

## Mission Beach public toilets

At the heart of Mission Beach is the Village Green, and on the corner of the Village Green and Donkin Lane, is the public toilet block.

I have not seen the original plans for this toilet block, but it has a septic tank and soakage trenches, and anecdotal evidence says that the design of this system was always inadequate, and that it was only a matter of time before the system failed. Notwithstanding this, Johnstone Shire Council approved the design of the toilets and built them.

These toilets are used by those members of the public alighting temporarily from the buses during their stop-overs, as well as by visitors and locals. These are heavily used public toilets.

With the arrival of the winter season tourists, the trenches have failed and Johnstone Shire Council has had no alternative but to shut the public toilets down and set up some temporary "porta-loos" outside.

They plan to decommission the trenches and put the septic effluent into a pipe and pump it half way along Donkin Lane, down Central Avenue to the beachfront, then along the foreshore to the public toilet block at the Stinger Net. There the effluent will be added to the septic trenches already in place.

The Stinger Net toilet block is located only 10 metres back from the high tide mark, and less than 1 metre vertically above the high tide mark, immediately above the beach where people sit when they are visiting the Stinger Net (usually in the summer season).

If these soakage trenches fail, like the current ones have, then the problem will have been transferred from the Village Green to the most popular spot on the beach.

On the stretch along the foreshore, the sewer pipe will be buried to a depth of 300mm, i.e. about a foot. This is totally irresponsible as the area is gazetted as an Erosion Prone Area under the *Beach Protection Act*, and is wide open to being swept away during a cyclone.

**This proposal is a totally unacceptable solution to the public toilet problem. The very last thing**

**we need is for large quantities of septic effluent to be released closer to the high water mark than at present.**

When I spoke to the Johnstone Shire engineer, he said Council had not even considered discussing the proposal with the Beach Protection Authority. "It is not an issue", he said. Wrong. The Beach Protection Authority says that Council **must** get a permit before starting the work. This is now happening.

The Council has also spoken with Environmental Protection Authority over sewage effluent licensing. They have claimed that the sum of the loads on the two toilet blocks is less than 20 Effective Persons. This is a totally unrealistic figure, but it means that EPA are not required to consider licensing the project. My estimate of the load is 200 EP, ten times the figure Council has quoted.

You may ask why it is that owners of land in Mission Beach have to submit a development application for their toilet systems, and be assessed under the Interim Code for On-site Sewerage Treatment, but Council doesn't, even when the proposal involves 500 metres of sewer piping through the village, ending up at the most popular spot on the beach.

**The answer is that the sewer pipe and trenches will be located on 'road reserve' and that road reserves are not included in the Town Planning Scheme. So it doesn't need a formal development application, or any kind of outside scrutiny at all!** Neat isn't it?

Council has argued that the local businesses should be opening their toilets to the public to alleviate the problem. The only trouble there is that Council, in its headlong rush for more development, approved the toilet systems for these businesses when it must have been obvious that the systems could never cope, given the very high water-table. Now businesses cannot open their toilets to the public because they know that could cause a serious health hazard.

All of these problems stem from Council turning a blind eye to the real situation. This latest episode is just one of many such planning disasters.

### Act locally, think galactically!

If you have ever stopped to ponder all the really big problems facing the Planet Earth – Greenhouse Effect, Ozone Depletion, Over-Population, Nuclear Waste, Rainforest Destruction, etc, etc, etc, – you might have come to the conclusion that the Human Race is not capable of solving its problems and will ultimately kill itself off.

One alternative is to hope that we will be contacted by an advanced intra-galactic society, who will put us on the right track.

The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence project (SETI) has been looking for signals since 1977, so far without result. They use spare time on the giant radio-telescope at the Arecibo Radio Observatory in Puerto Rico to record radio signals on the 1.4 GHz band, and they then analyse this data for signs of intelligent messages.

This is a GIGANTIC data analysis exercise, and so SETI breaks the data up and sends bits of it to people who want to help process it with their computers. If you want to take part in this fascinating project, go onto the Internet to :

**[setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu](http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu)**  
and download the software and your first slab of data.

Once installed, the analysis program will start up whenever your screen saver comes on, (i.e. when your computer has been doing nothing for a few minutes). Processing a slab of data takes my computer a total of 36 hours, but this is automatically broken up into times when the computer is otherwise unoccupied.

When the analysis is complete, the next time you go on the Internet it will automatically send its results back to SETI at the University of California, Berkeley, and get another slab of data to work on. It only takes 3 minutes. There are already over 2.5 million PCs involved with the project, making it the biggest distributed analysis network in the known universe. So do something useful for the environment – search for some help, before it is too late!

◆\* Dave Kimble