those easterly winds. When it blows hard easterly, it's a destructive wind that rips the beach apart. It wrecks ships. But summertime southerlies – they're wonderful! They blow 10 knots. You can fly any kite. It put a smile on people's faces. It's easy, summertime wind."

Ted Mellor, 'The Kite Man'



### 1. Strategic Planning

From its earliest years, careful planning has been an important factor in Port Fairy's development.

Contemporary residents enjoy a legacy of the earliest settlers, whose vision for a harmonious village with wide, welcoming streets still characterises the village today.

More than 50 community groups maintain a high level of interest, commitment and passion for the overall strategic planning of the town, its environment and natural setting. Their interest embraces heritage precincts, main streets, commercial development and custodianship of the pristine natural environment.

At an operational level, design and development guidelines have identified character precincts that help to preserve the character and form of the township.

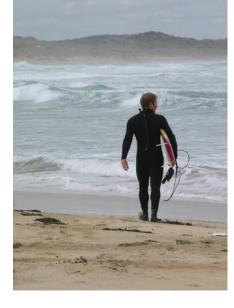
There are a large number of specific strategies into which the community has had input. These include the Arts Strategy, the Accessibility Plan, the Tourism Strategic Plan, Economic Development Strategy and many, many more.

Moyne Shire Council actively engages and invites community involvement in the development of its various strategies. The Council has a raft of strategies in which the community is involved and broadly engaged. They include:

- the East Beach Committee;
- Major Employers Group;
- Port Fairy Streetscape Committee;
- Railway Place Advisory Committee.

Council is proactive rather than regulatory in its approach to heritage matters. It engages professional heritage advisors to provide advice in relation to caring for, maintaining and preserving historic buildings, particularly those earmarked for renovation or extension.

Council is set to embark upon Stage 3 of a major Heritage Study which will guide the future development of Port Fairy.



"The Port Fairy Working Group will plan and coordinate tasks that assess the risk to Port Fairy from flood and coastal erosion, reduce impacts on the community from coastal hazards such as erosion and help Port Fairy adapt to a rising sea level and increases in storm surges and flooding..."



The community also has a culture of active involvement in a range of issues confronting the town. As a result, the following community action groups have been formed:

- Friends of Griffiths Island:
- Coastal Challenge Group;
- Say Goodbye to Plastic Bags Group;
- No Pokies for Port Fairy Group;
- Belfast Pool Management Group;
- Port Fairy Traders Association;
- Port Fairy Tourist Association.

### Best practice story

## Strategic planning to combat sea surge

Rising sea levels and storm surges are a genuine threat to seaside Port Fairy. A Moyne Shire Council and State Government working group has been formed in response to this major concern.

The Port Fairy Working Group is pilot study for Victoria, and will help the community adapt to living with more regularly occurring extreme weather patterns and an eroding coastline.

The resulting body of work will include informed commentary and action in relation to costs (social, environmental, economic) associated with sea level rise, storm surges and flooding from the Moyne River.

The Port Fairy Working Group will plan and coordinate tasks that assess the risk to Port Fairy from flood and coastal erosion, reduce impacts on the community from coastal hazards such as erosion and help Port Fairy adapt to a rising sea level and increases in storm surges and flooding.



"Port Fairy has always had this thing called 'Port Fairy Time'. Time in Port Fairy is always just... whatever! Always a bit slower.

We're in heaven here and we know it!"

Essie Warmuth

## 2. Enhancing our natural and built environments

Port Fairy has a unique physical environment. Its pristine seaside/riverside locale means there are particular responsibilities upon its residents.

In particular, planning for the future of Port Fairy requires recognition of the fact that our township sits within a dynamic, but fragile, natural system.

Situated at the mouth of the Moyne River, flooding is a natural process that Port Fairy's residents have had to learn to live with and adapt to.

The coastal dune system is also an environmental feature subject to movement and impact from a range of natural forces.

Future planning for Port Fairy is undertaken on the basis that our built environments must have minimal impact upon our natural environments.

Beyond the physical environment, Port Fairy's rich heritage, the role of the port in commerce and recreation, the presentation of the town centre and the overall character of the town are critical to its social integrity. Together with the environmental setting, these features are critically important to the local residents and visitors.

There are several examples of how sympathetic development has helped to generate civic pride while creating new facilities to improve the quality of life of community members.

As an example, the development of a Community Services Hub in the centre of Port Fairy has not only accommodated demand for early children education and care. It has also created a place for people to gather and meet.



Image: Port Fairy



A further example is the Battery Hill Precinct, schematic plans for which are shown below.

Battery Hill is historically and environmentally important to Port Fairy, but is a site that has been neglected over the years. Plans to carefully restore and redevelop this fascinating precinct have been developed in consultation with the community. The outcome will be a large recreational area for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The Railway Place precinct was also developed in close consultation with the community. For the past three years, the community has been working collectively to develop a Master Plan to breathe new life into what is presently a disused and abandoned railway goods shed.

Located in the true heart of Port Fairy, Railway Place is a favourite common area for festivals and markets. The Master Plan will preserve the integrity of the town's early rail history while creating new opportunities for the future.

Image: Battery Hill, Port Fairy.

#### Environmental best practice

The Port Fairy community has drawn together to protect and enhance its natural environment. Like many townships of this size and type, it has suffered from some poor development and management decisions in the past.

The Port Fairy Working Group was formed to help the community adapt to living with more regularly occurring extreme patterns, the result of which is an eroding coastline. As outlined elsewhere in this submission, a Coastal Challenge Group has also been established to monitor and report upon the impact of coastal erosion around Port Fairy.

The Port Fairy Rotary Club regularly plants native trees in and around the town, often with the help of local school children.

Indeed, the Port Fairy Consolidated School has a particular focus on sustainability and environment, having installed a solar wind generation system and a range of other sustainability measures.

The school is a participant in the award-winning Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden project, with students actively learning how to grow, prepare (and eat!) their own fresh produce.



Image: Fishing in Port Fairy.



A number of environmental action groups, including the Friends of Griffiths Island and the Friends of Powling Street Wetlands, have been established to help care for the natural environment and protect a number of endangered bird species. These include Shearwaters, the Latham Snipe, the Orange-bellied Parrot and Hooded Plover.

Moyne Shire Council has introduced a "three-bin waste management system", whose green waste and home composting program has resulted in a 40 per cent reduction in compostable waste.

Council has been a recipient of a number of environmental awards in recent years – a measure of its genuine commitment to the environment.

#### Best practice story

## The Friends of Griffiths Island

Griffiths Island is named for John Griffiths, who established Port Fairy's whaling industry on the island in the 1830s.

Since 1859, the majestic lighthouse which is today such an iconic feature of Port Fairy has been faithfully guiding shipping along the treacherous coastline. Today, traces of the lighthouse keepers' cottage and legendary garden can still be quite clearly seen.

Griffiths Island is home to an internationally significant colony of Shearwaters, or "Mutton Birds". Each year, the birds embark upon a remarkable, 15,000-kilometre migration that takes them to the Aleutian Islands and the Kamchatka Peninsula in the most northern extremity of the Pacific Ocean and then back to Port Fairy.

The Friends of Griffiths Island is a band of volunteers which is passionately committed to caring for the island and its native inhabitants.

Aside from its work to protect the Shearwater colony, this group manages priorities for the island, including protection of wildlife, public access, history and heritage and vegetation. Its overall mission "To protect and enhance the natural and cultural environment of Griffiths Island and its vicinity".

The group has a leadership team of eight and membership of some 40 people. It is considered to be the primary source of community action and positive change on and around Griffiths Island.

Image: Griffiths Island, Port Fairy - home of the largest breeding colony of Shearwaters on mainland Australia.



Image: Local schools produced hemp bags that are sold at the supermarket to help reduce plastic bags in Port Fairy.

#### Best practice story

## Say Goodbye to Plastic Bags Project

Thanks to the foresight of two Port Fairy residents, the town is now officially "plastic bag free"!

Genevieve Grant and Essie Warmuth instigated a campaign to rid Port Fairy of plastic bags while at the same time bringing together a range of local businesses and community members.

With the support and cooperation of the local IGA supermarket, Genevieve and Essie succeeded in convincing the entire community to begin using recyclable 'green' bags in place of the environmentally damaging plastic bags.

As part of this project, local schools were asked to help design hemp bags that are still sold in the local IGA supermarket today. Profit from the hemp bags is fed directly back to the schools.

An important aspect of this process was careful consultation with the local indigenous community via Elder, Vicky Cousens. Vicky was asked to provide advice about respectful indigenous terms and phrases to use during the campaign. Vicky also spoke with school children about respect for the land in terms of indigenous language and history.

"With the support and cooperation of the local IGA supermarket, Genevieve and Essie succeeded in convincing the entire community to begin using recyclable *'green'* bags in place of the environmentally damaging plastic bags..."



Image: Port Fairy's East Beach.



### 3. Arts, culture and heritage

There is a depth and diversity of creative talent in Port Fairy. This buoyant and colourful artistic community provides Port Fairy's distinctive 'flavour' and establishes the town as the cultural capital of the Great Ocean Road!

Each year, Port Fairy hosts a rich calendar of events.

The internationally acclaimed Port Fairy Folk Festival is expanded upon in this submission as an example of international best practice.

Winter Weekends is a Port Fairy Tourist Association initiative which provides a welcome splash of colour, light and movement in the depths of Port Fairy winters. Set over two weekends - one in June, the other in July - the thematically-based weekends invite lovers of music, food, wine and the arts to join with Port Fairy locals.

All things literary are celebrated during the annual Ex Libris festival, which draws dozens of booksellers, swappers and authors for a program of workshops, discussions and other literary events.

The Spring Music Festival heralds the arrival of spring with a variety of performances and concerts in intimate café, church and even pub settings. Chamber music is a particular focus.

The best working dogs in Australia are put through their paces each year for the Port Fairy Sheep Dog Trials.

And from Christmas right through until the end of January, the Moyneyana Festival provides a huge program of summertime family entertainment. Now in its 65th year, Moyneyana includes the annual Lions Club art shows, street parades, a classic and wooden boat festival, riverside markets, children's activities and events, bands and family entertainment.

Beyond the festivals, a thriving arts community has given rise to a plethora of galleries, artist workshops, theatre, film, live music and markets. Nationally recognised sculptors, Don Stewart and Meg Finnegan, call Port Fairy home, along with glass blowers Robert Gatt and Freya Marriot, painter Kathryn Weatherly and a range of other artists.

Each month throughout the year, community and farmers' markets operate from the central Village Green. Here, local producers are given opportunity to showcase their home-grown and home-made goods.

Port Fairy is a "foodies" paradise! As the adopted capital of regional and wine producers, it has built a solid reputation for fine dining and culinary excellence. A thriving café culture has been fuelled by the region's buoyant tourism industry.

Port Fairy's cultural appeal is grounded firmly in its heritage. The township has more than 70 National Trust-registered buildings and sites of historical significance.

An active Historical Society operates from the old Courthouse and offers tours of the town centre, cemetery and port.

Port Fairy pays homage to its heritage via a number of memorials and information boards located throughout the town.

"With the support and cooperation of the local IGA supermarket, Genevieve and Essie succeeded in convincing the entire community to begin using recyclable *'green'* bags in place of the environmentally damaging plastic bags..."



Image: Historic Port Fairy in renowned for its well-preserved heritage buildings.



Image: Nigel Wearne, a local musician who got his start at the Port Fairy Folk Festival and recently told his story at the Rural Council Summit that was held in Port Fairy in April.

"The Port Fairy Folk Festival is the largest festival of its tupe in Australia. But aside from delighting music lovers from around the world, it plays a pivotal role in the community..."

### Best practice story

## The Port Fairy Folk Festival

The Port Fairy Folk Festival is the largest festival of its type in Australia. But aside from delighting music lovers from around the world, it plays a pivotal role in the community.

The Port Fairy Folk Festival Committee is comprised of a range of local businesspeople, most of whom cheerfully profess to knowing little or nothing about music! But what they do have in common is a passion for their town and community.

The Festival's success has seen millions of dollars directly spent on new facilities and amenities in Port Fairy, with a great deal of financial support for sporting clubs, community groups and major local charities. The local hospital is a particular beneficiary of festival funds.

Each year the Port Fairy Folk Festival attracts around 30,000 visitors to the town. Locals understand it has a major impact upon the local and regional economy and are prepared to volunteer vast amounts of time to ensure its success.

It is worth noting that the current Festival Director has been at the helm for 34 of the 36 festivals to date. During that time, there have been a total of 28 committee members. This stability has been an important factor.

So, too, the professional business structure that underpins the work of the committee has been pivotal.

But in essence, the committee believes it is its shared passion for and commitment for Port Fairy that has made the Port Fairy Folk Festival the international success it is today.



Image: Port Fairy Folk Festival





### 4. Community participation and empowerment

Port Fairy is the living embodiment of community participation. People in Port Fairy have a 'can do' attitude. Rather than rely on Government to fund the many needs and possibilities, this is a community that just gets on with the job!

Examples of active community participation include:

The huge voluntary commitment to help stage the range of festivals and events throughout the year.



Port Fairy 'Men's Shed' project - an initiative that helps to meet the social needs of older or retired men in the community.

- Port Fairy Community House operates a range of low-cost programs aiming to boost community wellbeing and enrich residents' lives.
- The range of groups who manage community-owned assets, including public halls.
- A vast number of sporting clubs, including football and netball clubs, bowls clubs, the Port Fairy yacht club, basketball clubs, cricket clubs, etc.
- The work of the various service clubs, including the Belfast Lions Club with its work with the elderly and the Port Fairy Rotary Club, which operates tree planting programs.
- The 'No Pokies for Port Fairy' group which aims to ensure the town remains poker machine-free.
- The Say Goodbye to Plastic Bags group, details of which are outlined elsewhere in this submission.
- The various environment groups, including the Friends of Griffiths Island, Friends of Powling Street Wetlands, Friends of the Port Fairy Botanic Gardens, and the Coastal Challenge group.
- The community built and managed indoor heated pool.
- The establishment of the Port Fairy Community Services Centre.
- The various faith and spiritual groups.
- The artistic groups, including artist cooperatives, the Port Fairy Film Society and dramatic groups.

Image: The youth delegates at Rural Summit 2012.



Image: Angela Kenna of Moyne Shire Youth Council leads the opening of Rural Summit with a stirring version of the Australian National anthem.

"Rural Summit 2012 was held in April, with more than 250 delegates drawn from across Victoria. The program reflected a range of sessions and presentations that showcased the needs and aspirations of young people in rural and regional Australia..."

#### Best practice story

## Port Fairy Youth Councillors

This year, Port Fairy was chosen to host Rural Summit 2012 - a major event for Victorian rural communities and their decision-makers.

The Moyne Youth Council opted to become actively involved, nominating two of its Port Fairy-based councilors to sit on the Summit Steering Committee over 12 months.

Rural Summit 2012 was held in April, with more than 250 delegates drawn from across Victoria. The program reflected a range of sessions and presentations that showcased the needs and aspirations of young people in rural and regional Australia.

This event marked the first time young people had been represented in any meaningful way in this state-wide, strategic decision-making forum.

Highlights of the summit included:

- Direct involvement of more than 50 young people from across Moyne Shire for the duration of the three-day event.
- Partnership with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Open Channel in showcasing technology and social media as a means of community engagement.
- Presentations by young people about projects with which they had been actively involved.
- Representation in the opening and closing sessions, which included a young person singing the Australian National Anthem.
- The launch of the Youth Council Mobile Youth Bus resource the culmination of six years of hard work.
- Feedback from delegates that the involvement of young people in the Port Fairy program had inspired them to take a closer look at how they engage and work with young people in their own regions.

### 5. Healthy lifestyle

Port Fairy's pristine natural environment provides the perfect playground for healthy living.

The kilometres of white, sandy beaches and protected lagoons draw large numbers of locals and tourists during the summer months. Surfing, fishing, swimming and boating are all popular pastimes.

Inland, the town's layout actively promotes walking and cycling. Wide streets are serviced by a pathway system that links the residential streets with the busy commercial heart. The ever-increasing network of bike paths and walking tracks encourages people to utilise gardens, parks and outdoor areas throughout Port Fairy.

This is a sporting community, with a number of sport clubs and groups providing important social and healthy living opportunities.

An outstanding 18-hole, links-style golf course on the town's outskirts is ranked among Australia's top 50 golf courses.

"The community has also worked hard to ensure a range of recreational facilities are available..."

Image: Wharfside at Port Fairy



Image: The close proximity to the swimming and surf beaches lends itself to an active involvement in a range of water sports.

"The special thing about Port Fairy is that it is a four-hour trip from *Melbourne* and it doesn't seem to be developing the same way as other areas because it has that tyranny of distance.

It has such a lot for a small town in terms of shops and restaurants and the health service is extraordinary for the size of the town.

> There is a very strong community spirit."

Helen and Ben Fennessy

The community has also worked hard to ensure a range of recreational facilities are available. These include an indoor basketball stadium, squash courts, football ovals and cricket pitches and netball courts.

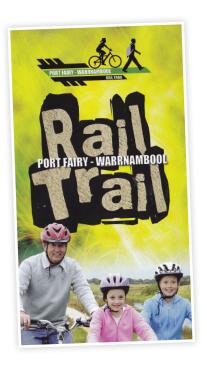
Port Fairy also has an indoor aquatic centre which was funded with the support of a number of local businesses. This provides a safe, year-round venue in which children can learn to swim and a range of other exercise classes can be offered for people of all ages.

In 2012, a rail trail linking the regional City of Warrnambool and Port Fairy was officially opened. Formerly a rail link between the two centres, the new bike and walking path has already proven enormously popular with locals and visitors alike.

A range of programs that encourage healthy activity also operate in Port Fairy. These include:

- the Port Fairy Walkers (each Tuesday morning)
- community cyclists (Thursday)
- Eat Well, Be Active program.

Port Fairy's two primary schools each have a strong focus on healthy, active living. One of the schools is a participant in the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program under which students grow, prepare and eat their own fruit and vegetables.



### Best practice story

## Murray to Moyne Cycle Relay

"There is plenty going on in town. Too much, in fact!

*The great attraction of Port Fairy is* that it is still a village. It takes you half an hour to go down to the letterbox because you will meet three or four people that you know, That's the atmosphere in Port Fairy. People care."

**Judy and Victor Gillatt** 

The annual Murray to Moyne Cycle Relay is a great Port Fairy tradition established by the late Graham Woodrup. Graham's vision for a charity fun ride to raise money for local hospitals has evolved into a major event attracting 1700 riders and their support teams.

Aside from raising much-needed funds for hospitals and health services in south west Victoria (in excess of \$1.3 million in 2012), the team relay event's secondary aim is to encourage more people to realize the health and social benefits of bike riding.

Participants in the 2012 event, which is staged over 520 kilometres, included the Moyne Shire Youth Council which has made the event a part of its annual program of activities. Many local residents and teams from local and regional organisations participate in the event.



Image: Cyclists on the Murray to Moyne Charity Bike Ride, 2012.

### Acknowledgements

A range of groups and individuals have contributed to or were referenced as part developing Port Fairy's entry submission to the International Awards for Liveable Communities. These include:

- Staff and volunteers from the Port Fairy Visitor Information Centre
- Volunteers from the Goodbye to Plastic Bags project, especially Genevieve Grant, Essie Warmurth and the Port Fairy IGA supermarket
- Port Fairy Folk Festival committee
- Port Fairy Bike Group members
- Helen and Ben Fennessy
- Ted Mellor
- Marg Leutton
- Rosemary Arnold
- David Bills-Thompson

- Jenni Hider-Smith, BIG4 Port Fairy
- Steve Dawkins
- Port Fairy Traders Association
- Port Fairy Tourism Association
- Port Fairy Lions Club
- Friends of Griffiths Island
- Port Fairy Community House
- Port Fairy Rotary Club
- Moyne Youth Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- O2 Media Strategic Communications and Graphic Design

"Port Fairy is an historic fishing village on the iconic Great Ocean Road in Victoria, Australia..."

