The Moolap Salt Works – past, present and future

The old salt pans from the previous Cheetham Saltworks are highly important feeding and roosting areas for a range of migratory waders and a nesting site for Fairy and Little Terns. All these species of birds are listed in the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC). A wide range of other water birds use the site. Members of the Geelong Field Naturalists have a strong connection to the site due to their ongoing survey work there for more than 40 years.

When plans to create a marina/urban development at the Moolap site were announced in 2012, the Geelong Field Naturalists Club formed a group to lobby strongly for the conservation of the site. This involved a public campaign and a series of detailed submissions to various authorities.

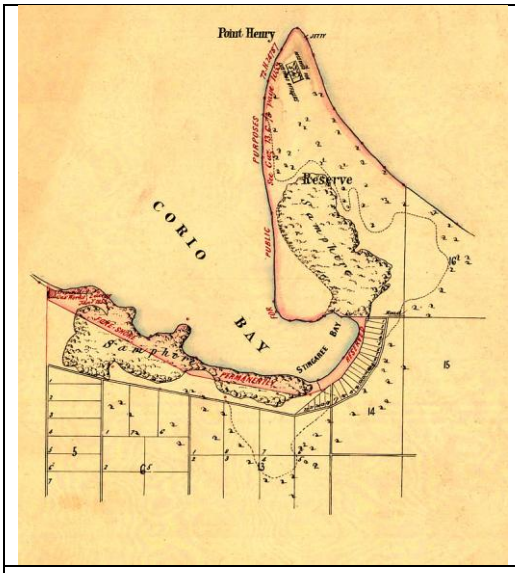
Since the 2015 Ministerial decision to conserve the leased area as an environmental asset, multiple studies and plans have been released. Future management of the site is unclear.

A brief history of the Moolap site so far

Year	Event
Pre 1835	The site was a shallow salt marsh zone, part of Corio Bay.
1888	Cheetham Salt begins producing salt at Moolap on 630 acre lease of Crown Land plus some 400 acres of freehold title.
1981	**Geelong Field Naturalists Club (GFNC) begins regular surveys of shorebirds**.
1992	Ridley Corp purchases Cheetham Salt.
2009	**Salt refining ceases at Moolap**. Salt extraction ceased much earlier.
2012	Ridley announces first **plan to develop an urban/marina at the Moolap site**. The high conservation significance of Moolap to migratory shorebirds triggers the Federal EPBC act.
May 2015	Minister Lisa Neville announces suspension of the marina development and the formation of a Land Use Study to cover the zone from Moolap Salt Fields to Pt Henry.

The Land Use Study and other developments since 2015

Aug 2019	**Moolap Coastal Strategic Reference Plan** released (4 years in the making)
Jun 2022	The GFNC urged that the Moolap site be incorporated into the **Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Ramsar site**.
2023	**Leasehold on the Crown Land passes to DEECA.**
Jan 2024	Development of the **Moolap Environmental Management Masterplan** begins.
Oct 2025	State government review of Ramsar site boundaries recommends that Moolap be incorporated into the **Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Ramsar site**. The change is yet to receive Federal government approval.
Mid 2026	Release of the **Moolap Environmental Management Masterplan** due. This should map the locations of wetlands, buildings, infrastructure, pathways etc, plus management, tenure and funding of the site development.

	
Pre1890 map	Aerial view