

Local news

Shire boundaries

There have been two Public Meetings in the last few weeks concerning the Shire boundary that cuts the Mission Beach area in two. The first was called by Johnstone Shire, but Cardwell Shire Councillors did not attend. The second was called by Cardwell Shire, and thankfully the Johnstone Shire Councillors did attend.

A lot of talking was done and I cannot report it all, but the upshot of it all is that the two Councils will now ask the Local Government Association of Queensland to arbitrate over how to ask the ratepayers what they want to happen.

The three proposals are (very roughly at this stage) : (a) to do nothing; (b) to amalgamate the Johnstone Shire with the northern part of Cardwell Shire and the southern part of Cairns City to form "the Wet Tropics Shire", with Cardwell going to Hinchinbrook Shire; and (c) to move the Johnstone/Cardwell boundary north to include El Arish, Bingil Bay and Mission Beach in Cardwell Shire.

Obviously there is going to have to be a lot more talking done before any final decision is made, but here are a few things that people should think about before they make up their minds.

Johnstone Shire operates a Voluntary Conservation Agreement scheme that encourages landholders to preserve part of their land with cassowary habitat on it, in return for a rate deferral. About 1,295 hectares has already been protected in this way and more is in the pipeline, so the project has been a great success.

Cardwell Shire has a similar scheme but it has never got off the ground because no effort has been allocated to its implementation. The plan was for Council to approach twenty landholders with high priority blocks, so Council could get a feel for how it was all going to work. However the overworked and underpaid Parks and Gardens supervisor simply doesn't have the

time to follow up on it.

In Johnstone Shire, if you apply for a Material Change of Use (what we used to call a 'rezoning') on land with cassowary habitat on it, you are likely to be required to put 90% of it into conservation. In Cardwell Shire the figure is likely to be 60%.

Johnstone Shire has an Environmental Manager, an Environmental Resources Officer and 1½ others looking after these issues. Cardwell Shire has no one working directly on environmental issues, although they "will explore the funding possibilities for such a position on a fixed-term basis, to particularly assist in implementing a new Town Plan over the next two to three years."

As I think you can see from these examples, the Johnstone Shire is doing more to protect the environment than the Cardwell Shire, and this translates into a better lifestyle for Mission Beach residents, particularly if they rely directly on tourists for their livelihood. A larger local government area means a larger rate base and more expert staff to do the things which need to be done properly. A Wet Tropics Shire would therefore be a step forward.

Coastal Management Plan

The Draft State Coastal Management Plan has been released for public comment, and the Environmental Protection Agency gave a presentation of it in Tully recently.

The Government made it clear at the presentation that it accepts the principle that removing landholders' existing land-use rights requires compensation, but it insists that this policy will not take away anybody's rights. Many farmers at the presentation who subscribe to the Creeping Government Conspiracy Theory were not convinced. They object to being asked to look after their properties and hence the coastal environment.

The Draft State Plan is available from EPA and submissions should be in by February 2001. The Regional Plan for Cardwell/Hinchinbrook will conform to the State Plan, and a draft will be coming out for public

consultation next year.

Shipping in the Marine Park

This last month has seen the grounding of another ship on the Great Barrier Reef. It is obvious that commercial shipping crews cannot be trusted to behave responsibly, so it is essential that ships have a pilot on board who can be trusted. This is already the case in the section of the Marine Park north of Cairns, where the inshore passage is at its narrowest, but it is clear that this needs to be extended to the whole Park.

It has been pointed out that even pilots need to rest during longer trips, so in these circumstances there should be two pilots on board so that they can rotate. The cost of this should be borne by the shipping operators.

Crown Lands Strategy

The outstanding issue of land for the Sailing Club next door to the Surf Lifesaving Club at South Mission Beach has been resolved, with the Sailing Club getting the land, with access via the Surf Lifesavers.

This would seem to be the final step in getting Cardwell Shire Council to agree to the implementation of the Strategy, so we can now look forward to its finalisation. Expect to see a visit from Minister for Environment and natural Resources, Rod Welford, in the not too distant future.

Correction

In my September article I wrote about developments with the Crown Lands Strategy, including Mr Wheatley's Crown Lease to the north of Frog's Hollow. To be strictly accurate, the "lease" is now in fact a Permit to Occupy, not a true lease.

In it I wrote that land had been cleared to the north of this lease beyond the boundary. I have since spoken with Mr Wheatley and I have learnt that the area to the north of the current Permit to Occupy had earlier been part of the larger lease mentioned in the article, so the clearing was valid when it was done. My apologies to Mr Wheatley.

□ Dave Kimble