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Eco-tourism development proposed for Yanakie



SIGNIFICANT progress has been made on a proposal to develop an eco-tourism facility on 256 acres at Yanakie, just outside the gates of Wilsons Promontory National Park.

Mindful of the need for community support to realise his vision, the developer, Tom Tootell, held a community forum at Yanakie Hall last Thursday night. Forty or so people, mainly fellow residents of Yanakie, attended the occasion, which was largely an opportunity for Mr Tootell to present his vision and invite submissions to the planning permit application for the 'Prom Wilderness Lodge.'

Mr Tootell made reference to the website especially created for his development and suggested that anyone wanting further information should visit www.promwildernesslodge.com.au

A big fan of South Gippsland, Wilsons Promontory in particular, Mr Tootell, said he was keen to protect the Park from commercial development. He bought the land at 4215 Meeniyan Promontory Road back in 2002 with the aim of creating a development which would be sympathetic to the environment

at the same time as accommodating visitors to the Prom and other South Gippsland attractions.

In addition, he said, he wanted "to produce something that will serve the local community".

It has been a long time in the germination, but now, said Mr Tootell, "the project has some real feet to it; it's starting to perform nicely".

For several years Mr Tootell directed the landscaping of the property. As a result of working with his site manager John Atkinson, local nurseryman Frank Smolders and Greenfleet workers, among others, thousands of indigenous trees have been planted and a salt wetlands created abutting Corner Inlet. The area attracts a wide variety of birds and other wildlife. Mr Tootell also had his site manager build canals among the swampy lower reaches of the property, opening up opportunities for canoeists.

"Comfort and nature" encapsulate his vision for the property. "In effect, it will be a mini-park outside the main national park," said Mr Tootell.

The land was granted 'Special Use' zoning in

2012. Since then Mr Tootell has been finalising the plans with an architect and looking for investors. At the Thursday night forum he introduced Gil Williams, a principal with The Property Advisory, who is seriously considering getting his clients, mainly superannuation funds, to invest in the development, if the figures are right.

Mr Tootell said that part of the reasoning behind his choice of EME Design to draw up the architectural plans for his development was the practice's philosophy of working with rather than against the environment. He invited EME principal Luke Middleton to present the concept designs for 'Prom Wilderness Lodge.'

The plans show a main building and a series of accommodation pods, built and positioned to minimise their bulk in what is a fairly flat landscape. The two-storey main building is embedded into the hillside, with rammed earth walls for thermal mass and a central entry. It has a cafe, restaurant, lounge, bar, reception, fireplace, rumpus room, storage and toilets, as well as accommodation for staff. The restaurant will seat

140 and will be open to the public.

"The buildings are low enough not to cut the horizon line," stressed Mr Middleton. He said that he had drawn on the rocks and mountains of the Prom for inspiration, as well as the classic Australian shearing shed, with its big eaves, and the limekilns of Walkerville. He was also mindful of providing protection, even on the decks, from South Gippsland's famous winds when drawing up his design.

The half dozen pods in addition to the main building have 40 accommodation units between them, each sleeping two, with the option of booking two together to accommodate a family. They will have vertical cladding in a variety of timbers.

The development has comprehensive wastewater facilities and will use solar energy as much as possible. Roads within the development are kept to a minimum, with a network of paths for visitors to use instead, and the buildings will be some distance (80 metres or so) from the main road and a long way from the coast, and well screened from the main road by judicious tree planting.

Mr Tootell is hopeful that his development will be welcomed by the local community as a venue for work – there should be many employment opportunities – and leisure – dining at the restaurant or cafe, drinking at the bar or taking in the view from the lookout on the landscaped site. He has presented his vision to South Gippsland Shire Council and is now inviting the general public to comment. Submissions can be made to the council by the end of the month.

• An artist's impression of the proposed development at Yanakie, as envisioned by architects EME Design. View from the east, showing the main building and a couple of the accommodation pods.

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