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Managed Solution a Better Option to Headland Development Proposal at Bastion Point

By
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Surfrider Foundation Australia is the peak non-government organisation representing Australia's 1.2 million surfers. Surfrider is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of oceans, waves and beaches for all people through C.A.R.E. – Conservation, Activism, Research and Education. Surfrider is active in many aspects of coastal management and protection. Internationally, our membership stands at over 60,000 people. In Australia, we operate across the country through over 20 local community branches.

Surfing is big business in Australia. Per capita, surfers spend as much, if not more than recreational fishers. The business of surfing relies on the image of a pristine environment – clean beaches with waves and people having fun. While Australia's coastline is vast, only a relatively small area can be surfed with any degree of safety or regularity. East Gippsland Shire is no different and Bastion Point is the area in East Gippsland where the waves are the most accessible and the most consistent. This is why Bastion Point is the most popular surf break in the area. Surfers have been using the area as a primary surfing location for well over 40 years, throughout the year and in all weather conditions. It is regularly used by over 60 local surfers and many hundreds more visiting surfers every year. Bastion Point is unique in that it is one of the few surfbreaks on Victoria's far east coast that works well in southerly and south west winds and it provides a safe environment with a variety of surfable waves that cater for beginner through to expert surfers. Bastion Point is big business to surfing in Mallacoota, Victoria and Australia. To destroy the wave at Bastion Point, as the Shire will do if the boat ramp development goes ahead as planned, is akin ripping up the only town footy field to put a car park. There simply is no other place round the corner to go and surf.

Everyone who visits Mallacoota knows that Bastion Point is a rare jewel – an unspoiled piece of Victoria's coastline tucked away from the prevailing winds – a haven not just for surfers, but for swimmers, families, fishermen and beachcombers alike. This proposal poses a significant threat to the amenity and experience of all of these groups.

For over 12 months now, Surfrider Foundation has been assisting those in the community of Mallacoota who oppose the development of the boat ramp and associated infrastructure at Bastion Point in Mallacoota. Along with many others, we recognise that the safety of all users is vital and on this point alone, we simply cannot support the proposal in its current form. Careful analysis reveals that this proposal purports to be economically rash and environmentally unsound also. Two independent reviews of the coastal processes study both found the report to the Shire to be

significantly flawed. The model used to predict coastal processes in the report to the Shire is known to only be valid in the following conditions:

1. no tidal current is present,
2. the beach is straight without groyne-fields or offshore breakwater present, and
3. the beach is planar without complicated breaker-bar systems.

Bastion Point does not satisfy any of these conditions. Further to this, the study did not consider any effects as a result of tidal change, sand movement around Bastion Point and no fieldwork was ever undertaken to establish whether the figures used in the modelling were accurate. This is contrary to widely published coastal engineering advice (and common sense). *We would be happy to provide copies of these reviews upon request.*

Our advice is that the studies are incomplete and that the development, if it proceeds, will do little to lessen the risk to boaters and other users. On the contrary, the risks may be increased. Surely the community has a right to know this!

Why has the Shire not openly considered other options such as a managed solution such as that used in Byron Shire in NSW. This may include the employment of a boating officer to manage the area at peak visitation periods (plus the possibility of a minor upgrade to the existing boatramp may be required). This type of solution:

- Would provide a much safer boating and recreation environment than the current proposal;
- Would have no detrimental effect region's wilderness status;
- Would have no detrimentally affect the surf break;
- Would not lock the Shire into a market that might prove to be unsustainable in the long term; and
- Is significantly cheaper.

An initiative such as this would likely proceed with majority community support as well as provide the benefits listed above. Surfrider Foundation continues to make itself available to East Gippsland Shire for consultation.