

Bastion Point decision suffers further delays

East Gippsland Shire cited a late submission from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) as the reason for halting the Bastion Point Environmental Effects Study panel proceedings last week.

Shire said an unsigned and unidentified submission from DSE was presented to a directions hearing in Mallacoota recently stating a preference for a 1999 proposal for the site.

Shire councillors expressed their surprise at the submission, as DSE had required that an EES be completed before it could recommend the Minister to grant Coastal Management Act consent to the project.

Mayor, Cr Mendy Urie, said DSE had asked the shire to be the proponent of the project even though other Government agencies and departments had an interest in an upgraded facility.

"Shire has been guided by DSE throughout the process and a technical reference group chaired by the department oversaw and approved the development of the EES," she said.

"This late submission

by DSE appears to effectively rule out two of the three options investigated."

Cr Urie said there was 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.

"We should be asking why the shire was asked by DSE to go down this track in the first place," she said.

Neville Penrose, regional director for DSE Gippsland, said it was not appropriate for DSE to comment "while there is a process in place through a committee appointed by the Minister to hear submissions and make a decision based on those submissions."

"It is not appropriate for DSE to make any comment prior to a decision made by the committee and their subsequent recommendations to the Minister," he said.

Ros Macvean, coordinator for the Save Bastion Point Campaign, said East Gippsland Shire Council would appear to no longer be backing its proposed breakwater / boat

ramp development.

"Council was granted an adjournment of the inquiry that was to commence in Mallacoota in mid November 2007," she said.

"It appears to no longer be confident that its large-scale high-impact development will stand up to public scrutiny or have any chance of being approved."

Ms Macvean said the shire's approach entering the inquiry stage has been bungled, as is its handling of the entire EES process.

"It is now attempting to find a scapegoat. Shire even goes so far as to claim it was reluctant from the beginning to be the proponent for the development, asserting that it only assumed the role in the interests of the broader community.

"As a proponent that has pushed its breakwater/ boat ramp option all the way through the EES process, shire now seems to believe Government agencies such as DSE should give it a tick of approval prior to the public inquiry. It is a rare occasion when a proponent calls a halt to the last stage in the process because of its concern that defending

its proposal may be a futile waste of resources."

She said that the public would have preferred the chance to present the strong evidence opposing the development, believing that it would not gain Ministerial approval.

"It nevertheless would be pleased if shire now decides to fully abandon the proposal," she said.

"We call on the Minister for Planning and Minister for Environment and Climate Change to step in and take responsibility for the future of Victoria's coastlines.

"Bastion Point needs a low impact facility that provides improved ocean access whilst recognising the limitations of local conditions."

