

# The Geraldton Guardian

A West Australian Newspapers publication

Published since 1906

Phone: 9956 1000 Classifieds: 9956 1010

\$1.30 (inc GST)

Friday, January 15, 2016



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# Storm over coastal leases

■ Jon Solmundson

Wednesday night's Point Moore coastal study meeting was inundated with interruptions as residents voiced concerns about whether their leases in the historic Geraldton area would be extended.

The City of Greater Geraldton hosted the meeting at Belair Lifestyle Village with the Friends of Point Moore group to explain the details of its coastal inundation study, released to the public last Friday.

The City announced in May, 2014 that it wouldn't extend leases on 176 Point Moore cottages past 2028.

City chief executive Ken Diehm opened the meeting by explaining to the crowd of about 60 the council was still waiting on an environmental report on the septic installed beneath the cottages and community consultation before a decision was made on leases.

MP Rogers senior engineer Clint Doak explained the 100-page report, highlighting the land needed to be safe from a once-in-500-years event.

"This includes weather conditions like those around hurricane Katrina, or cyclone Yasi," he said.

"These lines (on the Point Moore maps) don't represent a prediction of the future, they're just models for one potential situation that has been outlined in the State Government's coastal planning policy."

Mr Doak's explanation was interrupted several times by residents anxious to know what the report meant for their lease situation.

"This is abuse!" One woman yelled, standing up from her seat.

"What you're doing here is abuse, you're taking away our homes!"

Another woman later cut off Mr Doak and said nobody really understood what he was saying.

"Sorry, we don't care," she said.

"All we want to know is how long we've got left."

Mr Diehm said people had come to the meeting with incorrect expectations about what was going to be discussed, and were getting information from myths and rumours.

"I'm really keen to hear and dispel some of those myths and rumours," he said.

"Please put them down and we'll give you a written response."

"We've been criticised as a council for commissioning these reports and not showing people them — so we're here today with the Friends of Point Moore to show everyone this and at a future date we can discuss the leases and those things."

One of the key concerns raised during question time was whether there were ways to prevent inundation and keep the leases available, to which Mr Diehm said there was a wide array of mitigation measures which could satisfy State Government and council standards, including building rock walls or dunes, or putting up signs warning people of inundation risk.

Friends of Point Moore president David Harrington said while there were clear challenges for the future of the leases, the meeting had shown they were not insurmountable.

"We've still got to go with the septic report, but I don't think that report would be sufficient on its own to have the council say they'll not renew our leases," he said.

"Should inundation happen — and it's just storm inundation we're talking about here, not rising waves — the sand is so porous that the water would be gone by the next day."

"If that happened in Point Moore, we'd say 'oh bugger', and have to get a new TV or washing machine or whatever, but we'd all move back."

Mr Diehm said they'd make a decision on the future of the Point Moore leases by the end of the financial year.



Peter Mack, with wife Fran, attended the meeting in a life vest, saying: "If they say this extreme inundation event is going to happen sometime in the next 500 years, tonight could be the night, so I'm prepared."

Picture: Jon Solmundson

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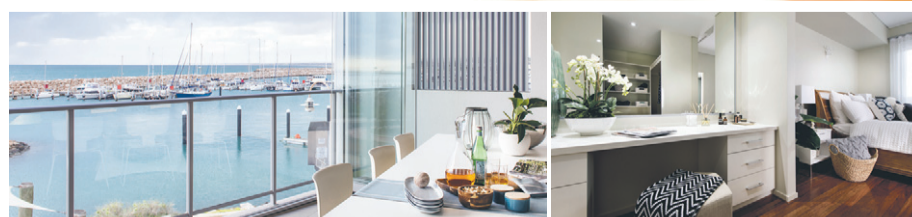


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