

SAVE VETCH'S ASSOCIATION

Despite numerous objections from the citizens of Durban over a six year period, in August 2009 the KZN Department of Environmental Affairs authorized The Durban Point Development Company (DPDC) to construct a small craft harbour (SCH) in the Vetch's Pier area on the Point. In essence, what this means, is that this popular beach will be buried under a pile of steel and concrete, robbing the man in the street of this truly family beach environment and turning it into a playground only for the super rich. We believe that this will not only forever change the lives of those who enjoy this natural watersports playground through the various clubs, but of all the people of Durban who use this area extensively for numerous recreational activities. The fact that our municipality is a 50% shareholder of DPDC makes this an even more bitter pill for the ratepayers to swallow. As this development is also funded by ratepayers' money, it basically means that not only do we lose our beach, but pay to lose it too! Can we just sit back and allow our City Council to do that to us?

Vetch's Beach, being the province's most heavily-used and safest government-appointed launch site, has been the home of various water sports clubs since the mid 1950's. These clubs were created by the public and are being run by the club members without ever receiving any financial assistance from the city or the government. They have provided wonderful recreational facilities for all the citizens and visitors to our city, taking care of all their safety issues and today contribute over R500 million annually to the city's GDP. If this SCH goes ahead, these non-profit clubs will have to raise R25-R30 million just to be a part of this development. Repayment of such loan, levies, municipal rates and operational costs will no doubt take membership out of the reach of the man in the street. Subsequently, the clubs along with the safety and enjoyment they provide will crumble.

Vetch's Pier has been in existence since the mid 19th century and is one of the largest sub-tidal mussel beds in the entire KZN Coastline hosting an estimated 85 tons of mussels. It is also the home of millions of other marine creatures, which help sustain the food-chain on our beachfront. This has made Vetch's Pier an extremely popular snorkeling hot spot for all novice divers in the city as well as being used by recreational and subsistence fishermen. The sheltered waters of the beach also provide the ideal conditions for windsurfers, paddlers, learner surfers and various other water sport activities. The reef itself also provides a world-class right-hand surfing breaks under the right conditions. There can be no doubt that these activities will cease to exist, should the SCH go ahead.

In August 2009 all of the 14 appeals against the authorization of the SCH were, we believe without good reason, dismissed, thus paving the way for construction to commence. For many people this meant the end of the road for all the objectors. But a group of dedicated and passionate people decided not to accept what was being forced upon us and do something about it. Objectors, which include the Wildlife Society of South Africa, members of the ski boating, sailing, subsistence angling, paddle skiing, surfing communities and other private individuals, have formed a properly constituted "Public Interest Group" known as Save Vetch's Association and intend taking the decision on review to the High Court, which is the final legal avenue open to the public. We believe that the original EIA findings, the Record of Decision and the MEC's response to the appeals were seriously flawed, all of which will be revealed during the course of the legal process.

Unfortunately, justice does not come cheap in this country and costs for such court action will be substantial. The Durban Paddle Ski Club has pledged a considerable amount of money, but much more is needed, if we are to succeed in saving Vetch's Beach. We appeal to all beach users such as ski boaters, divers, sailors, surfers, paddle skiers, windsurfers, beach strollers, swimmers, fishermen and other beach lovers to support our efforts to retain our natural environment for our children and future generations of all the people of South Africa. Whilst we are not objecting to the landside rejuvenation of the Point area, the loss of Vetch's Beach is totally inappropriate and simply too big a sacrifice to make. We believe that the citizens of this city have the right to have access to our most valuable asset, the Indian Ocean, and the water sports users certainly deserve a better deal than what has been forced upon us by our municipality and their developer allies. We believe that the short-term financial interests of an elite few investors have been placed over and above the long-term social interests of the rate-paying public and our visitors.

If you agree with our sentiments, please join us in supporting the battle to stop the destruction of yet another important part of Durban's social heart by contributing generously to our fund:

Standard Bank: Branch: Gale Place Code 042526: Name: Save Vetch's Association. Acc No 25 172 8307

More information and updates are available on our website www.savevetchs.co.za where you can register as a supporter of Save Vetch's Association.

Face book group: save vetchs beach.

Should you wish to assist us in distributing information or in any other way, please contact Johnny Vassilaros on 083 458 6650 or Mike Larmont on 076 823 7577.