



PLANNING AHEAD: French boating expert Christophe Vieux, left, with Buffalo City's Gaster Sharpley yesterday in front of the Orient Beach, which is being considered for an exciting development project.

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Picture: ALAN EASON

# Could EL become SA's new yachting mecca?

## City leaders believe a marina could be ideal for Orient Beach

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Municipal Reporter

A PLAN to turn East London's beachfront into an entertainment hub that includes a new yacht club and marina is being touted by city leaders.

Buffalo City municipal manager Gaster Sharpley said that developing the beachfront area, from the port to Marina Glen, was an important part of the city's lobby for a R5 billion government funded upgrade to the port.

"Developing the beachfront is the first milestone in developing our port," said Sharpley.

Yesterday the plans were given a fresh perspective from Christophe Vieux, the manager of the French boat show, the Grand Pavois, who was hosted by Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) this

week. France's boat-building industry is estimated to have a total turnover of R95 billion, making it one of the most important European boating markets, according to the International Boat Industry.

After visiting East London's port and beachfront area yesterday he met with local executives from DaimlerChrysler South Africa, the International Development Zone (IDZ) and the National Ports Authority (NPA).

Afterwards, Vieux said the possible expansion of East London's port presented a unique opportunity for the leisure boat industry. "In the global field this is a big chance to develop an unexploited stretch of coastline," he said.

Buffalo City Mayor Zintle Peter asked Vieux to advise the municipality on proposals to move East

London's yacht club to the beachfront.

The boating industry expert said a yacht club could be the focus for development, with the space around it becoming prime real estate. "It's not just about sailing, it's about developing a place where people want to be."

Vieux said the opportunity to incorporate a leisure boat facility into the development of the port would benefit the local economy. He suggested that a well-planned development might lead boat-builders to relocate to East London's IDZ.

According to the International Boat Industry, South African-built boats have a reputation for "ruggedness and good seakeeping". The majority of the boats in South Africa are locally built.

A previous commercial develop-

ment at the port, Latimer's Landing, has been unsuccessful. But acting-mayor John Badenhorst said that being tucked away close to the commercial port, it was in the wrong place.

In comparison, the land between the port and Marina Glen presents a more viable option. Private investors have offered up to R1 million per 100m<sup>2</sup> for prime land in this zone.

A R1 million development study for the beachfront is being carried out by the Buffalo City Development Agency (BCDA). One of their proposals includes an "iconic" five-star hotel at Signal Hill.

Private investors have also shown "high levels" of interest in two vacant beachfront sites earmarked as part of the development. Proposals for these sites close on Monday, said Sharpley.