

Dismayed by statements

Sir,- As one of the so-called 'selfish and apathetic onlookers' (*Snowy River Mail*, April 10) who oppose the Bastion Point 3B option as proposed by the East Gippsland Shire Council, I was dismayed at the emotive and ill-informed statements made by the author, if there is confusion over the alleged benefits of this development it is simply because people have made outrageous claims over the benefits without having availed themselves of the facts which are readily available in a number of inquiries, reports and studies associated with the project.

At low tide the boating channel behind the wall will not provide for vessels over approximately nine metres in length or with a draught in excess of 1.2m.

In rough seas or moder-

ate swell conditions there will very likely be breaking waves in the vicinity of the breakwater entrance. Mallacoota does not have a rescue vessel capable of operating in anything more than moderate seas.

Advising mariners that the proposed facility will offer protection during inclement weather or will 'fill the gap' in rescue capability is misleading at best and could be considered culpable.

Furthermore, local investigation into a vessel of an adequate size and length, capable of operating in rough seas and the associated infrastructure required, such as a large vehicle to transport it to the ramp, sheds and maintenance facilities and a volunteer crew trained and qualified to operate it will cost over another \$1 million.

Is the Mallacoota community expected to run endless sausage sizzles and fundraisers to provide this service?

Even then the crew would be running extreme risks trying to depart from the breakwater during heavy seas and swells.

As a caretaker on Gabo Island for over 10 years I have been directly involved in a number of offshore boating incidents including those mentioned by Mr Ferrier. In nearly all cases of those travelling between Eden and Lakes Entrance they have run into difficulty in rough to very rough seas and gale force winds during which assistance or rescue by anything other than the large patrol boat out of Eden or helicopter would have been impossible.

Yours etc.,
Leo op den Brouw,
Mallacoota.

Cause of surprise

Sir,- Harry Ferrier's letter (*Snowy River Mail*, April 10), in respect of ocean access at Mallacoota is the cause of some surprise.

The suggestion that a new ocean access facility at Bastion Point could act as a port of refuge, the base for an all weather rescue service, or had any significant relationship to the recent tragedy on the bar are all open to serious

question.

In fact in seriously adverse sea conditions the facility would more likely be a death trap for the uninformed seeking refuge, and particularly a keeled yacht.

The approaches to the proposal are quite shallow, the entrance is very narrow (about 25m) with the rock breakwater on one side and a hazardous reef on the other, while the supposed dredged depth behind the breakwater is only 1.4m at low water. This whole area can be subject to heavily breaking seas.

A wave with a breaking height of 4m or more can occur immediately adjacent to the entrance in the type of adverse conditions likely to cause a marine casualty.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the proposed dredge could maintain the 1.4m channel and entrance depth in times of heavy sand movement. Overtopping of the breakwater and a heavy surge could also be expected and make the narrow sheltered area behind the breakwater untenable in extreme conditions.

It is unlikely that even the most sophisticated self righting lifeboat could operate in the shallow water/breaking wave environment that can apply near the entrance. The safety assessment commissioned by the government suggested a helicopter as the only practical solution.

In respect of the accident on April 1, I am advised that of the order of 15 crafts used the existing sub standard ramp without incident that day. The craft in question encountered breaking waves on the bar while leaving via the natural entrance to the inlet, a kilometre or so from Bastion Point.

It could have chosen to do otherwise.

The existence of a new facility will not stop other boat operators from using the existing bar entrance when open and nor will it stop the inexperienced or the risk taker from using the new facility when it is hazardous to do so.

Yours etc.,
Michael Perry,
Retired director of Ports and Harbours, Victoria.