

Frustrations rise as Bastion Point protest continues



• Police were called but no arrests were necessary when Save Bastion Point campaigners (left) created a blockade at the entrance to the construction zone on Friday.

By Melinda Cairns Hack

Save Bastion Point campaigners have become increasingly frustrated with the East Gippsland Shire Council and Victorian Government.

In what has been described by the group as an inappropriate large-scale development of Bastion Point, and due to a perceived lack of proper answers, the campaign group's members rallied in Mallacoota last Friday during a council run meeting.

With cries of Shame, Shire, Shame, the protestors slammed the East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC) as part of a continued effort to protect Victoria's Wilderness Coast from the controversial Bastion Point ocean-access boat ramp development (known as option 3b).

Community members expressed their outrage at council's destruction of the beach and its refusal to work with them to build a less damaging ocean access boat ramp.

EGSC director of operations, Chris Waites, said the protest action was disappointing.

"The protestors were loud and at times some fairly abusive comments were made from a small number of protestors.

"Council fully expects heartfelt opposition to the project from those who have been opposed to it all the way through, but Friday's protest really started to get beyond what could be considered as peaceful.

"We understand and accept a level of ongoing opposition," Mr Waites said.

"Objectors have made this clear from the start but council would hope if the protests continue, they return to a more peaceful form."

The protest escalated as it moved to blockade the gate to the construction site at which point the police arrived to break up the rally, but no arrests were necessary.

Save Bastion Point spokesperson Ros Macvean said on Tuesday that despite petitions, numerous letters and emails to the EGSC and Victorian Government, protest rallies, the support of the Greens party and other major organisations, and having the Independent Inquiry Panel recommend against the council's proposal, the group is still being ignored.

"We have played by the rules and followed due process the whole way but politics has made the final decision.

"Business influences have prevailed over sound management of our coastline," Ms Macvean said.

"The community is not getting any answers that add up ... the development is illogical and the desecration that is occurring has caused deep grief in our community.

"As one protestor in the community said, if destruction to manmade structures occurred it would be called vandalism, but to our coastal wilderness it is regarded as progress."

Work began on the \$6.5million project by GPM Constructions earlier this month, and the beach now has truckloads of rubble on site in preparation for a road and breakwater construction.

"It's only a matter of weeks until the damage will be irreversible," Ms Macvean said.

She said a significant number of residents against the development have taken to another form of protest, through a rates strike.

The group is maintaining a vigil at the front gate of the construction site and will continue to hold protests, Ms Macvean said.

"People will carry out all sorts of passionate acts when they feel strongly that something is wrong.

"The Save Bastion Point group advocates peaceful organised protest action, but we cannot predict what individuals may do," Ms Macvean said.

"We are at a loss as to why the general community is being ignored.

"Despite more than 5000 people choosing to come here over summer, it seems due to our remoteness from Melbourne we are being forgotten ... our natural assets haven't given us any lobby power."

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