

The Save Bastion Point Campaign

A coalition of concerned groups and supporters has formed to fight the East Gippsland Shire Council's proposal for a boat ramp and breakwater development at Bastion Point, Mallacoota. The campaign opposes such inappropriate development: it aims to protect the many values of Bastion Point and to promote safe and sustainable use of the area.

Where is Bastion Point - Why is it so special?

Bastion Point is located in Mallacoota, the most easterly coastal township in Victoria. An icon on Victoria's Wilderness Coast, Bastion Point is part of an outstanding natural environment. Immediately to its north is the entrance to Mallacoota Inlet, a natural estuary and lake system renowned for its unspoilt beauty. To the east are Cape Howe Marine National Park and Gabo Island, home to the largest colony of little penguins in the Southern Hemisphere. A wilderness coastline stretches in either direction as far as the eye can see. This spectacular marine and coastal environment is surrounded by Croajingolong National Park, a World Biosphere Reserve.

Bastion Point has extensive indigenous cultural heritage sites, has one of the few accessible shallow reef habitats in East Gippsland, and has ecological, geological and landscape values of state significance. It is the town beach and is used for surfing, swimming, beachcombing, bird-watching, rock pool rambling, scientific study, snorkeling, relaxing, angling and other recreational and social activities throughout the year.

What is the issue?

The East Gippsland Shire Council wants to construct a large ocean access facility at Bastion Point. Bastion Point currently provides ocean access for the abalone industry, government departments and recreational boating. The existing single-lane concrete ramp is 40 years old, and has not been maintained. It is in poor condition and is often covered by transitional sand. We recognize the need for improvement at Bastion Point; however all of the options considered by Council would require heavy engineering works, including large breakwaters, and would result in irreversible damage to Bastion Point. The Council's preferred option, 150 metres south of the current boat ramp, includes ~

- a 2-lane boat ramp
- a large car/trailer turning area on the beach
- a boat holding area, with jetty
- a large breakwater approx 130m long, 2.3–2.8 high and 15m wide
- permanent sand dredging equipment
- road access through the headland
- catch-weighing, boat washing and fish cleaning facilities
- a boat trailer, car park and toilet facilities

The Council is currently preparing an Environment Effects Statement (EES) for their proposal, which is a requirement by the Victorian Minister for Planning before any decision can be made about the development.

What's wrong with the process?

To date, the Council's conduct of the EES process has been substandard. They have failed to provide genuine, transparent and inclusive engagement of the Mallacoota community. A number of the reports that have been commissioned by Council have been inaccurate and flawed. Options for Bastion Point that could be environmentally, socially, culturally and economically sustainable have not been considered or assessed.

What's wrong with the proposed development?

➤ It will degrade a significant wilderness coastal environment & habitat

The proposed boat ramp and breakwater would cut through the geologically significant Bastion Point reef, resulting in the destruction of diverse and species-rich marine habitats. It would also interfere with the coastal processes and require an on-going dredging operation that would further impact the reef and nearby beaches. Construction of the access road and turning area would remove significant coastal vegetation and habitat, and threaten fragile dunes and a cliff-face of geo-scientific importance. Impacts on the wider environment from the proposed development are also likely. An outstanding coastal panorama would be seriously interrupted, and the natural integrity of a wilderness coast destroyed forever.

➤ It will be inequitable and discriminate against all other users

The proposed development would increase the boating activity footprint substantially, disenfranchising all other users of the area including swimmers, walkers and rock-ramblers. Surfing in particular would be severely affected as the breakwater would cut across an important surf break and affect other surf breaks in the vicinity. This would have a major impact on the town, especially the youth for whom surfing is a vital activity. There are no other surfing locations nearby that provide the same level of shelter in the predominant southerly winds. Ongoing dredging with its discharge, smells and noise would degrade the amenity of the popular nearby beach.

➤ It will create safety hazards

There are major risks for boat operators who would be encouraged to use the new ocean access infrastructure. Dangerous breaking waves regularly occur in the vicinity of the proposed breakwater and beyond. The breakwater would impair vision for boat operators, making exiting and entering the facility dangerous. Inexperienced boaters enticed into waters where conditions can change rapidly and become hazardous, would be especially at risk.

➤ It will destroy Indigenous cultural heritage

The proposed road works would be located in an area that contains significant Indigenous archaeological cultural heritage sites. This infrastructure would have a severe impact on these midden and quarry sites.

➤ It will threaten sustainable tourism

The proposal threatens Mallacoota's long-term tourism future by compromising the many values of Bastion Point and the Wilderness Coast. Residents and visitors are attracted to the area because of its natural beauty and low-key development. Investing in and protecting the area's natural assets can better achieve sustainable tourism.

➤ It will not be economically sustainable

The need for such a costly and heavily engineered facility has not been demonstrated. The abalone industry does not depend on the proposal proceeding and will sustain itself without it. The economic benefits of the proposal have been exaggerated, and the environmental, social, cultural and economic costs have been ignored or grossly underestimated. There would be significant on-going operational and maintenance costs, and high usage fees are likely.

➤ It will be contradictory to Government strategies

The proposal is inconsistent with many government policies, including the principles of sound coastal management as endorsed in the Victorian Coastal Strategy.

What is the solution?

There needs to be a genuine and comprehensive investigation of options for Bastion Point to facilitate the provision of safe and sustainable solutions that respect the natural, cultural and recreational values of the area.