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Bairnsdale

Safety the priority at Bastion Pt

As reported in last Friday's *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, Planning Minister Justin Madden has released his assessment of the panel report into an ocean access boat ramp at Bastion Point, Mallacoota, and he has given the green light for council to design and construct a breakwater and boat ramp.

Mr Madden said the State Government was taking action to support delivery of necessary infrastructure required for safe commercial, fishing

and recreational boating needs.

"After an extensive Environment Effects Study (EES), which included public hearings, I have disagreed with the panel report and conclude that doing nothing or a minor upgrade at the existing site would only increase the risk of swimmers and beach users sharing the ocean where boat launching occurs," Mr Madden said.

"There is currently a dangerous mix of swimmers, beach users and boating traffic in a con-

fined area of water at the boat ramp location and this is not acceptable.

"Therefore I have approved the option presented to the panel which best minimises the problem of swimmers and boat users in the same space and provides the necessary approvals for further work on the more detailed design and construction."

Mr Madden said boat access to the ocean was an important requirement for Mallacoota given the emerging growth in marine tourism, the existing

commercial fishery and increasing recreational boating demands.

Any contemporary new facility requested by East Gippsland Shire Council would need to be designed consistent with a full safety audit conducted by Marine Safety Victoria, and in accordance with relevant Australian design standards.

"Striking the right balance between the needs of beach users and boat access is important," he said.

The existing car park will also be expanded

giving access to the beach via the existing access track, creating an additional access along the base of the headland and creation of a new two-lane ramp protected by a breakwater where boats can launch into a naturally occurring fissure in the rock platform.

Mr Madden said the design must include provision for sand bypass, safety and management arrangements and enhancement of car parking and pedestrian safety considerations.

Independent Member

for Gippsland East, Craig Ingram, said the project can now finally proceed and described it as "an essential piece of boating, tourism and fishing infrastructure".

"With the Minister's approval through the Environmental Effects Statement, Mallacoota and the Croajingolong coast can now look forward to a future with a reliable, safe and usable bluewater ocean access - something that many coastal communities everywhere else take for granted.

Continued page 4

Save Bastion Point group concerned

From page 1

"This project is incredibly important for the future of Mallacoota and East Gippsland and has been identified for many years as one of the region's top priority tourism and economic development infrastructure projects.

"The tourism potential of the Mallacoota region is well recognised and this project will only add to that potential and future opportunities for this area."

Mallacoota Ocean Access Committee has warmly welcomed Thursday's announcement to proceed with the construction of a new ocean boat ramp.

Chairman of MOAC, Ian Lewis, said: "People I have been able to talk with so far are delighted that this key project can now progress.

"As demonstrated by a community ballot, there is clear support within the town for a substantially upgraded facility and much needed parking, to improve the current safety issues surrounding boat launching and retrieval.

"The approval to relocate the site by some 150 metres will reduce conflicts between various users and should eliminate the potential catastrophe of a swimmer or surfer colliding with a boat.

"Make no mistake this issue is central to the wellbeing of the town,

given its coastal focus.

"We have the most valuable commercial fishery in the state on our door step and a tourism industry substantially reliant on our coastal resource, whether for fishing, or tourists exploring the natural resources of the wilderness coast.

"It is unacceptable for the town to continue to lose tourism due to a substandard facility and to expect current users to continue to endure difficulties in the safe launching and retrieval of boats. However, that is the reality we have endured over the past 20 years.

East Gippsland Shire mayor, Cr Wendy Urie, said the process had been lengthy and stressful for all concerned but the Government had now provided a clear direction.

"As well as giving the go ahead for the proposal, the Minister has directed council to develop a detailed design that meets the requirements of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Marine Safety Victoria, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and Gippsland Ports," she said.

Cr Urie said that the shire understood the concerns of those who did not support the proposal. "As best we are able, we will look to working with all sections of the Mallacoota community." The decision hasn't been welcomed by all,

with the Save Bastion Point group, Victorian National Parks Association and the Australian Conservation Foundation

calling on the Minister to review his decision because the development was strongly opposed by the community and did not follow the environmental protection principles of the Victorian Coastal Strategy.

Leo op den Brouw, Save Bastion Point spokesman, said the proposal to build an extensive breakwater, access road on the beach, car park and boating channel was unsustainable and unsafe, and would irreversibly damage the Bastion Point environment and surrounding coastline.

"We are concerned that the removal of more than 3,000 cubic metres of reef, to make way for the boating channel, and the addition of more than 8,000 tonnes of imported rock, to construct the 130-metre-long breakwater, will disturb tidal flows and damage the marine habitat," he said.

"The permanent sand dredging required to keep the boating channel clear will also impact on marine life and cause unnatural siltation build up.

"While the community agrees the existing boat ramp is in need of repair, we believe there are smarter, sustainable and safer low-key developments that will improve ocean access, protect the

area's outstanding attractions and values and meet the provisions of the Victorian Coastal Strategy."

ACF oceans campaigner, Chris Smyth, said Minister Madden appeared to have ignored the advice of the expert panel.

"The Minister's approval of the development contradicts the recommendation of his own expert panel, which rejected the proposal after a lengthy and comprehensive inquiry," he said.

He said that more than 85 per cent of submissions to the Environmental Effects Study (EES) public inquiry were strongly opposed to the Bastion Point development. The Gippsland Coastal Board stated it could not support the options set out in the EES because none of them were consistent with the 2002 Victorian Coastal Strategy.

Megan Clinton, VNPA's conservation and campaigns manager, called on the Environment Minister Gavin Jennings to reject the proposal.

"This is a poor decision for our coasts and clearly a failure of the coastal planning system. The Environment Minister must now use his powers under the Coastal Management Act to ensure this environmentally destructive idea is dropped once and for all," she said.