

Group fiercely protects culture

Mallacoota District Reconciliation Group has made every endeavour to ensure that cultural and Aboriginal heritage sites would not be compromised by East Gippsland Shire Council's proposals for ocean access and boat ramp, Bastion Point Mallacoota, according to the group's secretary, Jean Nickels.

Meetings and discus-

sions took place with Aboriginal elders and traditional custodians of the sea and land, resulting in submissions to the planning panel enquiry on the Environmental Effects Statement.

"Our respective submissions acknowledged that improved ocean access is needed and could satisfactorily be achieved by improvements to the existing Bastion Point ramp which would not require a breakwater and would have less impact on cultural heritage sites," Jean said.

"Our submissions did not object to the need for improved ocean access, but objected strongly to the option of achieving it by means of an inappropriate breakwater and extensive destructive major works on land and in the sea."

Mallacoota District Reconciliation Group is heartened that the planning panel recommendations handed down to the Minister for Planning, Justin Madden, (announced on June 11) stated in part "there is no overall societal benefit in progressing these options further and they should be discarded".

"We applaud the planning panel personnel for their diligence in considering the views of all who contributed an opinion on the Environmental Effects Statement.

"(But) We are outraged that the Minister announced in his media release on June 11, his disagreement with the planning panel's recommendation. Instead he recommends proceeding with the option three breakwater development with an access road on the beach. This detrimentally impacts on the cultural heritage sites and completely ignores the panel's considered recommendation for a minor upgrade of the existing ramp.

"The Minister's decision makes a mockery of the democratic process and we will not accept this injustice. We are determined to stand with the Aboriginal people to protect our cultural history and will continue to fight in the shared spirit of Aboriginal custodianship and reconciliation," Jean concluded.
