

Open democratic government - not

Friends of Boat Bay have been circulating a petition to send to Johnstone Shire Council to demonstrate the depth of community support for 'no new marine facilities at Boat Bay'. A total of 502 signatures were collected in a four week period, which is a respectable proportion of the community.

One would think a petition of this size would make Johnstone Shire Council sit up and take notice, but the opposite has been the case.

Friends of Boat Bay asked to present the petition to Council and make a presentation of their views, and were given a date of 16th May. But by the 13th, they still hadn't been given a firm time to turn up, and then the date was changed to the 23rd May. And then the invitation to make a presentation was withdrawn altogether, confirming Council's contempt for public opinion.

I spoke to Peter Roberts, the Council's General Manager, and he said that Friends of Boat Bay was wasting its time, and Council's, as there is no development application before Council to consider.

I pointed out that since he didn't know what Friends of Boat Bay was going to say to Council, it was a bit presumptuous to decide that it was a waste of time. In fact the group is asking Council to do something that it can make a decision on right now if it wants to.

The proposal is to change the purposes of Reserve 550 from Boat Harbour Reserve to Environmental and Scenic Reserve, with a small area for a Jetty Reserve and another at the boat ramp for a Landing Reserve.

The first step in this process is for Johnstone Shire Council, who are the Trustees for the Reserve, to write to Department of Natural Resources (DNR), who are the 'owners' of the Reserve because it is State Land, saying that they want to change the purposes of the Reserve.

This can be initiated with a simple motion during a Council Meeting, and DNR will then consult with all the stakeholders and the public and decide what to do.

Substantiating the case for the

change should be straightforward, as the area the Reserve covers has outstanding natural environmental values and beauty. A detailed report on these values is being prepared by Friends of Boat Bay.

The effect of this reallocation would be that when a development application for a marina is being prepared by a private organisation, the legal owners of the Reserve, DNR, have to counter-sign the application, and they will only do that if the proposed development is in line with the designated purpose of the reserve.

Thus if the purpose of the reserve is Boat Harbour, DNR can counter-sign an application for a marina, but if it is an Environmental Reserve then they can't.

Given the strong pro-development attitude of the Council, it is unlikely that they will jump at this proposal and implement it straight away. But they are in the process of preparing a new Planning Scheme (Town Plan) where the strategic intent for the Reserve has to be addressed.

Friends of Boat Bay will be asking that the proposal be put into the draft Planning Scheme as an option for the community to consider when the draft goes to public consultation later this year. That way people can see what options are being proposed and choose which one they prefer.

Another thread in the story concerns the lack of public information about what the Mission Beach Marine Facilities Joint Board (MBMFJB) has been doing since the marina proposal was rejected in 1994 in favour of building the current jetty.

At the last Friends of Boat Bay meeting, Councillors Joe Galeano and Ken Fox came along. They are Cardwell Shire Councillors, and they are both on the MBMFJB. (The Narragon Beach jetty is in Johnstone Shire and the Dunk Island jetty is in Cardwell, hence the Joint Board.)

Joe suggested that rather than make a formal Freedom of Information Request to get access to the MBMFJB's minutes and accounts, the group should write asking for access on a cooperative, non-threatening basis.

The group went along with this,

but despite Joe's efforts, the request was rejected. So much for open government and the cooperative approach. Consequently the Freedom of Information Request has been lodged. I have since spoken with the Secretary to the MBMFJB, Richard Giuliany, and we may yet be able to work cooperatively on this.

Mr Giuliany says that the idea that the Narragon Beach jetty only had a lifetime of ten years is wrong. **The current refurbishment work will give the jetty another 6 to 7 years of life, and the process can be repeated more or less indefinitely after that.**

This contradicts what Mayor Barry Moyle said when he claimed we only have three years left before the jetty is condemned. Indeed this information totally undermines the main argument for why we need a marina.

Mr Giuliany also confirmed that the fees charged for use of the jetties by commercial boat operators are sufficient (just) to cover the on-going cost of maintenance, and that the ratepayers are therefore not subsidising the price of tourists' boat tickets. This is welcome news.

Sewerage update

A company has now been selected to be the Project Manager for the Mission Beach/Tully sewerage scheme, and they will begin their work by drawing up a project plan for approval. They will then liaise with the public and the Mission Beach Sewerage Community Advisory Committee. Then they will call tenders for 'design and construct', after which the final cost of the scheme will be known.

The chosen company is none other than our old friends Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey (GH&D), who were responsible for the aborted scheme to treat the sewage at the block on the corner at the South Mission Beach turn-off.

That block was bought on GH&D's recommendation by Cardwell Shire Council for \$200,000 using SCAP funds that will have to be paid back to the State Government at some stage.

π Dave Kimble