



*The road between Williamsons Beach and the mouth of the Powlett has been closed off for the desalination project. Inset: in happier times, it was a popular recreation trail.*

## Reclaim the roads

A GROUP of cyclists who arrived for the annual Melbourne Cup Day ride from Williamsons Beach to the Lower Powlett River found their way barred by security surrounding the pilot desalination plant site.

In July, DSE erected security gates at both ends of the road, a popular recreation trail, to evict the community caravan and protesters who had maintained a round-the-clock peaceful picket of the site for more than three months.

Deciding that free speech wasn't getting them anywhere, the State Government ordered Victoria Police to remove protesters from the site. (Ten have since faced court.)

After politely requesting entry – and being refused – some of the cyclists scaled the fence, evaded security staff and rode the length of the road.

Rumour has it that Critical Mass, the Melbourne guerrilla cycling movement dedicated to reclaiming public space, will be joining the next ride of liberation.

# Bass Coast Council takes the stand

By Danny Desal

I WAS pleased to see Bass Coast Mayor Neville Goodwin, Cr Gareth Barlow and Bass MP Ken Smith at San Remo for the Bass Coast presentations to the EES inquiry, which were of high quality. I couldn't count the number of times the issue of poor communication and community anger came up through the morning but it must have got through to the inquiry members.

In conclusion, council CEO Allan Bawden reiterated that economics would play a big part in this project and that, as many decisions would be left to the contractor, we need a more integrated approach to decision making and an adequate balance between the economic/social and environmental issues so IF this goes ahead it is truly done at world's best practice standard.

He further emphasised that this project had damaged relationships with the State Government and we would have to live with this plant forever, so the Government was beholden to try to repair that relationship.

Shire staff Jeanette Draper/Patti Wenn/Stephanie Symes all made detailed and informative presentations about the social disadvantage in this shire and how this project could compound it, particularly if there are hundreds of workers doing the "fly in/fly out" and splashing money around.

Patti Wenn said this was a project where all the benefits accrued to metropolitan Melbourne and the state but there would be problems if one group's needs and desires were treated as more important than another group. She said there was a lot of rage in the community and the council hoped that the panel would make tough recommendations to ensure there was no disadvantage – beyond what has already happened – to the community.

Jeanette Draper said the EES social

assessments had not understood the level of passion in this community has for their environment, their neighbours and their community. She detailed the statistics that identified the shire as disadvantaged, including high unemployment, high numbers of single-parent families, limited transport options and huge gaming losses. Most people rent in the private sector, which will no doubt put rents up if construction workers come to town looking for somewhere to live.

Jeanette said a construction workers village should not be on site and the council

***"The local presenters did us proud – you have stood up to be counted in trying to protect your environment and your community."***

would not approve of one but there were areas in Wonthaggi that could be looked at. The site would require about five hectares and must be done at a high standard, integrate into the community and be available to use after construction has finished.

Key points included:

- ▲ This project has the potential to divide a socially cohesive community.
- ▲ The community feels very disempowered by the process and there is a level of distrust in the state government and general disapproval of the project.
- ▲ Concern about the influx of a predominantly male population. The performance requirements alluded to mitigation measures but did not spell them out.
- ▲ Social cohesion studies should be re-conducted after construction begins.
- ▲ Community safety shouldn't be compromised.
- ▲ There is only one 24/7 police station in the area and this will not be sufficient.

▲ The Council fully supports the Bass Coast Regional Health submission.

▲ There is no evidence of planning for the influx of construction of workers.

I won't go over the economic items as we all know them by now as they relate to creating jobs and upskilling of people in the local area and we've heard them before but they are equally important and need to be dealt with by the project proponent.

The afternoon was emotionally draining as this was the start of the 10-minute slots for people to have their say. All were fantastic – you could see how much effort people had put into packing their 10 minutes full of information that the inquiry should listen to and take note of in their deliberations.

It ranged from concern over the waste, sediment entrainment, the southern brown bandicoot, farming and the overhead powerlines lines issue, damage to the natural and unpolluted environment, visual disaster, marine mammals that haven't been properly considered, insulting comments in the visual assessments, the totally unfair and undemocratic nature of this process, the number of black balloons this will create and just how WRONG WRONG WRONG this project is.

When one family presented an impassioned plea to stop a power transmission pole being erected just outside their house, I had to hold back the tears.

The local presenters did us proud – you have stood up to be counted in trying to protect your environment and your community.

We can only hope it makes a difference for future generations.

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