

## Council watching

### Crown Lands Strategy

The saga of the Crown Lands Strategy continues. At its Town Planning Meeting of 10th August, Cardwell Shire Council had a deputation from Department of Natural Resources and Wet Tropics Management Authority, concerning the Unallocated State Land (formerly called Vacant Crown Lands) in the Mission Beach area.

The decision on what to do with these parcels of land was finalised way back in 1995, but never acted on by the Borbidge Government. Since the Beattie Government came in, progress has been extremely slow, but at least there has been some progress.

I had a letter from the Minister a month ago saying the decision had been finalised, but it seems that DNR is still keen to get Cardwell Shire Council onside with the final outcome. The biggest difficulty has been getting them to agree to what was agreed originally.

The land opposite Frogs Hollow, going all the way over to the beach was designated as being partly Aboriginal Reserve, partly National Park, and partly Strategic Land Reserve (for future use of some kind). However all three sections are crossed by the power line easement that runs from South Mission to the refuse transfer station on Wheatley Road.

Also the SKM report on sewerage suggested the power line easement would be the best place to run a sewer between South Mission and the southern end of Reid Road. Councillors obviously only had the haziest idea of the lie of the land, but didn't want to give up anything to National Parks that they could avoid.

So it was conceded by DNR that if there was no feasible alternative to this sewer alignment, then they would allow the easement to become a "Resource Reserve" rather than a National Park, which would allow the pipe to be laid and maintained. A sunset clause would mean that if the sewerage scheme does not eventuate (a significant possibility) then the reserve would revert to National Park.

Of course this concession is actually meaningless because there *is* a perfectly feasible alternative location for the sewer – running alongside South Mission Beach Road and Wheatley Road.

On the same side of the road as Frogs Hollow and a bit to the north, is Wheatley's Crown Lease land. In fact this lease used to cover a large area, but being low-lying swampy country, only a small part of it has ever been cleared for grazing. It turns out some of the land that was cleared was actually not on his lease at all, but on Vacant Crown Land to the north.

So in the interests of compromise, DNR has agreed with Mr Wheatley to let him continue to lease the cleared area (including the part that wasn't his to clear), while the remainder becomes Strategic Land Reserve and National Park as indicated in the Strategy.

Council agreed to this in principle but deferred a final decision pending formal notification of the revised boundaries and the Town Planner's formal recommendation. (Did you ever get the feeling this is like pulling teeth?)

The third area of contention was a small parcel of land to the north of the South Mission Beach Surf Life Saving Club, which has been proposed to house the Sailing Club.

This is still a forested block and DNR are unlikely to agree to this idea because the area is critical cassowary habitat and a rare vegetation type in its own right. Alternative sites have not been adequately canvassed, and of course if this piece of forest is trashed, then the pressure will be on to trash the esplanade strip in front of it, just like the Surf Lifesavers want to trash the bit in front of them.

It would be a terrible shame if this piece of forest was lost. Unfortunately it is typical of the way people keep whittling away at the one thing that Mission Beach has that makes it so special. The Environmental Protection Agency has sent a senior officer down to look at the site and I hope he recommends that it be protected.

### Sewerage

In late July I attended a special Whole of Government Meeting convened to discuss the Mission Beach sewerage scheme. Both Councils were represented, along with Department of Health, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Local Government and Planning, and Sinclair Knight Merz.

EPA once again stated that they had no power to force the Councils to put on sewerage, they only assess applications for permits. DNR said the same thing.

GBRMPA agreed, but said they were very keen to see sewerage implemented, because of the effects of nutrients on the Reef ecology. I pointed out that SKM and the independent consultant, Professor Greenfield, agreed that the amount of nutrients from Mission Beach's septic systems were minuscule compared to the nutrients running off sugar and banana farms in our region, so GBRMPA's concerns were unfounded.

DNR said that the SKM report had insufficient water samples to come to any concrete conclusions about damage to the environment. (This contradicts SKM's position).

They also confirmed that the Interim Code of Practice for On-Site Sewerage Systems does not apply to existing sites. (This contradicts SKM's position).

DNR also said that the figures projected for the cost of groundwater injection were "extremely rubbery" and that it might take as much as two years to do all the necessary feasibility studies.

DLGP said that there was \$100 million in SCAP funding applications already being processed, involving 58 Councils. Half of the total SCAP program's \$150 million has already been spent. I leave it up to you to judge whether that means we are likely to get the \$16.8 million the Councils and SKM are after.