

Ms Julie Reid  
Manager Urban Strategy and Culture  
(Attention: Ms Claire Merlo)  
Bayside City Council  
76 Royal Avenue  
SANDRINGHAM VIC 3191

Dear Ms Reid,

## Comments on Coastal Trails Signage Proposals



**Beaumaris Conservation Society Inc.**

Association Number A00348878

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2008-03-07

Beaumaris Conservation Society Inc. appreciated the opportunity for some of its officers to inspect examples of the above signage and discuss them with Council staff and consultants at Ricketts Point on 2008-02-25. BCS Inc. has considered the proposals, and its comments below.

### 1. Proposed New 'Art Trail' Signs have some positive aspects relative to Existing 'Art Trail' Signs:

**Subject to the comments in the subsequent paragraphs**, BCS Inc. acknowledges the proposed

- Intention to not increase the number of 'Art Trail' signs,
- substantial reduction of the area of each 'Art Trail' sign, with reduced verbiage,
- simple rectangular shape replacing the previous gimmicky wavy lower edge,
- reduced intrusive visual impact of each sign's support, as a low single support of a subdued rust colour would replace each present tall pair of knob-capped green poles,
- distinctly improved and more refined quality of the graphics and lettering on the signs,
- reduction of the size and percentage of space (was c. 15%) used for logos and attribution, and
- inclusion of a Web site address for those seeking elaboration and updating of information.



Comparison of Present & Proposed 'Art Trail' Signs

**2. Sign Proliferation Degrades Coastal Landscapes:** BCS Inc. notes Council's resolve to maintain its 'Art Trail', and add extra interpretive trails, but points out inherent conflicts of purpose in the small remaining natural coastal landscape affected. The fundamental problem is that, by definition, a natural coastal landscape is spared alien artefacts like signs. A sight visitors to this landscape want to avoid is the ubiquitous signage in Melbourne's vast built-up areas. Instead they find, perversely, that Beach Park at the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary now has **180 signs erected by some 8 different organizations**, a seemingly greater average **signage density** than most places in Melbourne, apart from its commercial and industrial areas. Council should declare a maximum for the number of its signs here, and adhere to it.

**3. White Background of New Signs is Too Conspicuous:** The background of the new 'Art Trail' signs is still a pure white. That is the most effective surface for non-specular light reflection, so it produces maximum visibility of the signs' presence from an enormously greater area than the signs can be read from. The signs' strong white presence contrasts starkly with the green vegetation of low reflectivity behind them. They thus, excessively and unnecessarily - for no good purpose over that great area beyond the very much smaller zone where they are readable - alter and intrude greatly upon the fine landscapes they refer to.

**4. Interchange Reflectivity of Text and Background:** It is ironic that the few long-gone artists the signs refer to were spared the alteration and intrusion into their landscapes that signs introduce, but the much more numerous current artists and observers of the landscape today cannot escape that harm. The excessive size of the existing 'Art Trail' signs made that effect worse, but the effect should, in the interests of retaining some quality of landscape experience for all users, especially those that show their appreciation of the reserve by repeated visits, be further minimized by replacing the background with a far less reflective shade such as grey

or brown, and replacing the very much smaller area of text with a pure white to provide good contrast for reading, even though that softer, subtler distant appearance might cause a few less observant visitors to overlook some signs on their first visit. This interchange request applies to all the proposed trails. A benefit of using a darker background is also the disincentive given to graffiti vandals, who normally apply dark marks.



**Gross Impact of Sign's White Background to its Text at Table Rock**

The stark contrast that discordant large rectilinear objects produce in the natural landscape was very evident in the segment of the widely-viewed ABC Television series *“Sea Change”* filmed at Bayside’s Half Moon Bay beach, where the treed background to the beach was marred by a large white rectangle – the local ‘Art Trail’ board. Local conservationists - responding to an invitation by the former Federal Member for the neighbouring electorate of Isaacs, Ann Corcoran MHR, to show her features of the Mentone foreshore - were embarrassed when she asked, on the foreshore at Mundy Street, Mentone, what the noticeable white object was on the Beaumaris Cliff some 300 metres away, and they had to apologetically tell her that it was one of Bayside City Council’s unnecessarily disfiguring ‘Art Trail’ signs.

As many of the **180 signs above** are necessary for safety and management of the land, and are most concentrated in car parks and heavily trafficked areas, any overspill, especially into more natural remnants, should be much more firmly and thoughtfully rationed than at present.

**5. Once Read, Signs just Clutter:** Little consideration seems to have been given to modified or alternative interpretive measures that would impact less persistently on the most frequent visitors to Beach Park, who include many Beaumaris residents that contribute financially to its upkeep through the rates they pay. After frequent visitors to the reserve - who would account for a large percentage of its visitors - have read the fixed interpretive signs **the first time**, most would very rarely choose to inspect them again, yet the fixed signs linger as a conspicuous, irritating, part of the landscape that is of no further use, but they are hard to put out of sight and notice. [Googling “Ricketts Point”](#) shows Bayside Council’s Web efforts to be a non-starter. Council should have visitors doing a Web search on Ricketts Point to see plenty of good Ricketts Point material once Council has placed it there. That would be far more dynamic, flexible and ongoing, and far less harmful to Beach Park.

**6. Use Existing Structures as Backing:** The interpretive signs would be much less grating if they were affixed to surfaces of existing structures, e.g. signs. Both blank, uncontributing rear sides would then be usefully hidden. Such affixing is referred to in a qualified way under the heading, **“Design: Form”** on an explanatory Bayside City Council sheet we were given, but BCS Inc. would appreciate much more specific indications of the actual places where, and the extent to which, such an intention would be implemented.

There is no better example of a type of much-replicated and distinctive Ricketts Point structure - only one of which now has a sign on it, in precisely the way BCS Inc. suggests - than the numerous large cairns of basalt rocks cemented together holding the large horizontal poles that form the fence along the concrete promenade south from Beaumaris Yacht Club’s building some 400 metres. The sole cairn used for a sign bears a bronze plaque marking the official opening of the present ‘Art Trail’, as shown in the [photograph just below](#). We hope work on the rust-coloured steel supports is not so advanced and committed that the cairns and walls etc. will not be used instead, certainly for the nearby Charles Conder and Arthur Streeton signs.





## Bronze Plaque North of Ricketts Point Tea House Harmonizes with its Basalt Cairn Backdrop & Shows its Face Only

## 7. Proposed Modified Revival of the Defunct 'Environment' Signs of the former Municipality:

These signs, installed by the former Sandringham City Council well over 15 years ago, were in two forms. Their last location noted by BCS Inc. is shown at [www.beaumarisconservation.net/\\_sancsigz.pdf](http://www.beaumarisconservation.net/_sancsigz.pdf) with photos of each of the **180** signs of all types, *in situ*, and the individual contribution of each to the collective blight noted.

The more intrusive form of dilapidated 'Environment' sign, of which there were eight (two, including the [plinth sitting now where it was dumped](#) in the shallow water below the Quiet Corner sea wall, are bare) was a concrete 'crematorium' plinth topped by a box covered with a clear acrylic top through which the paper notices below were meant to be viewed. The underside of the acrylic top quickly became covered with condensed moisture making it opaque for much of the time, and droplets from it soon marred the paper notice with unsightly and obscuring mildew. Nevertheless the signs were all left to rot, even though [at least one of those](#), referring to and describing Thomas Ricketts 1860-1906, bears the attribution of Bayside City Council.

The less intrusive form of dilapidated 'Environment' sign, of which there were seven, was a hardwood slab with an angled top to which was screwed a small plastic notice with a protective clear acrylic cover. The signs are now generally derelict and unreadable, and three are just [bare slabs](#).

BCS Inc. officers were shown an example of a modification of a 'crematorium' plinth that had, secured to its top surface, in place of the former acrylic-lidded box, a hollow steel triangular right prism structure with its ends open and with a sign, "Geology", on one of its two sloping surfaces between its ends. The other sloping surface was empty. They considered that the size and appearance of that hollow steel prism and the format of its notice was reasonable and usable, provided that:

- as with the 'Art Trail' signs, it used grey or brown backgrounds with far less obtrusive white letters,
- the number of 'Environment' signs was halved by using **both** sloping surfaces of the prism, and
- the bulky concrete 'crematorium' plinths that it and similar signs were proposed to be placed on were all removed from Beach Park completely.

They propose that the steel prism signs should be mounted on the existing basalt cairns and other existing functional structures such as pole barriers etc. instead - thus beneficially resulting in the class of gratuitous clutter represented by the bulky 'crematorium plinths' disappearing from Beach Park entirely.

## 8. Proposed Introduction of Many New, Extra Signs described as ‘History’ and ‘Indigenous’:

The example of a 'History' sign exhibited revealed a bigger sign about twice as wide as it was high. Signs of that size and shape are too wide to be affixed to one of the large number of basalt rock cairns available, so BCS Inc. officers consider that such signs would be better reshaped to be squarer so that they could be affixed to those cairns. The example was also displayed on the seaward side of the long concrete promenade, where it intruded into the landscape view too much.

Location of all signs on the landward side of that promenade would be far preferable. Other places that such squarer signs could be much less damagingly placed would be on walls of buildings, and on the blank backs of other signs. No example was displayed of an 'Indigenous' sign, but a similar approach to avoiding more separate supports and signed surfaces peppering the quite small, overloaded area of coastal landscape is needed for all existing and proposed signs.

### 9. Distribution and Siting of the Plethora of Signs along the Beaumaris Coastline:

The explanatory document mentioned “Rationalization, Orientation hubs, and Supportive Settings”. That could give an opportunity to spare more remote parts of the Beaumaris coast enjoyed primarily by walkers, viz.:

- between the McGregor Avenue Ramp and the Beaumaris Yacht Club,
- between the Dalgetty Road stairway and the Keys Street cliff top car park, and

- between Moysey Gardens and Charman Road, Beaumaris.

Those parts now have 'Art Trail' signs, 'crematorium' concrete plinths and wooden slabs whose location could thus be reconsidered so that the replacements are consolidated more discreetly into better manageable hubs. The existing 'Environment' plinths and slabs are a quirky hotch-potch of isolated *ad hoc* snatches of information about the botany, geology and history of the area. It is to be hoped that the 'rationalization' and 'hub' approach referred to above will remove the present pattern of fine relatively undisturbed stretches of bushland and beach being interrupted by didactic signs and their infrastructure.

The hubs and settings should logically be near existing structures such as buildings, stair rails and seats, all of which provide a physical support for the proposed signs and shelter them from standing out like sore thumbs. BCS Inc. is opposed to more seats being installed. The existing policy allowing commemorative plaques for deceased citizens should be altered to discontinue that practice as the space is needed for public purposes such as the above rationalization.

The siting of existing and proposed signs should be far more discreet and localized, with existing structures being used to play down their prominence. As the Table Rock picture earlier demonstrated, and our Web page on [Clarice Beckett and the Moysey Gardens](#) points out, the bright white is seen from too far away. Far more consideration should be given to how far beyond the reading distance a sign can be seen from, with a view to confining the visual impact of the sign to within the reading distance. It would appear that the guide posts envisaged might assist in that aim, but it is important that they are not too bulky. The tall post displayed would be far too obtrusive unless it was right alongside a stairway post or some such feature that moderated its visual impact. The small colour indicators are a sensible measure, but it might be desirable to have the single word 'Art', 'Environment', 'History' or 'Indigenous' appear just under each to re-inforce its significance.

Yours sincerely,

Adrian Cerbasi  
President  
Beaumaris Conservation Society Inc.