

Surfrider Foundation condemns Government decision to destroy Bastion Point

Victorian Minister for Planning, Justin Madden MP, has rejected the findings of the Government's own Independent Panel Inquiry, and approved a plan to construct a large breakwater and boatramp at Bastion Point, on the east coast of Victoria.

By granting consent to the East Gippsland Shire to proceed with this project, the Minister has ignored advice from within government and gone against the wishes of the majority of the community.

The Independent Panel Inquiry found that there were significant problems with all of the proposed breakwater options. The Panel report cited serious concerns with safety, a poor economic argument, concerns over the long-term viability of the proposal, and the likelihood that the development would be a net detriment to Mallacoota's tourism potential. The Panel concluded that the proposal offered no significant societal benefit, and that an upgrade of the existing facility was their preferred alternative.

The Independent Panel Report states the following:

Weighing up all the different issues and considerations for ocean access at Mallacoota, the Panel has concluded that on balance the development proposals should not proceed. The economic case for the project is very weak and likely to have a benefit cost ratio well below 1.

"The Minister has disregarded the fact that Bastion Point is unique coastal environment. The beauty of Bastion is it's pristine environment. When you're out in the surf and looking back to the land, the view looks like it's been the same for a thousand years. That's what makes it so special. Now the Point is going to be just another concreted piece of the coastline," said Tim Frazer, Secretary of the East Gippsland Chapter of Surfrider Foundation.

Mallacoota's pristine foreshore is registered by the National Trust of Australia for the important aesthetic, historic, scientific, social and spiritual values it has. The proposal will result in the removal of 3000m³ of natural rocky reef and the importation of many thousands of tonnes of rock and concrete to construct a 130-metre long breakwater, and a major road upgrade along a coastal headland will irreversibly damage the area and its scenic and environmental values.

"The loss of the surf break at Bastion Point will have far reaching consequences for the local community," said Mr Frazer. "More people surf in Bastion Point than participate in any other sport. Bastion Point is the only break within an easy walking distance of town. This will be an incredible loss for the kids in Mallacoota. It's bad enough that team sports have suffered in recent years due to population change in the town, we really need to hold onto this surf break for the youth," said Mr Frazer.

"Despite the high level of importance that surfing and the surf lifestyle has for Mallacoota, the Minister has unilaterally ignored the concerns of his own independent inquiry. He may understand a football field but he has no clue on watersports and beaches," said Dr Rex Campbell, Director of Surfrider Foundation Australia.

"The approval for the project means that a surf break will be ruined plus the construction of a high breakwater, the removal of large sections of the natural reef system and the introduction of a sand bypassing system is a recipe for disaster,"

"The best way you can value add to a natural environment is by keeping it natural. This is what keeps visitors coming back to beautiful places like Mallacoota that could sensibly accommodate both boaties and surfers needs, as proposed by the Panel to the Minister, but now rejected. High quality surf breaks are incredibly rare and should be protected at all costs. Surf breaks are important economic, social and cultural assets for local communities and the tourism sector and should not be sacrificed," said Dr Campbell.

There are a number of other locations where the intermixing of swimmers, surfers, recreational and commercial boating has been addressed through managed solutions, including The Pass, at Byron Bay.

It's not too late for the Government to take its own advice and do the right thing and agree with the Independent Panel's recommendation for a low-key upgrade at the existing site," said Mr Frazer.

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Surfrider Foundation is an international not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's oceans, waves and beaches for all people