

SURFRIDER

OFF RAMP

The fight to save Bastion Point and why you should care

BY TIM BAKER



Bastion Point, Mallacoota, in the remote south-east corner of Victoria, has been the stage for an epic environmental battle for almost 20 years. The proposal to build a massive breakwall and upgraded boat harbour and car park at the point would completely destroy the popular, high quality surf break.

At first glance, Bastion Point reminds me of Snapper Rocks, a jagged rocky finger that provides the take off spot for a long right hand wave that peels through multiple sections of varying length and character. On a good day, the ride extends almost 500 metres, from the outside section, known as Broken Boards, through the Point itself, and onwards towards the beach breaks that extend to the east almost as far as the eye can see. The proposed breakwall (known as Option 3b) - 2.8 metres high, 130 metres long, and constructed of 8000 tonnes of rock, at a total cost of around \$6.5 million - would cut the break in half. In effect, it would completely destroy the break, preventing swell from reaching the point, and creating backwash and other unknown effects that would most likely render Broken Boards unsurfable. I recently surfed Bastion Point on a large south-west swell, with two other surfers. A bit full on the high tide, it was nonetheless an exhilarating session. The take-off spot at Broken Boards is marked by an ominous boil and kelp bed, where the wave heaves and lurches with multiple steps in the face. Negotiate this tricky

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drop and a long wall wraps towards the Point itself. Halfway along a second boil appears, creating more steps in the wave, almost like a mini-Shipsterns. Ride high through this section and you're then faced with a game of chicken as the wave accelerates towards Bastion Point itself. A narrow rocky finger juts out and on larger swells it is possible to ride right through the point and continue on another couple of hundred metres. If the proposed breakwall goes ahead, you would be playing an unwinnable game of chicken with a large rock wall. From the end of the breakwall, boats would emerge completely unsighted and with no clear view of oncoming boats, swells, or surfers. Worse, boats would come out blind travelling side on to approaching swells, a scenario that has raised alarm bells for almost everyone but those who have approved the project.

The case in favour of the breakwall is based on an expected increase in recreational boating and improved efficiencies for the lucrative local abalone industry, worth around \$20 million a year. Yet many in the abalone industry are also surfers and say they

don't need such a large, expensive and intrusive piece of infrastructure. It was approved by the previous Labor Government, despite an independent panel appointed by the Planning Minister advising against it. 482 submissions were received by Planning Panels Victoria in July 2007, of which 87% were opposed to the planned breakwall. The independent panel sat for two weeks and heard submissions from 72 individuals. Its comprehensive 178 page report left it in no doubt that the panel was totally opposed to the plan. Back at the Point, the cheery local surfer who has shown me the paddle out spot and happily called me into set waves, is expressing his exasperation. He works on the abalone boats so he sees both sides of the story. "But we just don't need it," he tells me. He's got to go in and get back to his other job, as a board maker and carpenter, and suddenly I'm left alone in the line-up - this cold water, Victorian Snapper Rocks with its boils and kelp beds. I catch a wave in to the Point, and enjoy a few long peelers from the Point into the beach breaks, paddling back out on my own in brilliant sunshine. And I wonder for how long this experience might remain available to my fellow surfers. ▣

To find out more go to: savebastionpoint.org and surfrider.org.au

ABOVE: DON'T HAVE TO GUESS WHAT THE LOCALS THINK OF BREAKWALLS 'ROUND MALLACOOTA WAY. (MICHAEL RAYNER)