

Marina questions

Mission Beach Harbour Pty Ltd has circulated a newsletter throughout the Mission Beach area, outlining their proposed marina project at Boat Bay. There are a number of points in the newsletter that need to be questioned.

λ In describing the history of Mission Beach Harbour Pty Ltd. (MBH), it was implied that the Cardwell Shire Future Search Workshop was totally supportive of the concept of a marina. This was not the case.

Those supporting the marina concept formed the working group that ultimately became MBH, and those opposing it formed Environmental Management Group (EMG) under the Chairmanship of Norma Morgan. Both groups were assisted by a support officer, paid for by Council, for the 12 months following the Workshop. EMG is still in existence, meets regularly, and still opposes the marina concept.

λ The newsletter states "The present jetty is nearing its use by date", but in fact it is 7 years old and has just been refurbished giving it another 7 years of life. If this maintenance is kept up, the life of the jetty can be extended almost indefinitely. The maintenance is certainly costly, but is currently being paid for out of the fees charged for commercial use, so does not cost the ratepayers anything, which is as it should be.

λ From the public safety angle, it should be noted that in 7 years of operation, no one has been injured while boarding at the Narragon Beach jetty, and in the worst 'incident', 3 suitcases were lost overboard. This should be contrasted with the dangers of being on Mission Beach boats at sea, where there have been numerous accidents involving broken bones and sprained ankles, and diving on the reef, where there have been two deaths.

It is impossible to eliminate danger when the sea is involved, but boarding at the jetty is statistically much safer than going to sea. Skippers must have the ultimate decision on safety matters, and so far they have done very well.

λ The newsletter states "Government policy is not to provide finances for public facilities for commercial use", but the example of Nelly Bay on Magnetic Island shows that it can be done. Department of Transport (Harbours) has a budget of \$5 million a year to improve public facilities, but Cardwell and Johnstone Shire Councils will have to keep lobbying hard if they want to get a share of it.

λ In answer to the question 'why can't we just do something at the boat ramp?', the article says that "would require a swing basin almost the size of the excavation proposed [for the marina]". Obviously it depends on what 'something' one is thinking of, but my estimate of the extent of the marina excavation is 14 hectares, whereas to access a pontoon alongside the boat ramp with a commercial vessel would surely need less than 1 hectare of dredging.

λ The suggestion that the marina excavation will "increase the fish habitat and nursery areas" indicates a grave misunderstanding of marine ecology. I know MBH Director, Tony Lee, appreciates the value of seagrass beds (indeed we are working together on a project to monitor their recovery following the trawl closure), and Tony also appreciates the habitat value of mangroves, but he seems to have a blind spot for that essential inter-tidal mudflat habitat.

The mudflats in Boat Bay are an extremely rich and diverse habitat in themselves, being home to seaweeds, sponges, crabs, molluscs, worms, mud-skippers, beach stone curlews, herons, sea eagles, and (when the tide is in) fish, dugongs, turtles, etc.

I accept that the seagrass and mangrove areas will not be excavated, but the inter-tidal zone is the area that links the three habitats together to form one ecosystem. The environmental impact on the excavated area will be total, as every bit of it will be dug up and turned into either land or deep water basin.

Of course the modified bay will develop into a new habitat, perhaps with more of some fish species, but the loss of the mudflat habitat is

certain to have flow-on impacts on the seagrass and mangrove habitats.

λ The claim that the marina basin will not need dredging defies all logic. Everyone knows that silt settles out in calm water areas, and Boat Bay already has plenty of silt to prove it is a calm water area. The creation of an island will make it even calmer, and this will cause more silt to accumulate. MBH claims to have a report that says otherwise, but if Gravity continues to do its job and the marina does silt up, how can it be dredged without enormous cost? And if this cost drives the enterprise into bankruptcy, who will be left to clear up the mess – the ratepayers?

Sewerage update

The Mission Beach Sewerage Community Advisory Committee (MBSCAC) has been waiting for the joint Councils and the consultants, GH&D, to complete their contract negotiations and prepare a short planning report before beginning community consultation.

However JACSJFAC has gone back on its word and decided that the consultant's brief will not now include community consultation. Instead the public will be kept informed 'through media releases'.

In my view this is a totally unacceptable decision. We have been promised media releases since the State Government funding was announced last December, and yet all we have had is one article in the Tully Times that said nothing new.

At the last Council elections, all candidates agreed that the project would only happen if it was affordable. Mayor Tip Byrne has repeatedly used the figure of \$400 per annum. Will the joint Councils drop the project if it turns out to cost \$500 p.a.? Will Tully residents have to pay the same amount to use the same treatment plant? If not, why not? Will Cardwell Shire Council be getting any extra State funding to subsidise the cost of the Tully part of the upgrade? If so, how much? Why the secrecy? These are things we need to know.

π **Dave Kimble**