



CALLING OUR COMMUNITY TO ACTION

Community advocacy can deliver real change

The best advocates for change are people who can tell a personal story that moves politicians, political candidates and decision-makers to action.

As voters, community members have the power to make their voices heard. Individual community members and groups can and

do influence government decisions and proactively drive change.

As a Council, we advocate strongly on behalf of our community for the outcomes that matter to you. We are more likely to succeed in that task if our community joins with us to push for change.

Working alongside our community on advocacy campaigns boosts Council's ability to negotiate an outcome, making success more likely.



How you can advocate

There are many ways individuals and community groups can advocate:

- write to or ask to meet your local Member of Parliament or political candidate
- invite your local Member of Parliament or political candidate to a community meeting or event e.g. BBQ
- start or fill out a petition and send it to your local Member of Parliament or relevant government minister
- start a community group to advocate for the change you want to see
- build partnerships – with Council and others – to work towards a common goal
- email your local councillors to let them know of your support for particular projects
- attend a Council Meeting, either in-person or virtually
- visit Council's Advocacy page online to find out about our current campaigns

To find out more visit: mornpen.vic.gov.au/SHOUTOUT

Council's role in advocacy

We represent our community and strive to deliver on the needs and asks of our people, but some community aspirations are not within Council's ability to deliver.

To achieve many of the goals of our Community Vision, we need to actively work with and influence all levels of government and a broad range of organisations.

One of the ways we do this is through advocacy – representing our community by seeking either financial or policy support from the Victorian and Australian Governments, to deliver what is important to you.

Based on what you tell us during our many community consultation sessions on a range of topics, we develop our advocacy priorities. These are projects we know will deliver real benefits and enrich the quality of life for everyone.

The community's role in advocacy

The Mornington Peninsula is lucky to have many established community and resident groups, with knowledge and expertise across a broad range of issues.

Working in partnership with our community has helped Council deliver a variety of successful advocacy outcomes, as illustrated by our case study examples.

Local level advocacy is essential for issues of local significance and involves partnerships with local residents, including community groups and businesses.

On many issues important to the community, Council cannot advocate alone. Community action on an issue demonstrates the depth of community feeling and ensures our advocacy is as effective as it can be.





AGL Gas Import Jetty and Pipeline Project

Perhaps one of the strongest community campaigns seen on the Mornington Peninsula, the success of the No AGL campaign in 2021 was the culmination of a sustained community effort, that stopped AGL's plan to install a floating gas import jetty and pipeline in Western Port Bay.

What started as a small group of residents determined to oppose development in Western Port Bay, grew steadily over a four-year campaign. It brought together a remarkable number of people on the Mornington Peninsula and beyond to successfully oppose AGL's plans.

In 2017, AGL's plans to construct a gas processing facility and pipeline in Western Port Bay were largely unknown. The Save Westernport group were determined to get the word out to residents, using social media, local newspapers and community events to engage the wider community and discuss the risks associated with the project.

"We quickly discovered that the potential for our community to find its voice, and to make it heard on this issue, relied on effective collaboration and communication," said Save Westernport secretary, Julia Stockigt.

"With the dedicated support of Environment Victoria, we fought a hard four-year campaign against AGL, working with many existing local groups, volunteers and Traditional Owners and contacting government decision-makers and the media.

"Collaboration with people and groups with diverse skills, experience and capabilities was a key element of our success."

It was this collaboration among a wide range of community and interest groups, such as Western Port Biosphere Association, Environment

Victoria, Victorian National Parks Association and Westernport Peninsula Protection Council, which was crucial to the campaigns success.

"The voluntary sphere can be so rewarding for people wanting to gain experience and develop new skills," said Stockigt.

"We should never underestimate the contributions and impact that we can all make."

To raise awareness early in the campaign the group made presentations to the Mornington Peninsula Shire, the Bass Coast Shire, schools and community.

Their Save Westernport stall became a regular fixture at local markets and festivals, where they collected hundreds of signatures every weekend and reached a broad audience, who may otherwise have been unaware of the issue.

"We knew that making people aware of the threats was one of the most important things we could do."

The group organised public meetings and letter box drops to inform and mobilise residents to participate in the campaign. They held rallies, events and protests to lobby the Minister for Planning to call for an Environment Effects Statement (EES).

Once the EES was released, Council voted unanimously to oppose the AGL project.

As a strong stakeholder in the campaign, Council advocated to both the Victorian and Australian Government on behalf of local businesses and thousands of passionate residents. It made a submission to the EES statement exhibition, presented at the Crib Point Inquiry and Advisory Committee and delivered its own communications campaign.

When COVID-19 lockdowns hit, the campaign moved online, relying on social media and online forums. The Council's dedicated webpage facilitated more than 6,000 submissions to the AGL project exhibition.

The extent of community concerns was confirmed by a Council-led online survey where more than 93 per cent of respondents stated their opposition to AGL's plans.

In March 2021 Minister Wynne announced: "It's very clear to me that this project would cause unacceptable impacts on the Western Port environment and the Ramsar wetlands – it's important that these areas are protected."

The community welcomed the Minister's announcement with overwhelming gratitude and joy. The success of the community's campaign showed how precious Western Port is to an enormous number of Peninsula residents and Victorians.

Flinders Pier

Flinders Pier is a much-loved part of the Mornington Peninsula – highly prized by locals and visitors alike, including world-renown naturalist Sir David Attenborough.

However, in the past decade sections of the pier have fallen into disrepair and in 2021, the Victorian Government announced that the first 180 metres of the historic wooden pier would be demolished.

The Save Flinders Pier campaign was born from the local community to raise awareness of the threat to the pier and to build public support for the pier's restoration. The ultimate goal was to persuade Parks Victoria and the Victorian Government that the Flinders Pier:

- provides a much-loved amenity to the people of Victoria
- has historic significance to the development of adjoining coastal communities
- delivers an economic benefit to Flinders through tourism and commercial use
- provides safe separation of pedestrians from vehicles that access the pier facility
- serves as a world-renowned diving spot and is home to the endangered weedy sea dragon that is unique to the Mornington Peninsula.

Under the auspices of the Flinders Community Association, the community led campaign benefitted from a strong combination of skills, including a botanist, marine biologist, civil engineer, social media expert and marketing executive.

"Having such a well-informed team of volunteers played a significant role in enabling the community campaign," said Save Flinders Pier campaign chairperson Charles Reis.

"All communities have residents with relevant expertise and networks that could be mobilised and play an important role informing and supporting community advocacy."

The Save Flinders Pier campaign used a range of strategic community advocacy tactics including:

- setting up a dedicated website
- arranging a public petition which gained more than 44,000 signatures
- holding community meetings and inviting local MPs and Councillors
- increasing the campaign profile through the media, including radio and newspaper coverage and using social media.

The pivotal role of online media merits special mention and the powerful role it played in keeping the issue at the forefront of community and Victorian Government attention. This took considerable effort within the campaign to ensure updates were published every few days on Facebook and Instagram. This intense media profile was picked up by key campaign targets such as Parks Victoria through media monitoring that tracks community responses to issues.

The campaign also capitalised on the timing of the Victorian Budget in May 2022, with the group strengthening its messaging at



the start of the year to influence the budget development process.

Community efforts were supported by the Council seeking recognition for the pier and the surrounding historical precinct in the Victorian Heritage Register.

In the May 2022 Victorian Budget, \$1.5 million was allocated to begin planning and restoration works on Flinders Pier and with it, the protection of the weedy sea dragon.

Heritage Victoria subsequently recommended the pier for listing on the Heritage Register and is proceeding with a hearing before it reaches a final decision.

The Council is now advocating to the Victorian Government for a further commitment of \$10 million

to adequately fund the restoration of the historic Flinders Pier – the current \$1.5 million funding will not be enough to fully restore it.

“Leading a multi-disciplinary committee of volunteers, our goal was to save a much-loved community asset for the future enjoyment of all Victorians,” said Reis.

“The pier defined the early maritime history of Flinders and the pier’s connection to the weedy sea dragon has made it an increasingly popular attraction for visitors and divers from around the world.

“Saving Flinders Pier is an example of how much can be achieved when the community and volunteers come together, supported by Council. It is a great example of effective community advocacy.”

Peninsula Trail

A fully connected Peninsula Trail will be one of the world’s great cycling and walking destinations, however it requires significant funding to construct the missing links.

Community feedback from the Council’s Peninsula 2040 Community Vision project highlighted that better walking and cycling paths are a high priority for the community. This was again confirmed during Council’s 2022–23 Budget consultations.

Community advocacy has been essential to increasing the profile of Peninsula Trail and activating successful Council funding bids to get this significant project started.

Peninsula Trail has been chosen by all eight Rotary Clubs on the Peninsula as a signature project, to mark the 100th anniversary of Rotary in Australia in 2022. Victoria Walks has also selected the project to feature within their sector level advocacy ahead of the 2022 state election.

Rotarians were aware of the community’s desire for better walking and riding paths and could see the potential economic benefits to businesses through increased visitors. Local Rotary members started talking to organisations in the community that shared an interest in the Peninsula Trail.

“There were two aspects to these conversations” says Ross Kilborn, Chair of the Rotary Working Group.

“The first was raising community awareness and support for the trail, and the second was identifying what rest stop facilities local communities wanted along the trail that the clubs could provide.”

The Rotary Clubs have engaged with Councillors, Members of Parliament and election candidates, schools, local businesses, residents and walking and cycling groups. The rest stop facilities installed so far include furniture like benches and tables and more than one club is undertaking revegetation adjoining the Peninsula Trail, involving some of the schools and community groups.

“Peninsula Trail has been the ideal centenary project, not just for the celebration, but for the opportunity it provided clubs to deliver their core purpose – community service. It will take a few years to complete but it will be of benefit for the next 100 years,” said Kilborn.

Council’s Peninsula Trail advocacy strategy has centred around raising awareness of the community of the economic benefits of the project and advocating for government funding.

Key actions have included:

- assigning Peninsula Trail as one of Council’s top six long-term advocacy priorities
- securing a \$10 million Council funding commitment



- a communications campaign including project branding, media releases, promotional video featuring the Mayor, social media posts and a dedicated advocacy page on Council website
- direct representation to local political candidates with CEO and Mayor
- working closely with Rotary to achieve state and federal funding.

The Council has also harnessed the support of a wide range of local organisations that amplify its advocacy through their networks,

including schools, the Baxter Residents and Traders Progress Action Committee, Mornington Community SafeLink Group, Rye Community Group Alliance, Red Hill Riders and the Mornington Preservation Society.

The efforts of local Rotary Clubs to support our advocacy with a consistent message to both Australian and Victorian governments and local political candidates, has undoubtedly resulted in Council successfully securing significant additional funding for the project.

🌐 mornpen.vic.gov.au/peninsulatrail

Spider Crabs

The annual migration of spider crabs to the shallow waters around Rye and Blairgowrie to moult, is recognised locally and internationally as a natural wonder that should be protected and preserved.

Long term residents value the stories going back over 60 years of the spider crabs coming to Rye pier to aggregate for moulting and provide a feast for the smooth rays.

Recent publicity about the Great Spider Crabs has led to huge numbers of crabbers plundering the vulnerable spider crabs from Rye pier and Blairgowrie.

Council and the community share serious concerns regarding the overfishing of spider crabs during their moulting season and the human impact on the fragile ecosystem.

To raise awareness of the risks posed by this overfishing, the Rye Community Group Alliance is running an advocacy campaign, with close support from the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

In addition to the threat to the spider crab population, the large number of crabbers on the piers and the bait used has resulted in pollution in the water and on the foreshore, while nets damage the sensitive marine environment under the pier. This further detracts from the enjoyment of all other users who want to witness this wonderful phenomenon.

“The key to community advocacy is persistence, persistence and more persistence!” commented Local environmentalist and Chair of the Rye Community Group Alliance, Mechelle Cheers.

“Bureaucratic departments assume that when they ‘knock you back’ you will just give up and go away and many people do! So don’t get disheartened, as by trying you will always make a difference to the result”.

Advocacy tactics used by the local community included:

- Getting the media onside.
- Working with individual divers and wider community interest networks outside the Mornington Peninsula to draw community attention to the problem.
- Pictorial displays such as photos of overflowing foreshore bins, huge crowds on Rye pier (during COVID), chicken carcasses littering the seabed and damage to seahorse and other marine habitat were widely circulated via social media.
- Involving the Council. As the crabber behaviour had an impact on community and visitors, we contacted the Mayor and Councillors requesting they contact the Victorian Fishing Authority (VFA) asking that a moratorium on catching the crabs from Rye pier and Blairgowrie marina during moulting be implemented



- Writing letters and emails. The wider community was encouraged to write individually to the VFA and the Minister for Fishing and Boating, requesting the plundering of spider crabs stops.

The Council formally wrote to the Victorian Government, urging them to implement a seasonal ban to protect the spider crabs. Its advocacy included:

- two letters to the Hon. Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Fishing and Boating
- a letter to the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA)
- a submission to the VFA regarding Fisheries (spider crabs) notice
- a communications campaign including a dedicated advocacy page on its website, a

promotional video posted to social media and website, a media release stating the Council's ongoing concerns and Councillor attendance at PR media opportunity.

Following this community and Council advocacy, the VFA has temporarily reduced catch limits from 30 to 15 spider crabs per person and increased location signage.

Council is continuing its advocacy work with several community and coastal user groups, including the Rye Coastal Advisory Group, Rye Community Group Alliance, the diving community and the Spider Crab Alliance (SCA).

📍 mornpen.vic.gov.au/spidercrabs

Emil Madsen Reserve

As the population continues to grow on the Mornington Peninsula and more young families move to the area, Emil Madsen Reserve in Mount Eliza needs to upgrade and expand its facilities to cater for the huge increase in sports participation.

The Mount Eliza Sports Association (MESA) was formed in 2008 to advocate on behalf of existing tenants at Emil Madsen Reserve– the local cricket club, football netball club and later the soccer club.

Over the past 14 years, MESA has continued to highlight the need for more sporting facilities at the reserve to match the huge growth in junior football, netball and soccer and in particular the urgent need for dedicated female change facilities. Parking and safe access to the reserve has also been an issue with the increased visitation.

"To quote the movie Field of Dreams," said Mount Eliza Junior Football Club Vice President Steve Baker, "'If you build it they will come'. Well, to that we said 'hurry up please they are already here!'"

Armed with membership data, census data and school enrolment data, the association continued to make representations to Council and local political candidates.

A new football oval was opened for play in 2018 after the Mount Eliza Junior Football Club pledged funding for 50 per cent of the cost, new netball courts have been built and the soccer club has two new competition-size soccer pitches.

However, upgrades to the tired and outdated sports pavilion and new changeroom facilities have continued to be an issue.

In 2019, there was a resurgence of lobbying efforts by the clubs up until the 2022 Federal

election, including family BBQ events with political candidates and a social media campaign. With new Council representatives and Federal Members, momentum began to build.

Master Plans were again reviewed and updated to reflect new industry standards and community expectations. Council allocated more funding to engage architects and consultants to lead design for a new multi-tenant pavilion. All clubs were involved in this consultative process.

In the lead up to the federal election, the Council also clearly identified and communicated to electoral candidates the community benefits of this priority project, with the purpose of gaining electoral funding pledges.

The 2022 Federal election saw both major political parties pledge \$15 million towards upgrading facilities at Emil Madsen Reserve. This was a wonderful outcome, but a lot of funding is still required to fully deliver the Master Plan. Our advocacy will continue to build on this first big step forward.

📍 mornpen.vic.gov.au/emilmadsen

