



# Smiths Beach will be independently audited

by Usman Azad

AN independent auditor has been enlisted to comb through public submissions into the controversial Smiths Beach development.

The Shire of Busselton has selected major financial company Grant Thornton Chartered accountants (WA) to audit more than 8000 public submissions to the proposed Smiths Point development guide plan (DGP).

The shire's director of lifestyle development Nigel Bancroft said it was a new process and it was requested by the developers.

"It will be a joint-funding agreement between the proponents (Canal Rock Pty) and the shire," he said.

The move is a sign of the intense public scrutiny on the development and Mr Bancroft said it was aimed to make sure the planning process was "beyond question".

The auditor will look at each individual submission and:

- Check that it was received during the advertising period.
- Review the submission and see whether it is in support or not in support of the DGP and detail

the main reasons.

Mr Bancroft said the auditor would not evaluate the validity of the issues in the submissions. The auditor would provide a report to council and council staff would then assess the submissions. It is expected the auditor will take four weeks to provide a report to the shire.

Smiths Beach Action Group (SBAG) chairman Bob McKay said the group was not consulted in the matter.

"We hope that the choice of this company was an open and transparent process, done without any influence on council by the developers," he said.

"We will be asking the question. The developers and their investors have already written letters to the local press to say that they are encouraged by the support for the development, acknowledging in those letters that there was a ratio of roughly 7-1 against the development. We think that those results if correct speak for themselves. There is clearly overwhelming opposition to this proposal.

"We never doubted the ability of the shire staff to produce an independent report on the submissions and acknowledge that staff are under incredible pres-

sure due to the many other development proposals in the planning process."

Senior planner for the Smiths Point project Michael Swift said the developers believed the audit would help shire staff work efficiently through their assessment of the submissions.

"In November Canal Rocks Pty Ltd called for an independent audit of public submissions on the Smiths Beach DGP to ensure that all submissions considered by the shire are valid and accountable," he said.

"This is the first time online submissions have been received by the shire so it is important that the type and number of submissions is accountable to a legitimate source and is a valid comment on the Development Guide Plan as advertised for public comment.

"We want to ensure that the council's recommendations are based on an accurate and fair understanding of the submissions."

Mr Bancroft expected the council to vote on the DGP in the latter part of the year, however, he said that would be dependent on the Environment Protection Agency assessment of the development.