

Council sits on the fence

Over 60 Mallacoota residents travelled to the East Gippsland Shire Council chambers in Bairnsdale last week to witness what they thought was going to be a re-commitment from the council to Option 3B for ocean access to Bastion Point.

Instead, in an 11th hour turnaround, council voted to wait for a review by the State Government of the 'Hybrid' option before making a decision to publicly back Option 3B or compromise on the new design.

Over two hours on April 3 at an ordinary council meeting, councillors heard from submissions from the Mallacoota community, heard from director operations Chris Waites about the shortfalls of the hybrid op-

tion and discussed the merits of each design.

Ten people gave oral submissions, with support heard for Option 3B, but many against it.

Jenny Mason, from Save Bastion Point, implored the council to not support Option 3B when she read out a joint statement from 19 groups, including Environment East Gippsland and the Surfrider Foundation.

"We...consider...Option 3B, with its extensive breakwater and beach causeway, to be unacceptable: it is too damaging to the values of the outstanding coastal environment of Mallacoota's Bastion Point, with no demonstrated societal, environmental or economic benefit resulting."

Ms Mason said.

"Option 3B involves the loss of a public beach for a road, the destruction of diverse reef habitat and rock structures, the loss of an internationally recognised surf break, unnecessary removal of coastal vegetation, encroachment on aboriginal cultural heritage sites, unknown impacts from dredging requirements and significant interference with highly acclaimed landscape values."

"We suggest the solution for an improvement to ocean access at Bastion Point is a community supported upgrade at the current site."

Ian Lewis from the Mallacoota Ocean Access Committee told the councillors that he supported Option 3B over the hybrid option and urged

them to support it.

Council sat on the fence, however, and Mr Waites put forth a new recommendation.

The recommendation said it noted the State Government's commitment to undertake a review of the hybrid option and in the absence of a clear determination by the Government regarding the review, maintains its preference for construction of Option 3B.

Mr Waites said the original recommendation was drafted last week on the premise that there would be information forthcoming from the State Government detailing the Government's preferred model prior to Tuesday night's meeting.

"This expectation arose from dis-

cussions with the State Government two weeks ago and the recommendation was changed to reflect the latest position.

"Subsequently, a modified motion was proposed by Cr Rowe and adopted unanimously by the council," Mr Waites said.

It was the first time this council has been unanimous in a vote on the Bastion Point saga.

Before council was to vote on this recommendation, Cr Jane Rowe put forth a different recommendation, which was adopted unanimously (mayor Dick Ellis declared a conflict of interest).

Cr Rowe's motion stated that council:

Continued page 2

SRM APRIL 12 2012

April 11 2012

Option 3B preferred

From page 1

1. Notes the Victorian Government's commitment to undertake a review (the review) and subsequent construction of an upgraded Mallacoota Ocean Access Boat Ramp and the associated Department of Transport proposal to provide an upgraded two-lane boat ramp with protective breakwater, known as Alternative H2 generally at the location of the existing boat ramp.

2. Seeks an urgent determination on the review from the State Government and detailed advice on its preferred option, including: cultural heritage, detailed design including costings and visual impact, car parking, further sand management studies etc to enable prompt implementation of the project; and

3. Requests State Government works with the Mallacoota Ocean Access Boat Ramp Community Advisory Committee to finalise the design of the State Government's preferred option and seek broad community support for that option.

Cr Rowe, in speaking for the motion, said she

hoped that with the motion the council could find a way forward that is palatable to most.

"We are in a position where our State Government made an election commitment to review a low key option put forward by the Save Bastion Point Group, a review we have heard puts that option to bed but, which we are yet to see a formal outcome from," Cr Rowe said.

"We are in a position where an alternative option has been put forward by an agency of that Government that remains:

- * Undefined in relation to final breakwater size.
- * Undefined in relation to car park size.
- * Undefined in relation to cultural heritage and environmental impact; and
- * Undefined in relation to true capital and ongoing costs.

"And my fellow councillors, we are being expected to make a decision in that vacuum of information and review outcomes.

"It is impossible for anyone to compare options 3B or H2 with any degree of rigour.

"We need to seek those review outcomes from the State Government and seek some assurance that, not only will they provide this further information to ensure full understanding of any alternative option but will also include the community in the final design.

"With this motion, the ball is without doubt, in their court."

Cr Ben Buckley said while council did not formally back Option 3B on Tuesday, this still remains its preferred option, with the decision of 2010 still in place.

"We haven't abandoned 3B, if that turns out to be the best option, then I will support it," Cr Buckley said.

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