

Work starts after 30-year debate



Christine Leidke delivers the Save Bastion Point group's message of protestation to site manager Paul Yu while Jenny Mason watches on on Monday morning. Work has started on an ocean access boat ramp project that has been on the drawing board for 30 years. (PS)



Chainsaws and heavy machinery moved in to Bastion Point on Monday morning. Signs put up by the Save Bastion Point group remained on the construction site fence on Monday afternoon when police and protestors had left. K875-143

Mallacoota reached a turning point on Monday, with work starting on a new ocean access boat ramp amid concerns East Gippsland Shire Council breached its own stakeholder engagement and communication plan for the project.

The project has driven a deep divide between residents, with Monday's events bringing a sombre mood to groups opposing it, yet pegged as a step towards increased investment and business activity in the town by supporters.

The project has been on the drawing board for 30 years, and one opponent on Monday said the movement against Option 3B had won every battle in its fight, yet had "lost the war".

EGSC's stakeholder engagement and communication plan states the Mallacoota Ocean Access Boat Ramp Community Advisory Committee (MOABRCAC) is to meet at the start of the tender phase, prior to the start of construction and monthly during construction.

MOABRCAC has committee members representing EGSC, the Mallacoota Ocean Access Committee, Friends of Mallacoota, Save Bastion Point, Mallacoota and District Business and Tourism Association and others as required.

EGSC director of operations, Chris Waites, said the committee was last convened at the start of the tender phase.

"The meeting that was to be programmed prior to construction could not occur due to the tight timing between receiving feedback from the group in regard to the final draft of the environmental management plan (EMP) and finally receiving approval of the EMP last week," he said.

"The shire has communicated project start dates through newsletters and local media to keep everyone informed," Mr Waites said.

"Arrangements are being made for an appropriate meeting of the Committee to occur in the coming weeks and periodically through the construction period as originally envisaged," Mr Waites said.

Members of the Save Bastion Point group were on the beach before daybreak on Monday, and reached an agreement with police to move on at around 7am.

Group spokesperson, Jenny Mason said those opposed to the development felt "pretty miserable"

time for them.

"We are not totally giving up, and we will have people there every day watching what's happening," she said.

That started yesterday morning, when police reported a woman chained to rocks at Bastion Point before construction started. She agreed to remove herself.

The group's Christine Liedtke delivered a message to the GPM contractors tasked with building the project.

"Our requests to the shire for a low impact upgrade have been ignored," she said.

"We request that you do not proceed with Option 3B."

However, supporters of the project said it was "brilliant" that work had started on the project, and that it had been "a long time coming".

"The benefit is for the town because Mallacoota relies on tourism," Charles Davidson said.

Mr Davidson said the development would help secure the town's future, and did not think a less intensive development, as suggested by Save Bastion Point, would suffice.

"A lot of people have been hurt (using the existing ramp). Mallacoota is an unspoiled secret of Victoria, but this is not going to spoil it."

He said new industries could emerge thanks to improved ocean access, and predicted that opposition to the ramp would evaporate in six months, again uniting the town.

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