

12.2 Minor Upgrading of the Existing Ramp

During the Hearing, it was put to the Panel that, in the event that it did not recommend that the proposals be approved, it should respond to the issue of a minor upgrade. Given that such a wealth of material has now been provided to the Panel, it would be remiss not to make some use of all this information.

The Panel considers that such an approach is explicitly countenanced in the Minister's Terms of Reference (the third dot point in Section 13.1) which encourages the Panel to consider the project in the EES '*...or with modifications in relation to siting, design...*'.

The Panel is not in a position to recommend specific proposals, as submitters in favour of the new ramp proposals at the Option 3 site have not addressed how the existing ramp could be improved. Therefore the Panel is loath to go beyond some general guidelines regarding both the nature of the facilities to be provided and the process for developing detailed proposals. These will be set out below.

Breakwaters

The two breakwaters proposed for Option 1 have several things in common with the Breakwater for Option 3: they would restrict the view by those launching their boats of the wave conditions beyond the breakwater, they would narrow the slot available to those returning, and they would make a significant visual impact on a wilderness landscape. They would also detrimentally affect the use and enjoyment of the cove area as a popular family beach, and would probably affect the nursery surfing area. As well as these, they require a major capital cost.

The Panel does not consider that breakwaters should be considered in the minor upgrading of the existing ramp. This may restrict useability to current levels, but as discussed in Chapter 4, the Panel thinks this appropriate.

Ramp slope and width

The present ramp is generally considered to be too narrow. Any contemplated upgrade should review its width and consider options to widen it.

The slope of the existing ramp is 1 in 12, flatter than the slope of 1 in 8 recommended for ramps, and which allow four wheel drives to launch and

retrieve boats without inundation of their rear axles. However achieving such a steep angle at all tide conditions would require at least two locations where such a slope could be accessed: one at higher tides, and one at lower tides. The Panel sees two difficulties here. Firstly, the likely sand movement at the existing ramp is such that any structure will be alternatively covered and stripped of sand, depending on sea conditions. There is limited ability to cheaply and conveniently clean sand from the ramps. Secondly, a structure would need to be provided to take vehicles the further distance to the low tide 1 in 8 slope. That structure would present a visual impact that may well be unacceptable.

The alternative is to consider management measures to better use a ramp with a 1 in 12 slope. Although much has been said about the deficiencies of the existing ramp, the Panel has been impressed by the fact that it has maintained its structural integrity to a large extent for 30 years, with only minimal maintenance. It seems that the original constructors of the ramp heeded the advice to 'design with nature', and have produced a low scale facility which has survived the ravages of an inhospitable coast. The Abalone Co-Operative manages its boat launching and retrieval from the existing ramp, and did not seek to change its present arrangements nor to support the new proposals through the EES and Panel process.

The use of a dedicated tractor or similar vehicle to assist with all launchings (or at least all launchings in the peak summer period) would address many of the problems caused by the flatter slope of the existing facility. It would also reinforce other management guidelines suggested below.

The Panel recommends that in any minor upgrading of the existing ramp, consideration should be given to widening the ramp, and to maintaining its present slope, but providing assisted launching and retrieval for all boats.

Sand and kelp removal

Sand and kelp removal are currently undertaken at the existing ramp. The Panel has little reason to suggest that any more economical or low impact maintenance measures can be undertaken than those employed at present. The Panel notes that the potentially dangerous practice of heaping up significant quantities of sand is no longer done, and that what sand that is handled is removed continuously in small amounts. The only aspect here that occurs to the Panel is whether the sand should be taken to the tip as cover, or returned to the beach environment. This aspect could be worth further consideration.

Management of conflicts between different user groups

The potential conflicts between different users is an issue that poses serious risk of injury or death. The accident history of the ramp environment suggests that the likely frequency of a serious accident is extremely rare. However the situation can be improved and a better management regime would assist.

Reference has been made to the Special Use Zone and limited success of that initiative at Bastion Point. The examples provided at the Hearing from Cape Byron and Torquay and others suggested by the Panel include:

- the presence of beach 'marshals' at peak times to assist car and boat traffic flow and to manage pedestrian conflicts, both at the car park and at the beach abutting the ramp. Local people could be employed over summer for this task with appropriate training;
- the restriction of boats to those being able to demonstrate they are familiar with local conditions (perhaps via a local licensing system);
- the management of times for boat launching and retrieval and for other beach uses, coordinated to minimise conflicts;
- the sounding of a horn by boats launching or approaching the ramp from seaward;
- 'lane marking' of the SUZ in the water during peak times with buoys to ensure swimmers, surfers and boaters respect its boundaries and operation; and
- the use of a special vehicle to undertake the launching and retrieval operations.

These and other measures that may be suggested during wider consultation may all contribute to significantly improving the risk profile of the special use zone.

The Panel recommends that measures to improve the risk profile of the Special Use Zone be considered and implemented.

Road and parking requirements

The Panel considers that the proposal for road traffic and parking (but not including the beach access) presented in Mr Wyatt's drawing LS1 have considerable merit. Alternatively, the level of parking that needs to be catered for has not been subject to detailed study, nor has the impact of allowing some parking along the road been evaluated.

The access from the existing car park to the beach raises questions about how best to manage this component of the access. The Panel has been advised of

a vehicle and trailer recently jack-knifing as it traversed the steep slope down to the beach. If all launching operations were undertaken by specialised equipment with knowledgeable operators, would the beach access need any upgrading? Questions have been raised about the appropriateness of any parking on the beach, while submitters have mentioned that the present vehicular access to the beach enables disabled persons to enjoy bathing in the safe waters of the Cove.

The Panel recommends that further studies be undertaken to resolve the issues of:

- **the need for and extent of parking to be provided, and whether any provision should be staged to ensure no oversupply is provided;**
- **the form of the road and parking layout that will minimise visual intrusion and native vegetation removal, with consideration given to the car park layout in Option LS1;**
- **whether the road sloping down to the beach needs to be sealed in some fashion; and**
- **whether beach parking should be restricted or prohibited, or more effectively and actively managed to improve circulation, safety and amenity.**

Ancillary facilities

The Panel agrees with the views of the EGSC that boat wash-down and fish cleaning facilities should not be provided at the ramp. Night lighting has been proposed at the new facility, and the issue may arise again with respect to upgrading the existing facility. No supporting material to demonstrate the need for lighting was presented to the Panel, while a considerable number of submissions condemned the proposal. Some few drew attention to the complete lack of need for such lighting.

The EGSC pointed out the location where the toilet might be relocated, off the board walk beach access. The Panel considered that in the absence of detailed drawings the impact could not be adequately assessed, nevertheless formed the view that the site suggested would present quite high impacts due to the clearing and site levelling required for even a small toilet. The need for new and improved toilets should be further explored.

The Panel recommends that ancillary facilities be limited to consideration of an alternative toilet location, subject to assessment of the need for the relocation, a feasibility design to allow an assessment of impact at any targeted location, and thorough consultation.

Study process

Mr Offor, who provided expert evidence on social issues for the proponent, advised that mitigation of the social impacts associated with the proposal could be assisted, to the extent possible, by a good participative process, by providing clear, accurate information about the proposal and mitigation, by engaging youth positively, and by setting up an advisory committee representing a cross-section of the community.

This advice is endorsed by the Panel not only in relation to mitigating the social impacts of the proposal, but as a general prescription for good consultation. However it does not go far enough. There is a great need for the EGSC to engage with the Mallacoota community in such a way that the level of distrust displayed at the Hearing by so many responsible and committed members of the community is overcome. Such engagement will need to be based on ensuring that those entrusted with directing and managing any further development of the existing ramp are free from bias and association with any special interest. In practice this will exclude nearly everyone who has been involved to date: there will be a need for an external facilitator or consultant who has not been previously involved to fill that role. EGSC will still be the decision-maker, but should not be involved in framing independent advice, if it wishes to restore trust in the local community.

Any advisory committee should include representation from the business and tourism interests, conservation interests, the Abalone Co-operative, a commercial operator with proven expertise and experience in eco-tourism and marketing, someone with experience in youth outreach, and someone with experience in land conservation.

The Panel recommends that the EGSC establish a broadly based community advisory committee and appoint an independent facilitator to assist EGSC in developing the detailed design of the minor upgrade of the existing ramp, consistent with the general scope set out above.

In relation to future approvals, the Panel does not consider that the type of upgrade envisaged above is likely to require an Environmental Effects Statement. Whilst not having the power or wish to restrict the Minister for Planning's determination on such an issue, the Panel's considered opinion is that such an upgrade could be managed via the Coastal Management Act consent process. A suitable environmental management plan could be prepared as part of this process.

Other approvals such as the native vegetation permit and Cultural Heritage Management Plan will still be required.

12.3 Conclusion

The Panel concludes that it has satisfied its Terms of Reference, and established that a minor improvement to the existing boat ramp is as much as should be done at Bastion Point. Advice on guidelines for any further studies to make such minor improvements to the existing boat ramp at Bastion Point is provided, should such a course of action be contemplated.