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Locals defend Margaret River beach from cliff-top hotel raid

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Sasha Pol in Gnarabup beach, WA ... 'what is here is unique and needs to be protected'. Picture: Russell Ord

Sasha Pol grew up swimming at the sheltered Gnarabup beach below a prime piece of cliff-top real estate where a resort and houses are now planned.

The McGowan government hopes Margaret River's first five-star hotel can lift the economy of a region that is world-renowned for its wine but has struggled to attract tourists in recent years.

Ms Pol, born and raised in the surf and wine mecca, is among locals who believe the resort and associated residential estate will diminish precisely what the region has to offer visitors.

"I've travelled all over the world to some pristine places but what is here is unique and needs to be protected," she said.

"It is such a special part of the world and there are still sections of our region that are untouched."

The Preserve Gnarabup group Ms Pol belongs to is well organised and boasts high-profile support.

Musician John Butler and retired surfer Taj Burrow, who both live in the region, have expressed opposition to the development. On Saturday group members led 450 people on a march through Margaret River, which has a population of about 7600.

The group argues the fragile southern limestone headland of Gnarabup beach is the wrong place for such large-scale development.

They are up against not only the developer, Saracen Properties. Western Australia's Tourism Minister, Paul Papalia, endorsed the proposed development at a media event in June, and the local MP — a member of the state opposition — believes the project should proceed.

Warren-Blackwood MP Terry Redman, a former leader of the WA Nationals, said he had been briefed on the plan for the Westin hotel and associated housing estate at Gnarabup and felt the scale was appropriate.



A view of the Gnarabup cliff-tops.

Mr Redman said the quality of the design would be crucial and it was important the community was properly consulted before construction began.

The possibility of a cliff-top hotel at Gnarabup has been looming for a long time. The area has been earmarked for development since the early 2000s, according to a state government spokesman.

"Any development activity in the Gnarabup area would be subject to both environmental consideration and community consultation," the spokesman said.

"The proposal can also be referred by the community to the Environmental Protection Authority, which will determine whether to assess the proposal."

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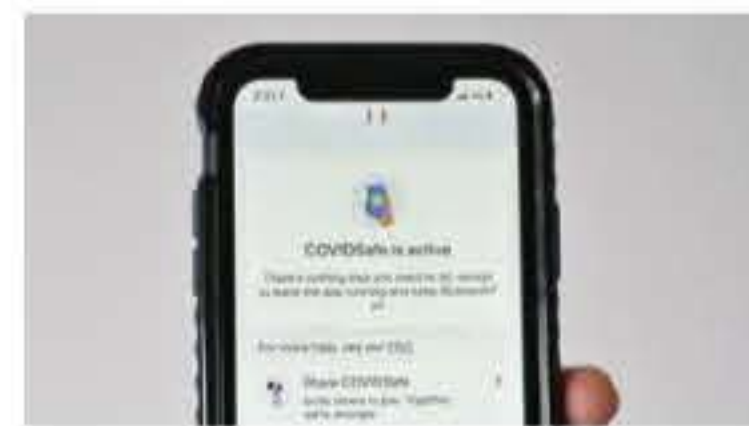
Paige Taylor is from the West Australian goldmining town of Kalgoorlie and went to school all over the place including Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and Sydney's north shore. She has been a reporter sin... [Read more](#)



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