

State Government issues

There have been a couple of pieces of new State Government legislation enacted this month that could have considerable impact on life at Mission Beach.

Vegetation Management Act

This Act was passed at the end of last year but was never signed off by the Governor because the State got into an argument with the Commonwealth over funding to implement it.

This argument was political grandstanding on the part of the Beattie Government because there is absolutely no doubt that land management issues are definitely a State matter. Having said that, the Commonwealth could still have come to the party if they had wanted to, as landclearing has a big impact on greenhouse gas levels, which is a Federal issue.

So now the Act has been watered down to remove protection for 'of concern' eco-systems, leaving only areas of 'high nature conservation value' protected. This is a severe weakening of the original scope of the Act and shows just how unconcerned the Beattie Government is with conserving our natural heritage and good land management practices.

As far as Mission Beach is concerned, all our remaining natural vegetation is of high nature conservation value, primarily because it is all habitat for the endangered Southern Cassowary and/or the endangered Mahogany Glider.

The vegetation in our area is recognised as being spectacularly diverse. The Far North Queensland Regional Environmental Strategy says, "*Twenty regional ecosystems were identified in this mapping study as occurring in the area between Maria Creek and the Hull River. Of these, seven are considered to be endangered*"

Unfortunately, for the purposes of this Act the definition of what is of high nature conservation value is what Department of Natural Resources says it is, and guess what — they

haven't mapped this area yet!

In the meantime our only protection for these priceless pieces of Nature is if the Minister (Rod Welford) decides to make an Interim Declaration these areas are indeed of high nature conservation value, even though they haven't been mapped yet.

I strongly urge you, even if you never do another thing to help our environment all year, to write to the Minister for Natural Resources, Rod Welford, Box 456, Brisbane Albert St, 4002 (fax 07 3210 6214) asking him to make an Interim Declaration over the endangered ecosystems already mapped in the FNQ study.

A sample letter is available on my web site at:

www.ozemail.com.au/~chakoro

Acid Sulfate Soils

The other significant piece of new legislation is the State Planning Policy – *Planning and management of coastal development involving acid sulfate soils*, which comes into effect on 20th November 2000.

It is actually part of the *Integrated Planning Act* and applies to coastal areas below 5 metres Australian Height Datum. It makes developments on Acid Sulfate Soils (ASSs) assessable developments under the Act. This means that developments that disturb ASSs, such as digging drains or foundations for new buildings will be subject to the policy.

Acid sulfate soils come about by the disturbance of soils containing high levels of iron sulfide that has not been previously exposed to the air, due to water-logging. When the protective blanket of water is removed, either by lowering the water-table or by digging up the soil, the air oxidises the sulfides to sulfuric acid, which then leaches out into the environment causing all sorts of problems.

The Policy requires the developer to provide evidence of the presence or absence of ASSs, and if present, various remedial measures are

required to protect the environment.

As for what this will mean for Mission Beach, ASSs are usually water-logged grey clays so if you are on sand or free-draining red soil, then you might have to have a report from a soil expert saying the land does not have ASSs, but that is all. For those on grey clay, which usually has (or had) melaleucas and pandanus growing on it, then things will be more difficult.

Marc Rowell's outburst

In order to drum up a bit of publicity for himself, this month our local Member, Marc Rowell, dredged up the issue of Lou Pajares' land at Barrett's Lagoon, which was bought up by the State Government last year as the final freehold block on the list of critical Mahogany Glider habitat.

Mr Rowell is reported as claiming that this was "first class land with potential to produce high quality sugar, and its acquisition was motivated by bureaucrats flexing new-found muscles."

The reality is that the Pajares block is inundated melaleuca wetland adjacent to the Edmund Kennedy National Park, and totally unsuitable for agriculture. Mr Pajares runs a bulldozer contract operation and would certainly have cleared this part of his land long ago if it had been any good.

Instead Mr Pajares refused to cooperate with the government over its resumption, and on more than one occasion deliberately vandalised the block with his bulldozer to try and squeeze a better deal out of the situation. Interim Conservation Orders were issued and re-issued to prevent further damage, and in the end a financial arrangement was finally agreed without recourse to compulsory acquisition.

The irony is that it was the Borbidge Government, of which Marc Rowell was a part, that issued the first ICO, so Marc manages to shoot himself in the foot once again.

□ Dave Kimble