

Bastion Point 'Option 3B' contract awarded

The Bastion Point ocean access saga, which has stretched over a generation in time, has been progressed further than ever before with the announcement of a contract for construction.

At last Tuesday's East Gippsland Shire Council meeting, attended by about 60 passionate locals from both sides of the debate, councillors voted in-camera to accept a tender submitted by GPM Constructions for \$4,987,843.21 to construct the divisive and council-preferred 'Option 3B'. Funding of \$6.5 million was on the table from the State Government.

The chamber was clearly divided with applause from one side upon the announcement, while those sitting in the other

threw peanuts at councillors, expressing their dissatisfaction. The peanut gesture was in line with the recent campaign by the Save Bastion Point Group, which believes the project is a white elephant.

It was a comparatively disjointed meeting, with Cr Jane Rowe moving a motion to suspend standing orders for 30 minutes at the start of the meeting to hear from the public gallery.

In doing so, she noted that the large number of people in attendance would otherwise not be able to contribute to the meeting.

Cr Michael Freshwater was the only one to oppose Cr Rowe's motion.

East Gippsland Shire mayor, Cr Dick Ellis, said while specific details on the tender process remain confidential, he described

the prices received as "competitive".

"It was a good field and the contract was awarded to a well credentialed company," Cr Ellis said.

"This was treated no different to any of our contract decisions, other than bringing the matter forward for discussion, so the members of the public gallery were advised of the decision earlier and did not have to wait until the meeting concluded for the outcome."

The *Snowy River Mail* had requested information such as the number of tenders lodged and if the winning tender was the cheapest or most expensive, however council could not provide such detail.

Construction of the project is anticipated to commence in September and will pause from Decem-

ber 26 to January 27 to minimise impacts to locals and visitors during the peak tourist period. The project is expected to be complete in mid 2014.

Chairman of the Malla-coota Ocean Access Committee (MOAC), Ian Lewis welcomed the decision.

"A permanent beach launching facility, providing safe, effective and adequate launching facility against the alternate option of crossing a variable and difficult ocean bar from the Malla-coota Inlet has been an issue for some 30 years, involving ongoing discussion with the various state govern-

ments and councils," Mr Lewis said.

"The so-called existing ramp was always considered as a back up to the entrance and never envisaged as the main means of accessing the ocean.

However, recent history shows that the entrance has become more prone to closures and has also become more variable and unreliable. Unfortunately the difficulty of negotiating the bar was highlighted by the fatality at Easter.

"Completion of work for 3B, while greatly enhancing boating safety, will also alleviate the current untenable conflict between boating, swimming, surfing and other water use that occurs in the existing launch area.

"By relocating the ramp, separation of various beach users will be of benefit for all. Further enhancement of the area will be achieved with suitable boat trailer parking and a modernized toilet facility.

"It is untenable for a small coastal town, whose economy is signif-

icantly reliant on sea access from both a commercial and recreational boating users, to have an unreliable source of access. It is also unthinkable that a number of government agencies are reliant on the facility, together with the need to conduct appropriate sea based assistance or rescue in the area."

MOAC congratulated the council for ensuring a suitable land based access facility had been exhaustively evaluated and had gained all necessary State and Federal approvals and State funding.

Jenny Mason, coordinator of Save Bastion Point campaign, said the anti-3B group was angry and disappointed at the decision, but not surprised.

"Council has proven itself quite incapable of managing this matter. It

has consistently failed to listen to the community or to advice from experts," Ms Mason said.

"It is irresponsible of council to have committed itself to the construction of Option 3B. This is a destructive, oversized development - so unnecessary when a less damaging and less costly alternative is possible.

"It is ratepayers that will ultimately have to bear the costs - a financial burden for years to come.

"For people in Malla-coota, it will be a permanent scar on the landscape - a monument to political expediency, financial irresponsibility, mismanagement, and ego. It will be a constant reminder to the many who love this place, all that has been lost."

More coverage in last Friday's Bairnsdale Advertiser.

Landslip report completed