

# Currarong boat ramp... “be bloody great when it is finished”

Officially opened in May of this year, the Currarong boat ramp is almost everything the local fishermen of the small south coast seaside town of Currarong have ever wished for. Costing over \$1.2 million to build, the ramp is a great example of what can be achieved by a very determined local community.

But notwithstanding the community’s delight in celebrating the ramp’s opening, it is somewhat disappointing that those that use it are being frustrated by an apparent lack of political will to deal with a number of outstanding issues – issues required to be addressed if



this is to be repaired and, if not attended to, will compromise the ramp’s utility at low tide. It will also prevent the installation of surge poles very much needed at the bottom of the ramp to secure

arriving and departing boats.

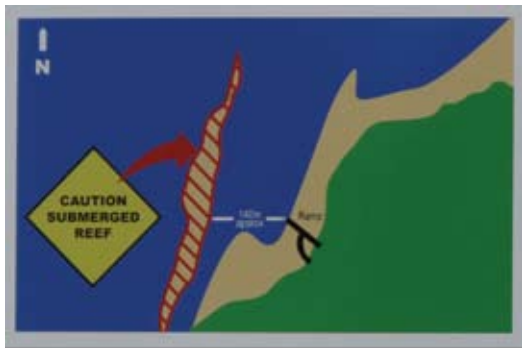
Also required is the construction of a wave barrier on the south west side of the ramp. Not only will this assist in containing boats on the ramp but also provide boat crews,

launching or retrieving boats (on that side of the ramp), with a catwalk.

The daily routine of fishermen dictates that a boat ramp should also be accessible during the hours of sunset and sunrise. For this reason, it is important that appropriate navigation marks are installed to assist boaters returning to the ramp in reduced visibility. This is even more applicable in

cases where boats returning to a ramp are returning from the open sea, as is the case at Currarong. But right now, no such navigation marks exist which is a rather odd omission for a ramp that cost \$1.2 million to construct and is there primarily as a facility to launch and retrieve fishing boats that fish in the open sea.

According to NSW Maritime, who are responsible for the installation of navigation marks, the ramp is unsafe. And because it is unsafe, they have no intention of erecting navigation marks. NSW Maritime justifies this decision on a “navigation risk assessment” report prepared by a firm of consultants for the Shoalhaven City Council. But what is difficult to reconcile here is how a reading of that report supports such a negative conclusion. Albeit that the report draws attention to various hazards associated with the ramp’s operation in different sea conditions (consistent with all ramps facing the open sea), it also



the ramp is to be properly completed and its full potential realised.

A number of these issues concern the actual ramp itself. During construction, the toe of the ramp (that part of the ramp that enters the water) was washed away during the pouring of the concrete – something that would appear to be the responsibility of the construction company. So far, however, there is no clear indication when

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makes a number of recommendations that would serve to minimise those risks. It recommends the following:

- Permanent marks on Peel's Reef
- Leads to establish the line of approach from seaward.
- Marks to establish the channel providing access to and from the ramp to the east of Peel's Reef and to the west of the adjacent shore and
- Marks to establish the sides of the ramp.

Any boat ramp open to the sea is going to be subject to conditions varying from benign to exceptionally dangerous. Clearly the use of such ramps is best left to those that are suitably experienced. But to the extent that the Currarong boat ramp has been built and is being used by fisherman during conditions of reduced visibility, why wouldn't NSW Maritime assist in minimising navigation risk by doing what the risk assessment document, that it refers to, recommends?

Concerns that Shoalhaven City Council and/or NSW Maritime might have as to their respective exposures to public liability can be dealt with by the

erection of signage that draws attention to the fact that use of the ramp at night or in adverse conditions can be dangerous and the safety of life and equipment can be compromised. Interestingly, there are many examples of entrances to rivers, ports and boat ramps along the coast where NSW Maritime erects and maintains navigational aids where, under adverse conditions, they too would be dangerous. The best example, particularly relevant to this discussion, is the boat ramp at the south coast town of Tathra. Also exposed to the sea, it too is described as requiring extreme care and under certain conditions deemed to be very dangerous. This is also highlighted on NSW Maritime's boating map of the area. But unlike at Currarong, the boaters departing and returning to the Tathra boat ramp are guided by a set of leads erected and maintained by NSW Maritime – clearly marked on the NSW Maritime boating map. What are we missing here?

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