



News > Property

Group protests \$100m Margs project



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PROPERTY



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Saracen Properties announced plans to develop a 120-room five-star resort on the southern headland of Gnarabup Beach last month. Photo: Russell Ord

The Preserve Gnarabup community group will gather for a public rally against the development of a five-star resort in Margaret River tomorrow, following its proposal to rezone the land.

Last month [Saracen Properties](#) announced plans to develop a \$100 million resort on the southern headland of Gnarabup Beach, about 10 kilometres from Margaret River's town centre.

Luxury hotel chain Marriott International has already signed on as operator of the resort, which is expected to feature 120 rooms and operate under the Westin brand as the region's first five-star hotel.

At the time of the announcement, Premier [Mark McGowan](#) told media outlets Marriott International's expansion into the South West was a positive sign for the state's tourism industry.

He later highlighted the estimated 300 jobs that would be created during construction and the additional 100 ongoing jobs that would be supported once the resort was in operation.

Since the announcement in June, a community group called Preserve Gnarabup has formed in an effort to stop the development, calling for the preservation of the beachfront and headland.

The group said it had grown to about 1,360 members over the past month and had received about 20,000 signatures via an online petition. Tomorrow at midday it is planning to hold a protest rally in Margaret River.

Preserve Gnarabup solicitor and spokesperson Clare Gleeson, who is also a director at Cape to Cape Lawyers, said the group had expressed several concerns with the project including rising sea levels; the nature of the limestone cliffs; cliff erosion; the environmental impacts on flora and fauna; and the presence of a registered Aboriginal heritage site (a gnamma hole) on one of the lots.

Ms Gleeson added that the group felt the project would decrease amenity and affect the area's character, and that the increased population would also impact public infrastructure in Gnarabup.

"There certainly are members of the community that want the economic growth," Ms Gleeson told *Business News*.

"We see a bigger picture - we're looking out for the environment and the planet.

"The current proposal of the 120-room resort is only the beginning... We're certainly willing to talk to the developer about a negotiated outcome."

Earlier this month, Ms Gleeson lodged a scheme amendment application to the Augusta-Margaret River Shire proposing to rezone the land to a public reserve or for the council to compulsorily acquire the lots.

"The local government has the power to reserve the land and halt the development," she said.

Under that proposal, if the Augusta-Margaret River Shire seized possession of the land, it would need to compensate the developer, [Saracen Properties](#).

Within her scheme amendment proposal, Ms Gleeson has estimated that compensation to be the value of [Saracen Properties'](#) \$5.5 million investment in purchasing the land.

Preserve Gnarabup said it planned to launch a campaign to raise funds for compensation to reimburse the developer.

However, [Saracen Properties](#) project director [Joel Saraceni](#) said that figure was grossly underestimated and that once complete, The Westin Resort & Spa and the adjacent holiday villas would have an end value of more than \$130 million, meaning the land value would likely exceed \$30 million.

Mr Saraceni said such a plan would be a total misuse of public money.

The land was earmarked for development and potential tourism projects more than 15 years ago and Mr Saraceni said previous approvals had permitted similar developments and that the company was not proposing to do anything outside of what the planning scheme already permitted.

"We're not pioneering any new development here, what we're proposing is consistent with what's been approved in the past and what's allowed under the planning scheme," Mr Saraceni told *Business News*.

"A lot of the South West understands, a lot of the businesses and even some of the residents understand what bringing an international quality five-star hotel will add to the region - we're not trying to take anything away from it."

Preserve Gnarabup spokesperson Beth Carlessi said one of the group's major concerns was the potential impact of the development on the character of the locality.

"This development is not just a concern for local residents and local tourism business owners, but also for people from Perth and further afield who come to this much-loved region to enjoy its untouched beauty and the pristine, non-built up coastline," she said.

Mr Saraceni said the main aim of the project's architects and landscape architects was to produce a design that sits sensitively within the landscape and responded to the natural environment.

He emphasised that the images released as part of the announcement of the hotel with the Premier represented early-stage concept plans and that the design had subsequently been developed significantly from that point.

"When they see our plans and how our architects are approaching the design... a lot of people who have those concerns now will probably change their mind I think," Mr Saraceni said.

"The last thing we want to do is change the feel and character of the area, as that is what everyone loves and values, ourselves included."

More to come...

Data & Insights

Mentioned Organisations

Saracen Properties
Property - (Built-form) Developers
Shire of Augusta-Margaret River
Local Governments

Mentioned People

Joel Saraceni
Mark McGowan

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