

Assessment preparedness questioned

The Save Bastion Point Campaign this week launched a stinging attack on the East Gippsland Shire Council, saying it is ill-prepared to enter the final stage of the environmental assessment process.

Campaign members believe council is attempting to delay the public inquiry into the boat ramp development in a bid to give itself additional time to prepare, and also has not disclosed its project expenditure.

Save Bastion Point Campaign says it has organised 16 expert witnesses to address issues raised within the council's Environment Effects Statement (EES).

Ros Macvean, coordinator for the Save Bastion Point Campaign, says that despite ample time to prepare, council is yet to name any expert witnesses of its own.

"The council knows we are serious in our opposition to this inappropriate coastal development," she said.

"We've always presented ourselves as a major stakeholder, and we now intend to enter the inquiry process well prepared to defend our arguments and advocate a more appropriate solution.

"We clearly have the support of many eminent national and international professionals to do this."

Brendan Sydes, principal solicitor with the Environment Defenders Office and lawyers for the Save Bastion Point Campaign says the council should not have been surprised that the panel would need to hear from a broad range of experts.

"The council has had seven years to prepare its Environmental Effects Statement, and ample time to arrange experts relevant to the inquiry," he said.

"If they are not ready to proceed now you have to ask whether they will ever be ready."

Ms Macvean was concerned more taxpayers' money would be used by council in the inquiry.

"In addition to what's been spent already, many hundreds of thousands of dollars more of tax and ratepayers money will now be sunk into the inquiry by the council," she said.

"Ironically it is money that comes from the people who don't want the boat ramp, yet we are defending our position with funds raised via community barbecues, music events and surf competitions", says Ms Macvean.

"If council has not been able to get to the point where they are confident that the project will stand up to public scrutiny, then it is time to abandon their concept and move on to a proposal that has broad community support. This needs to be resolved at the public inquiry in mid November, as planned."

East Gippsland Shire was invited for comment and said it will issue a statement in the near future. The SRM believes this will be today.