

Mallacoota saga nears end

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Bastion Point in Mallacoota. Photo: Michael Rayner

ONE of Victoria's longest-running planning sagas - which has dragged on for more than a decade - will be decided at a council meeting in Gippsland tonight.

The East Gippsland council wants to build a 130-metre breakwater and two-lane access road on the beach at Bastion Point, in Mallacoota, despite strong community sentiment against the proposal.

Opponents say the plan will cut through a reef and threaten a popular surf break and are lobbying the council to support an alternative, smaller upgrade of the current boat ramp.

A survey last month by the Department of Transport found almost 90 per cent of submissions preferred a smaller development to the proposed breakwater, but the council's bureaucrats have recommended that councillors vote tonight to approve it.

A report to councillors says the alternative proposal could not cope with the expected high usage and might be expensive to maintain. It urges council to reaffirm its previous decision to build the 130-metre breakwater and submit the plans to the Minister for Environment.

Save Bastion Point spokesman Leo op den Brouw, the lighthouse keeper on nearby Gabo Island, said it felt like "deja vu" to have reached this step through a protracted process.

"It keeps going back to council and they keep sticking to their guns for reasons we don't understand," Mr op den Brouw said. "They've been put in place to represent community views, but the community view is for a reduced option."

For more than 20 years, residents in the small tourist town have agreed that some upgrade of the boating ramp is needed, which is shared by commercial and recreational boaters as well as swimmers and surfers when the town's population swells with holidaymakers.

In 2010, *The Age* revealed that the Brumby government bankrolled the project against the advice of its own boating safety experts, Marine Safety Victoria. Residents claimed this was a bid to secure support from then independent Craig Ingram, in the event of a hung Parliament, but Mr Ingram and former planning minister Justin Madden would not comment.