

Independent assessment of NEW water site sought

By LEAH ANDERSON-BYRNE

CONCERNED Mt Beauty residents will seek an independent review and assessment, following North East Water's decision to stick to its original site on Embankment Drive to locate a new raw water offtake planned for the town.

The corporation paused the project in September following community concerns - reflected in a petition with almost 1000 signatures - surrounding the preferred site of the offtake.

NEW acting managing director, Anthony Hernan, announced earlier this month that an assessment concluded the original site remained the most suitable.

"The assessment included several additional locations identified by the community, on top of the five sites initially considered," he said.

"Its location was deemed the highest ranked based on social, environmental, technical and economic factors."

But local GP Damian Heman, who initiated the original petition, said the company's report showed a "fundamental lack of understanding" of the issues.

"It completely disregards the more than 1000 people who signed the petition," he said.

"Their assessment of social cost is grossly misaligned with community sentiment.

"They have also lobbied the report onto the community with a few days' notice for community meetings at the busiest time of the year.

"It is true they have some supporters, but it is mostly



**NOT
HAPPY:**
Mt Beauty
locals and
Nationals
MP for
Ovens
Valley Tim
McCurdy
are fighting
the
decision
made by
North East
Water.

NEW welcomes "strong interest" from community

NORTH East Water's face to face drop in consultations last week attracted up to 50 attendees and NEW executive of planning and infrastructure, Rebecca Johnston, welcomed the "strong interest".

"We welcomed the community's strong interest and discussion about the recently completed multi-criteria assessment, which outlined the site chosen for the new raw water offtake," she said.

"Questions were also raised about river access and safety at the location; we explained access to the river will be enhanced with improvements to nearby river banks, while design features of the weir will ensure the safety of swimmers related to

the operations of the offtake.

"Several people were also concerned about the wildlife at the chosen site on Embankment Drive and we have committed to consulting an expert to advise us in regards to all listed species.

"Due to the ongoing interest in the site selection process, we will hold a further information session in mid-January.

"The date and venue will be confirmed and communicated with the community as soon as possible."

The multi-criteria assessment is available to view at www.newwater.com.au/mtbeauty.

from people who are attracted to their promise of improvements which they can't guarantee they can deliver.

"There is serious ongoing concern about safety, environmental and aesthetic issues relating to the proposed weir, not to mention the size and scale of this industrial construction on our river's edge.

"Stakeholders who have met with NEW are also not confident that any community input regarding design is actually going to be considered.

"We are seeking an independent review and assess-

ment; there is an extremely strong and motivated push to ensure that the community's voice is heard."

Ovens Valley state MP Tim McCurdy met with concerned Mt Beauty residents on Friday and is prepared to advocate for their stance.

"I will write to the Minister for Water and chief executive officer of North East Water to have an on-site meeting so we can have a fair dinkum consultation about what's going on," he said.

"It's a pristine spot; you don't want a concrete jungle there, and it's where the locals go to

swim and fish so surely, out of nine sites, there's another that will be more appropriate.

"I'm disappointed in the sneaky consultation they've done; just advertising in their own newsletter and holding consultation leading up to Christmas.

"North East Water told me they're meant to go to tender in early February; if that's the case we need to throw a spanner in that works so they back off to look at it again," he said.

"This area will be joining the Ovens Valley coverage which is why I'm passionate about joining this project."