

Approval for Option 3B

The controversial 'Option 3B' proposed ocean access at Bastion Point, Mallacoota, is a step closer to reality with the issuing of Coastal Management Act consent last Wednesday.

The State Government consent, welcomed by proponent East Gippsland Shire Council, allows for the construction of a breakwater and boat ramp at Bastion Point to proceed. If council proceeds, works must be completed within three years (by March 1, 2016).

However, council will now face an interesting period in which it will continue to face "resistance" from the Save Bastion Point campaigners, and if and how it will fund the project (most recent estimate over \$6.8 million) if tenders come in over the State Govern-

ment-committed funding allocation.

The announcement of Coastal Management Act consent this week by Minister for Environment and Climate Change Ryan Smith follows a prolonged debate about the project.

Council approved Option 3B in August 2010 under the previous State Government, with funding approved. This option involved the construction of a new boat ramp and 130m rock breakwater and extensive landside works and vegetation removal, at a new site approximately 150m south-east of the existing ramp site.

The Coalition, with an election commitment to review the project, did that and also recommended an alternate option only to be rejected by council. That hybrid option was estimated to cost \$4.4 mil-

lion (last year's figures) with the Government to provide the majority of funding and a contribution from council.

In late 2012 council requested Coastal Management Act consent for Option 3B, and 27 months after being elected the Coalition has provided what was on the table in August 2010.

Shire chief executive officer, Steve Kozlowski said the consent together with a funding commitment from the State Government means council can proceed with the project.

"The consent under the Coastal Management Act now means that council can proceed with completing documentation required for the project prior to preparation of tender documentation for construction of its preferred model, known as Option 3B," Mr Kozlowski said.

"Tenders will go out as soon as the documentation is ready, which is expected to be within the coming weeks."

Questioned over the cost, Mr Kozlowski said council's latest assessment of likely project costs suggests that the funding available should be sufficient, "but in the end, this will be determined by the market place through the tendering process."

The Minister for Environment said the consent sets out a number of strict conditions to ensure the council's construction and operation of the project meets the standards for protecting the environment.

"It also requires the council's compliance with these standards to be independently audited," Mr Smith said.

Among the conditions imposed on the project

is the requirement for the council to develop and implement an environmental management plan for construction, maintenance and operational works. The council is also required to ensure that marine safety requirements are addressed during the project's operation.

"Council will also be required to keep the community informed about its project through a communication plan, and I would expect this to include the public release of the annual audit reports required under the consent," Mr Smith said.

Mr Kozlowski said extensive community consultation has been undertaken over the decades since a new ocean access boat ramp was first mooted, and council would continue to keep the community informed of progress during the project construction phase.

"The new boat ramp and breakwater will dramatically improve safety for the launching of commercial and recreational vessels and vehicle parking facilities, and provide a much-needed separation for swimmers and surfers in that location," Mr Kozlowski said.

Spokesman for the Save Bastion Point Campaign, Leo op den Brouw said resistance to the development is likely to continue.

"We cannot support the Option 3B proposal in any way. So-called 'strict conditions' set down by the Minister do not mitigate against this disastrous development," he said.

"Recent consultation shows the vast majority of the community expressed opposition to it. Moreover, the economic case is so weak it is likely to become an expensive white ele-

phant and a constant drain on public funds."

"We will continue to oppose this uneconomic and environmentally destructive project. This decision by the Minister shows that no piece of Victoria's coastline or beach is safe from poorly planned and destructive developments."

Simon Branigan, a marine and coastal project officer with the Victorian National Parks Association, said Victorians love their beaches and unspoilt coastlines.

"The State Government has again shown that it is completely out of touch with the community and continues their poor record on the environment by deciding to bury Bastion Point under a massive breakwater and bitumen road."

Member for Gippsland East Tim Bull said that the consent was provided solely within the parameters of the Coastal Management Act and it was now a matter for the project proponent, East Gippsland Shire Council, in relation to where to from here.

"The state did review the project and provided an alternate option was provided for the proponent's consideration, but after consideration of this, council determined to proceed with the original proposal," Mr Bull said.

The Coastal Management Act provides for the use and development of coastal Crown Land, including the construction and carrying out of works and a consent decision has to be made within the parameters of the Act also required the decision to consider relevant recommendations of the previous Government under the Environment Effects Act 1978.

Snowy River Mail

Jan 30 2013

SNOWY RIVER MAIL 30/1/13