

Snowy River Mail

Bastion Point ramp gets green light

Finally, after months and months on end of waiting for Planning Minister Justin Madden to release his assessment of the panel report on the controversial Bastion Point ocean access boat ramp, he did just that last Thursday.

The Minister went against the panel findings and gave the all clear for council to design and construct a breakwater and boat ramp.

Minister 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," he said.

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

rine 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, a former Mallacoota resident himself, welcomed the announcement.

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

"This has been a long-running and difficult process and I thank the community for its patience," Mr Ingram said.

"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.

"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."

"I look forward to seeing this important project through its funding, design and construction process.

"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."

East Gippsland Shire mayor, Cr Mendy 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."

Pages 4 and 5 – the reactions of the groups involved.