

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until Friday 8th June 2007

Economist slams eastern Vic wilderness coast development proposal

— *Surfriders to protest at Parliament House on World Ocean Day Friday 8th June*

A senior economist has discredited an East Gippsland Shire proposal for a breakwater development at Bastion Point, Mallacoota, and expressed serious concerns over its "questionable figures" and "lack of rigour".

A preliminary analysis of the Bastion Point Ocean Access Environment Effects Statement (EES) by Economist @ Large Senior Consultant, Simon O'Connor, has revealed a number of serious flaws.

"The reported social benefit of the proposed development appears to be highly inflated and we feel this will have significant implications for the overall net social benefit," Mr O'Connor said.

"Of particular concern is the lack of rigour in the calculations... the data presented in the EES will require significant review before it can be used for decision-making purposes."

The economic analysis of the recently-released EES comes as surfriders, environmentalists and people opposing the development prepare to rally on the steps of Victorian Parliament House this Friday 8th June (World Ocean Day).

"Not only is the Bastion Point breakwater proposal economically irresponsible," said Leo Op den Brouw of the Save Bastion Point Campaign, "but it would destroy an iconic section of the Wilderness Coast, with its many values disappearing under rock, rubble, concrete and sand.

"This development makes about as much sense as running a train track up the side of Uluru," Mr Op den Brouw said.

Bastion Point, Mallacoota, is surrounded by national parks and is part of Far East Gippsland's Wilderness Coast. It is a popular spot for surfing, swimming, beachcombing, rock pool rambling, bird watching, scientific study, snorkeling, relaxing, angling and other recreational and social activities throughout the year.

The Council's proposed ocean access development involves a road access through fragile dunes and Indigenous cultural sites, a 130-metre breakwater across a significant rocky reef habitat, and an ongoing dredging operation. It would severely impact on the recreational amenity of the area and create serious safety issues.

The Save Bastion Point campaign has attracted widespread support from national conservation and recreational sporting groups including the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) and the Surfrider Foundation Australia, as well as from the Mallacoota community and Melbourne-based visitors to the area.

“This proposed development would alter the marine and coastal environment of this special place forever,” said VNPA Marine and Coastal Project Officer, Megan Clinton.

“On World Ocean Day we should be celebrating our oceans and coastal values, not planning to exploit or destroy them. Mallacoota’s tourism future would do better to invest in and protect the area’s internationally renowned natural capital and Wilderness Coast values,” Ms Clinton said.

“We can’t let this breakwater development go ahead and have yet another surf break be destroyed through bad planning. Surfers and other users of the area won’t be sidelined in this decision making process,” said Stuart Ball, Manager of Surfrider Foundation Australia. “We will also have lots to say about the safety issues,” he said.

The Save Bastion Point Campaign is advocating a community-driven and properly formulated safety and environment management plan and low-impact improvements to the existing boat ramp site at Bastion Point.

The Campaign urges the public to oppose the development by writing to Planning Panels Victoria, which will review submissions on the Environment Effects Statement. Check the website <www.savebastionpoint.org>.

Ends/ends...

Members of the Surfrider Foundation Australia will lead a march from Federation Square to Parliament House this Friday, where a surfboard signed by more than 100 local and international surfriders will launch a statewide petition and encourage public submissions opposing the breakwater.

WHEN & WHERE: Friday 8th June, 10.00am at Federation Square. The march will make its way up Swanston Walk and arrive on the steps of Parliament House at 11.00am.

WHO: Surfriders from across Victoria, beach users, members of the Mallacoota community and people concerned about the inappropriate development of Bastion Point.

PHOTO / FILMING OPPORTUNITIES: Surfriders wearing wetsuits and carrying surfboards marching on Parliament House and presenting a signed surfboard to Victorian Parliament.

MEDIA NOTE: For media interview arrangements and further information about the march and/or the Save Bastion Point Campaign:

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