

Short-term coastal erosion

Where's my beach gone?

Coastal Management Fact Sheet 2.3

Short-term coastal erosion is a normal coastal process. In some years this can cause changes to our beaches.

Waves, tides and wind move and deposit sand along the coast all the time. As a result, the coastline advances and retreats. Whilst for most years this is barely noticeable, some years the beach you left behind at your last visit is no longer there.

Major erosion events usually happen in winter. They can lead to cliff slumps, sand slumps and slips on dunes, sand being removed from one beach and deposited on another, new sand bars, sand blocking estuaries and loss of vegetation.

Local land managers monitor erosion events, taking notes on if this is long term recession or a cyclic event. In some cases they will take action to look after their beach as a result of an erosion event.

Which beaches are affected?

All beaches along the coast can be impacted by erosion.

We've seen significant erosion events in recent years at Anglesea, Fairhaven, Skenes Creek, Apollo Bay, Marengo, Port Fairy and Portland.

All beaches are still open and available for normal coast uses including surfing, fishing, walking and swimming. In some cases there may be less sand to play on or barriers protecting dangerous or sensitive areas.



What happens where short-term erosion has occurred?

Protection of the shoreline is not usually required as a result of short-term erosion. However, sometimes action is needed where coastal settlements are very close to the changing beach environment or where people and their activities have changed normal coastal processes.

Actions taken in response to erosion include:

- Closing and/or providing alternative beach access points and car parks
- Rebuilding beach access points
- Erection of temporary barriers

In extreme cases the Department of Environment and Primary Industries has approved the movement of sand from beaches where sand has built up to beaches experiencing erosion. This helps protect eroded beaches against high tides.

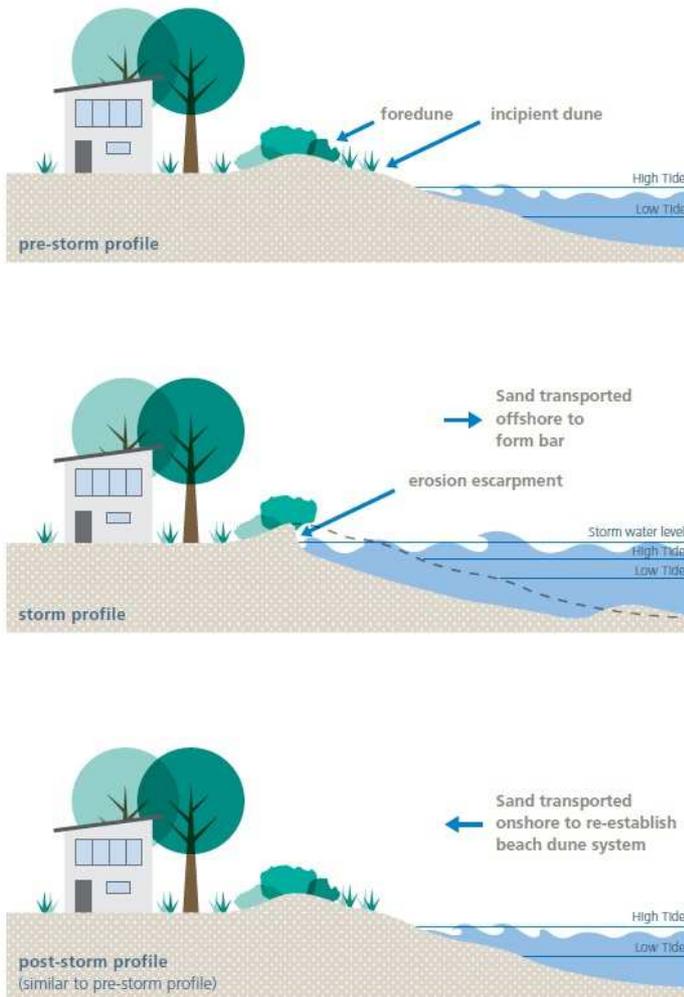
What you can do to help

Our coast is very resilient, but it can also be very fragile if it has been impacted by erosion. Simply walking on sand dunes can damage the sensitive vegetation and the homes of animals. Some things that you can do to help include:

- Keep to formed dune tracks to protect sensitive coastal plants and animals
- Don't drive cars or motorbikes on our beaches
- Don't dune surf or ride boogie boards on dunes
- Obey warning signs and other barriers restricting access to dangerous or sensitive locations
- Join your local volunteer group or become involved in the protection of our coastline

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Below: the impact and recovery from short-term erosion (source: NSW DLWC 2001)



What is being done to reduce the impact of short-term erosion in the future?

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries is working with coastal planners and managers to help manage risks and minimise impacts from a range of coastal processes, including erosion.

Wherever possible the need for emergency works as a result of coastal erosion is addressed by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries.

How does short-term coastal erosion happen?

The coast is always changing and coastal erosion is part of this dynamic environment.

Short-term erosion more often occurs during winter over periods or days or even years. During storms, waves remove sand from beaches and can reach the backshore area and erode the sand dunes. This sand acts as a reservoir. The beach changes, but the change is considered normal.

Impact of climate variability on short-term coastal erosion

The Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008 identifies that during this century it is likely the Victorian coastline will be impacted by sea level rise and increased frequency and severity of storm events which are likely to lead to greater coastal erosion in inundation.

The Strategy contains a range of policies and actions to help prepare Victoria's coastal communities for impacts associated with climate variability (www.vcc.vic.gov.au).

For more information on impacts of a changing climate and to see a copy of the Victorian Coastal Hazard Guide visit www.climatechange.vic.gov.au.



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