

Age 15/6/09

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JUSTIN MADDEN

Acting on a whim puts trust at risk

ONLY twice in Victoria's history has an independent panel found in favour of a community group rather than a development proponent. Save Bastion Point Campaign is one such group. It put its faith in the environment assessment process, rallied significant funds and support to participate in it, and went to enormous lengths to have legal representation and expert witnesses.

While the people of Mallacoota support proposals to improve ocean access at Bastion Point, there is bitter opposition to the current plan, which involves a major upheaval of an entire section of pristine natural coastline.

Under the plan, 3000 cubic metres of reef habitat would be removed and the beach turned into an access road. A 130-metre long, 2.8-metre high breakwall would be built, marring one of the greatest wilderness vistas in Victoria. The site would require ongoing dredging.

The panel found in the campaign's favour, recommending that there was no overall societal benefit in progressing these options further and should be discarded. This recommendation is unequivocal. Yet Minister Madden has disagreed. Why would any community put its trust in the democratic process when the minister can overturn the considered recommendations of a panel of experts on a whim?

Jenny Mason, co-ordinator Save Bastion Point Campaign, Mallacoota

IS JUSTIN Madden really concerned about the safety of swimmers in Mallacoota? I wonder how many powerful boating parties in East Gippsland are pulling his strings. His decision against all expert advice is mystifying.
Anna McCallum, Richmond