

Out of control

Sir,- As a ratepayer and former councillor of the East Gippsland Shire, I am deeply concerned with the democratic processes and financial management of this shire.

Present councillors appear unable to evaluate matters of serious consequence or are too gutless to speak up for the people they represent.

The council last week approved a multi-million dollar boat ramp whose ongoing maintenance and safety costs are likely to be astronomical.

As a ratepayer I object to this burden which is being incurred for the benefit of a minority group of users.

Despite expert advice from marine experts, fishermen, an independent parliamentary panel and people from many spheres of life, the council has persisted in the massive 3B option instead of an alternative lower impact ramp that would cost \$2m less to build.

Future implications are very serious. As well as destroying the naturally magic area that draws tourists to Mallacoota from all over the world, experts have pointed out the likelihood of accidents in the treacherous water to which 3B will give access.

With this advice on the public record it is likely that the usual insurance cover over public lands would be deemed invalid and multi-million dollar litigation would fall to the shire and its ratepayers.

Council, over a nine-year period, has dismissed the concerns of more than 80 per cent of submissions. We have been fed misinformation to such an extent that it is hard to imagine this has been ineptitude.

The council has used spin and expensive litigation to block the seri-

ous concerns of its constituents.

Every year council rates rise beyond the CPI, compounding plus revaluations, while householders face uncertain economic times. Local government has bloated to an expensive bureaucracy over boom years. But now with sharply rising costs of utilities (water, gas and power), with job losses and government cuts, it has become an unreasonable burden.

If councillors are unable or unwilling to respond to the concerns of constituents we have a parody of democracy at the level of government once described as that closest to its people.

With no brakes except at election time, it is merely a drive in / drive out form of democracy.

Do our councillors really represent us, and if not, who controls them? Other levels of government are scrutinised by active opposition parties but local government operates most of the time behind closed doors.

It is important that no increase in power be given to 'local government' through the coming referendum.

Yours etc.,
Linette Treasure,
Buchan.

Fight is not over

Sir,- The decision to proceed with Option 3B at Bastion Point is extremely disappointing, although not unexpected.

The disappointing aspect is that greed and self-interest has overridden the moral and environmentally responsible option. Most people who favoured the 3B option have said to me they did not realise the impact this proposal will have on the pristine beach and rock pool environment, at the end of the pristine

coastal walking path through a National Park.

Interesting to read an article by the new Rotary International president where he states "...if I discern that someone has a vested interest or may be looking at a personal economic benefit, I have a simple suggestion: Apply the four-way test."

The four-way test is a test we as Rotarians apply to all things we think, say or do.

The test is: Is it the truth, is it fair to all concerned, will it build goodwill and better friendships, will it be beneficial to all concerned.

There is no doubt that this decision to proceed with Option 3B fails each one of these tests.

But the fight for what is right is not over. Just as it was not over when people in power tried to destroy the Franklin River more than 20 years ago.

Yours etc.,
Bill Gamble,
Forge Creek.

Scar on landscape

Sir,- We have reached the final stage in this long fight to achieve a compromise solution for improved ocean access at Bastion Point, Mallacoota. Council has awarded the tender for the construction of the overdevelopment known as Option 3B.

If the results of expert panel hearings, hundreds of submissions and Government departmental advice are to be ignored, why waste public time and money pretending to consult? The money could be far more usefully spent on education, health, public housing, rather than paying mere lip service to the democratic process.

An eminent economist once gave this advice on problems of rural development: "For constructive work the principal task is always the restoration of some kind of balance. Today, we

suffer from an almost universal idolatry of gigantism. It is therefore necessary to insist on the virtues of smallness."

The chance to find a more acceptable, smaller solution for improved ocean access, at the site of the current inadequate ramp, appears to have been lost.

I am cynical enough to believe that the persistent pursuit of Option 3B is about a hidden agenda - the industrialisation of Bastion Point, not to make boating easier for recreational anglers.

Council's decision on July 2 marked a truly sad day for our democratic process and will leave the Mallacoota community extremely fragile for years to come.

By this time next year, should 3B actually have been constructed, the natural magic of Bastion Point will be just a memory.

The defacing of this lovely stretch of our coastline will become the legacy for which councillors will be remembered. Option 3B is

environmental graffiti which cannot even be given the alternative title of 'art'. It will create a scar that can never be eradicated from our wilderness coast, and a scar also on the psyche of the majority of Mallacoota's residents, who feel disillusioned and angry, for years to come.

Had adequate time been available at the council meeting, I had intended offering my heartfelt thanks to past councillors Linette Treasure, David Eagleson, Mendy Urie, Bill Gamble and Dale Fisher for their unwavering support, often in extremely difficult circumstances.

Yours etc.,
June Drake,
Mallacoota.