

What Price Democracy?

In the ongoing debate over the boat ramp issue, why do so many people overlook, or misinterpret the plebiscite conducted in year 2000 ?

In several radio interviews recently Mr Lewis quoted the overwhelming majority (66%) who voted in favour of upgrading our ocean access at Bastion Point, (including myself). This is true enough; but what we were voting for was - 'Do you support an upgraded Ocean access for boats **at the existing site** as outlined by Coastal Engineering Solutions Pty Ltd in its report of October 1999?' - to quote the actual document, (capitals emphasis mine).

As Option 3 or 3b did not exist at that time of the plebiscite, it is therefore misrepresent-

ation to declare it as proof of support for the Council's present proposal.

In my opinion EGSC has been poorly served by the expensive consultancies for whom we have all paid dearly. Would Council dare to take another plebiscite now in the light of

the 482 quality submissions to the EES Inquiry ? Of those 482, there were 82% of residents and 96% of non-residents, visitors, etc. who clearly declared opposition to Option 3b.

Obviously, a commonsense compromise is staring everyone in the face; but many fail to acknowledge it! Mr Madden's roughshod over-riding of his Review Panel's negative assessment of Option 3b was obviously a political decision - nothing to do with the best interests of Mallacootans. The disclosures over his Windsor Hotel review panel adds weight to this assessment. Don't forget that the Bastion Point panel process was mentioned in that same leaked document!

Is it any wonder why folk become cynical and distrustful of our politicians and bureaucrats? One may surmise what deals have been done behind the scenes that caused Mr Ingram to declare Option 3b to be 'A Done Deal'

Sincerely, Geoff Coles

Bastion Point - Launch Fees?

Dear Editor

Launch fees of around \$75 would be required for the proposed Bastion Point ocean access if a user-pays system operated. This figure is derived from annual cost figures presented by EG Council to the Inquiry Panel, recreational usage numbers determined by the Panel, and commercial usage numbers provided by the Department of Primary Industries.

The Mallacoota Ocean Access Steering Committee recommended to Council in 2005: 'EGSC levy a fee on all users with the view to recovering all costs associated with the maintaining and operating of the facility [sic]'. However, at the Inquiry Panel hearings, Council was recommending no user-pays fee, but instead that ratepayers and government pay the full operating costs for commercial and recreational users of the facility.

Yet, recently Council's Director Development Chris Waites put the user-pays principle firmly back on the table, when he stated in correspondence: 'the 'user pays' issue will need to be considered as an operational matter should the project be ultimately constructed'.

If there is one thing that all sides of the debate might agree on, it is that the time for discussion about user-pays fees should occur before construction begins. People need to know what the facility operator intends to charge for use of the ramp.

A user-pays fee will also have a huge bearing on the viability of the facility. This discussion should be an integral part of the economic statement that is to be provided to Council prior to their decision as to whether to submit this project to Minister Jennings for approval under the Coastal Management Act.

Council must come clean now as to how much users will have to pay, or why the community should be fully funding the ongoing costs of commercial and recreational users of this facility.

Yours sincerely,
James Thyer, ratepayer and frequent Mallacoota visitor