

Abbott feels heat on Jesus claim

By ADAM MORTON
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

TONY Abbott is under pressure to justify a claim to primary school students that it was considerably warmer when Jesus was alive than it is today.

The Opposition Leader urged year 5 and 6 students at Trinity Gardens Primary School in Adelaide to be sceptical about the human contribution to climate change, saying it was an open question.

During a question-and-answer session on Friday, Mr Abbott said that it was warmer "at the time of Julius Caesar and Jesus of Nazareth" than now.

Leading scientists said there was no evidence to suggest the globe was hotter 2000 years ago. Australian Academy of Science president Kurt Lambeck said true scepticism was fine, but required looking at published data with an open mind.

"To make these glib statements to school students, I think, is wrong," Professor Lambeck said.

"It's not encouraging them to be sceptical, it's encouraging them to accept unsubstantiated information."

Tas van Ommen, principal research scientist with the Australian Antarctic Division, which collects climate data from ice cores, said any definitive statement about global temperatures 2000 years ago was "completely unfounded".

He cited the 2007 report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which found that available data from climate records was too sparse to make clear statements beyond about 1000 years ago.

A spokeswoman for Mr Abbott said he thought man made a contribution to climate change, but there was an argument as to the extent and what should be done about it.

AGEING PARENTS KEPT OFFSHORE: How can we expect new Australians to abandon their mothers and fathers?
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Residents at breaking point over surf plan

By HELEN PITT

A BREAKWATER that threatens a popular surf break will be the centre of a historic legal action taken by residents of an East Gippsland hamlet who say the state government has ignored its own environmental advice.

Friends of Mallacoota have taken Planning Minister Justin Madden to the Supreme Court over plans to build a two-lane boating facility at Bastion Point, which includes a 130-metre long breakwater that goes through a reef and threatens one of the best surf breaks in eastern Victoria.

The case, which begins today, is believed to be the first time a community group has sought review of a planning minister's decision under the Environmental Effects Act.

For more than 20 years, everyone in the tourist haven, population 1000, has agreed a new boating facility is needed.

In the 1990s, the East Gippsland Shire Council pushed ahead with plans to redevelop the current boat ramp — shared by commercial and recreational boaters, surfers and swimmers — claiming it was unsafe, especially with holidaying Melburnians swelling summer numbers to more than 5000 a week.

In 2008, an independent panel appointed by the planning minister investigated the environmental effects statement and found that the development was unsafe and would harm tourism, and that the economic case for the project was very weak. The panel recommended a smaller upgrade of the current ramp that would not interfere with the surf break and reef.

Despite the findings, Mr Madden allowed the current breakwater development to proceed in June 2009.

Elizabeth McKinnon, a soli-

citor with the Environment Defenders Office, said the Save Bastion Point Campaign would argue the minister had failed to make an assessment of the impact of the proposed boat ramp on the environment, as the act required him to do.

"Obviously no community group wants to wind up in the Supreme Court. However, the Minister's decision in this instance is so extraordinary that the community feels it has been left with no other option."

Craig Ingram, independent member for Gippsland East, claims the issue has divided the small community where he grew up. A 2001 electoral commission poll found that support for the current boat ramp proposal was two to one, he said.

The independent panel dismissed this claim, as 87 per cent of submissions it received were against the development. The protest movement Save Bastion Point, whose members have placed numerous anti-development signs around town, brings together a diverse range of locals from the lighthouse keeper to surfers, well-heeled Melburnians with holiday homes and workers in the town's stores.

The Victorian National Parks Association and the Australian Conservation Foundation have lent support to the court case.

Save Bastion Point spokesman Leo Op den Brouw, the lighthouse keeper on nearby Gabo Island, said the court case was a last-ditch effort after an exhausting six-year battle. "The case is important for the whole Victoria coastline. We may live in a remote Victorian coastal town far from Spring Street, but it's time we were listened to."

A spokesman for Mr Madden said it would be inappropriate to comment as the matter was before the court.



Surfing the break at Bastion Point (below); Mallacoota local Jim Sakkas (left) on his bike outside his home; Jade Nolan with her children Nina and Taj and neighbour Dinah van-Swol (right); Jesse and Trindi Nation with a blunt message to the state government (below right).

PICTURES: MICHAEL RAYNER

