

The saga of the 'Crown Lands' Strategy

Back in 1995, after years of discussion and compromising, a plan was finally agreed on how to deal with the blocks of Vacant Crown Land in the Wongaling and South Mission Beach area.

The result was the *South Mission Beach – Wongaling Beach State Lands Strategy (1995)*. Briefly the Strategy was to convert the existing 13 blocks of 'Vacant Crown Land', (now called Unallocated State Land), into four different kinds of tenure – National Park, Aboriginal Reserve, Park Reserve, and Strategic Land Reserve.

The land that fronts the North Hull River, north of the Jackey Jackey boat ramp, was moved into National Parks soon after, but the other changes were put on the back burner, and nothing further happened while the Borbidge Government was in office.

When the Beattie Government came in, with Rod Welford as Minister for both Environment and Natural Resources, we were assured things would be completed quickly.

But the wheels of government turn very slowly, and the Cardwell Shire Council under Mayor Royce Fitzgerald reneged on the agreement, bringing things to a standstill again.

The Councillors couldn't see National Parks as an asset to the community which will bring in more tourists. All they could see was that NPs don't pay rates. Concrete is good, trees are bad.

Tip Byrne got my vote at the last Council elections because he said he was in favour of implementing the Strategy in full, but again Council put obstacles in the way of a quick solution. They argued against part of the forest between South Mission Beach and Wongaling becoming National Park because they might want to put a sewer pipeline through it, even though it is quite feasible to follow the South Mission Beach Road and Wheatley Road alignment.

Council also insisted on cutting a block out of the proposed National Park area north of the Surf Lifesavers Club, to make a place for the Sailing Club. This will involve clearing yet another piece of cassowary habitat,

when South Mission already has 145 vacant blocks (33% of the total) with many more on the drawing board.

Anyway, with Council's concerns dealt with, the way was clear to finalise the arrangements.

The good news is that Department of Natural Resources (Lands Office) has completed the changes, with one minor exception. Hurray.

I rather imagined that when things were completed there would be some sort of fanfare – perhaps an official hand-over ceremony or something, but that hasn't happened.

The not-so-good news is that Department of Environment has a huge backlog of acquisitions that have not yet been gazetted as National Parks, and ours will be a long time in the queue. Years probably.

However in the meantime Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) do have day to day management control of the proposed National Parks. It's a pity Head Office in Brisbane didn't tell the local Ranger or his boss in Innisfail. They didn't know anything had changed, and they will need to have extra resources to do a proper job of managing their new areas.

There is one pressing problem that QPWS needs to address, and that is the unofficial road that runs from outside the Surf Lifesavers Club at the northern end of Kennedy Esplanade, northwards through the forest on the dunes.

This road starts on proposed National Park, crosses the corner of the Sailing Club block, then back onto NP, and then northwards until it reaches a road reserve going westwards to the Waste Transfer Station, and a freehold block on the southern side of Wheatley Creek. This block has been variously known as Bert's Place, Jumbo's Place, and Shagging Point (I wonder why).

Curious tourists often drive up this road, and some decide to camp in the bush, bringing with them the problems of lack of toilet facilities, camp fires, firewood scrounging, rubbish, illegal clearing, stray dogs, noise, erosion of the dunes, and so on.

The obvious solution is to close the road where Kennedy Esplanade

officially stops. This was the recommendation of the *Environmental & Recreational Management Plan (March 2001)* submitted to Council by the Progress Association.

This report had the unanimous agreement of representatives drawn from a wide range of local community groups.

Council put the report on display for public comment, but has not taken this recommendation any further. Now, of course, they are no longer in control of the land, only the beach esplanade.

The other aspect of this bureaucratic tangle is that if this road is shut, then the owners of the freehold block need to have access using the official road reserve. This strip has never been formed into a real road, and it is Council's responsibility to do this. Council have indicated they do not have the money to do the work at the moment, but this may change if pressure can be brought to bear.

Sewage update

At the recent meeting of the joint Councils, Cardwell Shire's CEO, Mal Mallyon, advised that Department of Natural Resources had now completed their report on our SCAP funding application, and had said that they needed more information on the proposal. He also pointed out that usually a big project proposal like this would have been preceded by a Planning Report, such as has been done for the Tully and Cardwell schemes.

This means that the current SCAP application has been botched due to the joint Councils being in too much of a rush to get things under way.

Whilst it is true that sewerage Mission Beach has already had a stack of reports done on it, it was naïve to think that you could go from a project with two treatment plants at the beach to a project with one treatment plant in Tully simply by calling it 'an alternative effluent disposal method'.

This is just what I predicted in my June article, sarcastically entitled "She'll be right, trust me", so I think I am entitled to say "I told you so."

☛ Dave Kimble