

Mission Beach No Trawl Zone

Back in July I wrote about a proposed trawl closure in the Mission Beach area to prevent a repetition of the fish killed by prawn trawlers being washed up on our beaches.

Mission Beach Marine Advisory Committee made a recommendation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) for an extensive area to be closed, reaching to Cape Sandwich on the north-east of Hinchinbrook Island.

Hinchinbrook MAC was also consulted and suggested a smaller area reaching to Hecate Point on the north-west of Hinchinbrook Island.

Queensland Seafood Industry Association, representing the trawlermen, recommended a much smaller area, and Department of Primary Industry (Fisheries) also made a recommendation, although I haven't seen what that was.

All of these proposals were forwarded to the Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Hill, and finally GBRMPA made their own recommendation.

Their proposal has not been made public at this stage, but is believed to be a compromise between the Mission Beach and Hinchinbrook MAC proposals, that also recognises that it is the shallow, banana prawn trawling grounds that are the major problem, not the deeper tiger prawn trawling grounds.

Although I would have liked to have seen the whole area in there, I am prepared to compromise and accept the GBRMPA proposal. This would be a great step forward for the area, and Senator Hill should be encouraged to implement this plan.

In the recent amendments to the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act*, Senator Hill got some new powers to order fishing closures to protect World Heritage values. These powers come in the form of Regulations that need the approval of Executive Council. This is a formal meeting of the Governor General and some of his senior Ministers, when he signs on the dotted line to make things legal.

Unfortunately Senator Hill hasn't made his mind up yet, and it looks like there won't be an opportunity to get the regulations passed before the

upcoming election. At best we can only expect Senator Hill to give us a promise before the election. This means the closure is likely to become an election issue in the Kennedy electorate.

Bob Katter was quoted in the Tully Times (3/5/2001) as saying about the decision to include the sea off Mission Beach in the Marine Park, "*What we're seeing here is an excessive use of power and the enviro-nazis seeking to extend their power and control over our lives*", so I don't suppose Mr Katter will be in favour of a closure.

The newly pre-selected National Party candidate, Mary Lyle, is currently Mayor of Eacham Shire. There hasn't been time for her to get back to me on this issue.

One Nation hasn't chosen a candidate yet, but judging by the 'Letters to the Editor' in the Tully Times (6/9/2001), Smiley Burnett of Mt Garnett is interested in giving it a go: "*These treaties [unspecified] have all been signed behind our backs against the wishes of the people and all in their effort to introduce the New World Order, Globalisation, World Government – all the same thing – all controlled 100 per cent by the U.N.*" Hmmm, he sounds a lot like Bob Katter to me.

I wonder if the Liberals will take advantage of the lack of a sitting Member to run a candidate. They got 11.6% the last time they ran, in 1993, so that would make their preferences influential. When the amendments to the GBRMP Act were going through Parliament, the Member for Herbert (based on Townsville), Peter Lindsay, made a speech that ended up with the proud boast, "This is the greenest government ever." I can remember a time when no Liberal would have dreamed of saying that in Parliament, but times do change.

The ALP's Shadow Environment Minister, Senator Bolkus, and their candidate for Kennedy, Alan Nailen, have not got back to me with an opinion.

Assuming it eventually happens, the trawl closure will be good for the seagrass beds that are the food supply for dugongs and sea turtles as well as

shelter for juvenile fish and prawns.

This area will probably take a long time to rehabilitate itself after the battering it has been getting from years of intensive trawling, but it will eventually make the whole ecosystem more productive and so will be to everyone's benefit.

From the tourism point of view, the trawling closure should be good for recreational fishing, and that will have a flow on effect on fishing paraphernalia and accommodation. And as the seagrasses return, dugong-watching could become another attraction of Mission Beach, and one that leaves the uniqueness of the area intact at the end of the day. This is what the term "eco-tourism" is all about – enjoying the natural environment, not pouring concrete all over it in an attempt to improve on it.

From the point of view of trawling management, this closure should be accompanied by a buy-out of trawl effort. If it isn't, the effort will merely be displaced on to some other area, that will then be over-exploited.

In a way, I am not eager to give taxpayers' money to people who say 'if you don't pay me off I will continue to stuff up the environment', but the economic rationalist reality is that if you value the environment, then you must be prepared to pay for it, so I support a buy-out.

The buy-out package associated with the implementation of the East Coast Trawl Management Plan was argued over bitterly, but in the end was promptly taken up by the trawl industry, so I think it must have been reasonably fair. A similar package should be applied to this closure.

More land clearing

Last week I walked to Tam O'Shanter Point at a very low tide, to check on the seagrasses there. When I turned round and looked back towards South Mission, there was this huge red scar on the hillside overlooking Luggar Bay, on what used to be Campbell's land, where someone has bulldozed a new house site and surroundings. What a disgrace, a whole vista ruined.

☛ Dave Kimble