

New doubts over coral, safety at planned Olympic surf venue

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The existing wooden judging tower in Teahupoo is believed to be unsafe.

The president of French Polynesia has questioned whether 2024 Olympic surfing can go ahead at the planned site in Tahiti, saying he was concerned about safety and damage to coral from a planned judging

tower.

A construction barge slated to install a new judging [tower](#) broke more of the beach's corals in a [new test](#) in the French Pacific territory on Friday, which was filmed by [environmental groups](#).

That could leave an old wooden tower as the only space for the judges.

"Today we're breaking coral, and tomorrow we may be endangering people's lives if we use this old equipment," Moetai Brotherson told local broadcaster TNTV on Saturday.

"If there's no solution in the end... we must call into question the survival of the surf contests at Teahupoo," he added.

Brotherson cancelled tests he was supposed to observe as well as the start of construction work on Monday.

And he said that "there's no way we will be able to re-use the old foundations... or the old tower".

Brotherson told AFP that it would not be possible to move the competition to another beach in Tahiti, as Teahupoo was the site originally filed with Olympic authorities as part of France's candidacy.

And it would cost several million euros (dollars) to move the surfing events to a site in metropolitan France.

But Barbara Martins-Nio, the Tahiti Olympics site director, said she was "confident a technical solution exists".

"A new tower and new foundations are the only way," she added—while acknowledging that "it's true that it's difficult to access the site".

"If we don't manage it, all of us together will have to ask ourselves what happens next," Martins-Nio said.

More than 168,000 people have signed an [online petition](#) against the planned aluminum judges' tower, supposed to reach a height of 14 meters (46 feet), while hundreds have protested at the Teahupoo site itself.

It "doesn't make any sense to need such a giant tower for a 2 days event," American surfing legend Kelly Slater posted online last week, calling to "give the money to local infrastructure" instead.

Vai ara o Teahupoo, the main association opposing the new tower, has stopped speaking to the media about the case.

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