Observations of vegetation at Walkerville

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On Tuesday the 1st of April 2014 native vegetation between Waratah Bay and Walkerville South (Cape Liptrap Coastal Park) was inspected at the request of local residents to assess the likely ecological consequences of proposed prescribed burning. Much of the vegetation in this area has remained unburnt for almost 88 years.

Ecological Vegetation Classes occurring in this patch of native vegetation include Damp Forest, Lowland Forest, Damp Heathy Woodland, Sand Heathland, Wet Heathland, Coast Banksia Woodland and Swamp Scrub. The native vegetation observed during this inspection was regarded to be in good ecological condition. Weed cover and diversity was generally very low and confined to disturbed sites along roads and tracks and around camping areas. There were a diversity of age classes among woody species, including the dominant eucalypts, and the expected diversity of indigenous plants was observed at each of the EVCs inspected given the time of year.

Long unburnt native vegetation, such as that found at Walkerville, is rare within the landscape of South Gippsland, and provides an important reference against which other remnant patches with different fire regimes can be compared.

Mature Heathland at Walkerville

It is likely that the structure and floristic composition of mature heathland (pictured above) provides resources and habitat for a diversity of native flora and fauna that are absent or less abundant in earlier successional stages of this vegetation type. Given that there are many examples of early post-fire succession heathland remnants in the area (some of which cover extensive areas including parts of the Wilsons Promontory National Park) it is desirable for ecological reasons to retain the remnant vegetation at Cape Liptrap Coastal Park in its long unburnt state.

Damp Forest in this area supports wet forest/rainforest elements including Muttonwood (*Myrsine howittiana*), Twinning Silkpods (*Parsonsia brownii*) and Tasmanian Broom Heath (*Monotoca glauca*), which is listed as rare in Victoria. The consequences of burning this vegetation type will include allowing more solar radiation and wind to penetrate to the ground level, drying it out and making less suitable for these species. Observation suggests repeated fires tend to lead to a dominance of bracken and therefore an increase in fire risk; further research is required on the dynamics of fire regimes, vegetation flammability and fuel loads.

Tasmanian Broom Heath (*Monotoca glauca*) is a locally dominant shrub in both Lowland and Damp Forest at the site. This species appears to suppress the growth of more flammable species such as bracken and has very low ground litter loads. This is a significant fire sensitive tree within this area and its role in suppressing bracken and reduced accumulation of litter requires further research.

The growth of Bracken (Pteridium esculentum) is suppressed under mature Tasmanian Broom Heath (*Monotoca glauca*).