

# Snowy River Mail

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## Volunteers, resources under pressure

**Mallacoota's rescue services do not have the resources to operate a coast guard unit, volunteers say.**

Nigel Allison, of the town's surf lifesaving club, and Graeme Berry, of the local State Emergency Services unit, say the town lacks volunteers, qualifications, money for training purposes

and an appropriate vessel to service what they believe will be increased usage of the area once the Bastion Point break wall and boat ramp is complete.

"In a simple breakdown, there would be no one to respond. (East Gippsland) shire's projections are that there will be greater usage after the boat ramp is finished; they've ac-

knowledged all along that there needs to be more resources," Mr Berry said.

The former SES controller said the community could not afford to pay for a suitable vessel, nor does it have the funds for equipment to tow it with and housing in which to store it.

With a larger vessel also comes

more training needs and personnel, along with increased fuel costs.

"We've got an aluminium Jabiru flood boat and another smaller boat. It (the flood boat) has only got one engine, so we wouldn't put it in the ocean, and a flat bottom, which wouldn't handle marine conditions at all," Mr Berry said.

"To put it in perspective,

Mallacoota only has 1000 people to fundraise, and we wouldn't be able to do it to form a coast guard.

"Resources, volunteers and training needs to be in place for safety reasons.

"But the project has gone ahead, and they've neglected to do some of the essential components.

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# Ramp upgrade safety a plus

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"We need to get a larger boat, but it's the same people doing the same jobs, so we don't have the resources within our community to fundraise. What we need is probably an 11, 12, or 13-metre boat, with dual motors, preferably jets, which makes it capable of going through shallows, avoids getting tied up with ropes, injuring people; it would have to be of suitable standard."

Mr Berry also said the Mallacoota coastline was "very under serviced", the resources also unable to work at night.

Mr Allison, the lifesaving club's vice president and one of its longest serving members, said the club was already stretched covering maintenance costs of its current vessel - a rigid inflatable, while it also lacks volunteers who contain necessary qualifications.

"Our capacity to cover costs of repair and maintenance is stretching our club, whose prime role is to patrol the beach over summer," Mr Allison said.

"It's robbing our beach capabilities to go and fund and run a rescue service.

"We've got members who aren't prepared to go out to sea to rescue people when council ignored our point of view.

"At the moment we've only got two people who are prepared to run the rescue vessel.

"Our biggest concern is the

expectations of people who get into trouble, along with SES, organisations are chartered to go to their assistance.

"Volunteers won't always be available, and in the sorts of conditions they will be expected to go into may not be safe to do so.

"The situation is that the new boat ramp will put more a lot more people out in more hazardous positions.

"Given the sheltered nature of launch area, people will go out and think it's good when it won't be.

"Council went through saying rescue services had everything in place; that's not the case," he said.

Like the SES, the surf lifesavers can only operate in daylight.

"Another concern for us is that people will go out at night; the vessel is not licensed," Mr Allison said.

And what must the council and State Government do, according to the volunteers?

"If this is what the Government or council want our capabilities to be, they need to supply us with a boat that has those capabilities," Ms Allison said.

"There needs to be discussions about it, and they should be funding the operation of the craft we have, along with replacement, upkeep and petrol to run training on it. It's seven hours from Melbourne, so it's a huge cost getting people qualified to operate the vessel."

Mr Berry believes a training schedule should already be in place with a new craft.

"It's getting late. The boat ramp is due to open in October, so to get contracts out and to get a decent boat, it's going to take a couple of years.

"The whole thing's shambolic at the moment; in terms of getting equipment and setting up suitable training regimes, we should be training with a boat at the moment. If something happens, it could be tragic," Mr Berry said.

Member for Gippsland East, Tim Bull, said the shire's reason for upgrading the boat ramp at Mallacoota is based completely around improving safety.

"I am advised three of the most recent serious incidents, including one tragic drowning, occurred when boats were crossing the entrance," he said.

"The upgrading of the ramp I would anticipate would lessen the need for entrance crossings to be attempted.

"In relation to equipment and training, I have spoken to the SES's operations and emergency manager and advised him that any requirements that cannot be handled internally, I am happy to work with him on appropriate outcomes.

"SES needs to make an assessment, and any additional requirements on the matter, I'm happy to talk to them about it," Mr Bull said.