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MEDIA RELEASE

Brumby Labor Government intent on destroying regional Victoria's economic future

The recent announcement by Ports Minister Tim Pallas to provide \$6.5 million towards the funding of a controversial boat harbour at Mallacoota in Victoria's east is not consistent with the longer-term strategy of securing the economic future of regional Victoria, argues the Australian Coastal Society (ACS).

'The ACS supports the view taken by the government's own Independent Inquiry Panel for a low level upgrade to the existing boatramp and car parking area,' says ACS Vice-President, Associate Professor Geoff Wescott. 'We have previously made our position on this issue clear to the Victorian Government: it will not on balance improve safety; it has significant negative and irreparable environmental impacts; it will displace many users, including the youth of Mallacoota, who use this area for swimming and craft-riding; and its economic benefits are highly questionable.'

'We consider the potential risks to boaters, in particular, inexperienced boaters, as a result of using the proposed boatramp under adverse ocean conditions to be significant. Replacing an existing known and managed safety issue (the intermixing of bathers, craft riders and boats) with an unknown and potentially risky solution (inexperienced boaters not able to handle the often dangerous sea conditions in the region) appears not to be a productive solution,' said Wescott.

At the heart of this issue is a desire by all parties to secure the social and economic future of the region. Mallacoota's long-term economic future must be based on the most beneficial and sustainable use of its abundant natural assets. The future for this region can and should be based around wilderness tourism. This is the pathway most likely to secure ongoing opportunities, investment and long-term economic security for the region.

'A decision such as this has significant impacts and needs to be part of a wider wilderness coast Coastal Action Plan, which places it in the regional context. The Coastal Action plan should be prepared under the Coastal management Act (1995) before any further consideration of the ramp proposal,' says Wescott.

'There is a better and cheaper solution to solve the boating safety issue at Mallacoota. We urge the Government to take a long-term view and not to sell the people of Mallacoota short in order to satisfy a short-term political agenda.'

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