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## **SHIRE CALLS A HALT TO BASTION POINT BOAT RAMP EES PROCESS**

*For immediate release – Wednesday, 3 October 2007*

The East Gippsland Shire has sought a halt to the Bastion Point Environmental Effects Study (EES) Panel proceedings because of a surprising late submission from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) that has thrown the entire process into question.

DSE presented an unsigned and unidentified submission to the Panel Directions Hearing at Mallacoota that purported to represent the Department's views about the EES.

The submission stated that a proposal developed in 1999 would be preferred at the existing site.

East Gippsland Shire Mayor Cr Mendy Urie said she was surprised and concerned at the timing of the submission.

"More important, the document completely contradicts the process that the Shire is required to follow by DSE as part of the EES," she said.

"After the referendum that showed that there was a two-to-one majority in favour of upgraded boat ramp facilities at Bastion Point, DSE required that, for it to recommend the Minister to grant Coastal Management Act consent to the project, an EES would need to be undertaken.

"Interestingly however, although having sought an EES, DSE as the advising authority to the Minister, does not have to have regard to the EES outcome."

Cr Urie said DSE asked the Shire to be the proponent of the project even though other government agencies and departments had an interest in an upgraded facility.

“DSE encouraged the Shire to investigate the current boat ramp site and two other options and they endorsed the sites,’ she said.

Cr Urie added that the Shire had been guided by DSE throughout the process and a Technical Reference Group chaired by the department oversaw and approved the development of the EES.

“Ultimately DSE approved the documents to be placed on exhibition including the work done on the three options and the variations governing the various levels of safe use of the facility,” she said.

“This late submission by DSE appears to effectively rule out two of the three options investigated.

Cr Urie said that given DSE encouraged and guided the process and many stakeholders have contributed financially to the DSE-run process, the Shire is seeking urgent clarification of the department’s position as it now seems much of the EES documentation has been a waste of time and money.

“In fact the DSE’s late submission appears to indicate that it believed from the very start that only the existing site was suitable,” she said.

“This proposal requires a structure with two break walls and a long ramp at the existing site that would still require boats to operate in the area currently used by swimmers and surfers and which would force the closure of a significant part of the beach.

“Clearly there is no point continuing with the current hearing process if DSE all along as the approval authority had made up its mind that only the current site should be developed.

Cr Urie said a lot of time and money could be saved if that is the case.

“However, we should all be asking why the Council was asked by DSE to go down this track in the first place.

“I feel strongly that the Council, stakeholders and most of all the community has been seriously misled.”

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