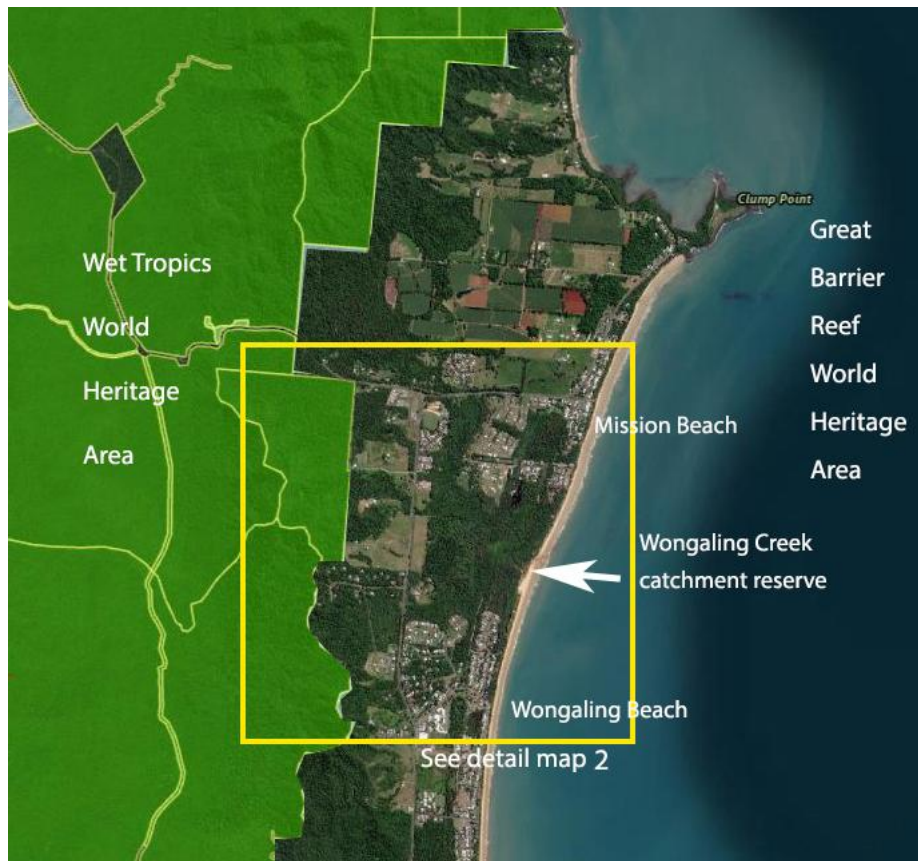


PROPOSED DOG OFF-LEASH AREAS IN MISSION BEACH

The environmental values of Mission Beach are outlined in the [Biodiversity Significance of Mission Beach](#) (Cheneweth 2007).

The highly fragmented coastal landscape at Mission Beach has left a lacework of habitat linkages connecting the Wet Tropics and the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Areas. All vegetation at Mission Beach is mapped essential cassowary habitat.



Map 1

The catchment of Wongaling Creek (known locally as Porters Creek) is a coastal lowland rainforest reserve between the Mission Beach and Wongaling Beach villages.

The Wongaling Creek Habitat Linkages report (Biotropica 2008), identifies 6 habitat linkages providing north south and east west movement for cassowary access to and from the reserve. (see Map 2 below).

Studies undertaken by Bentrupperbaumer (1992) and Crome (1995) estimated 5 birds and between three-six birds respectively were using and traversing the reserve.

Sightings of cassowaries shared via Mission Beach Cassowaries facebook page not only support the study findings but suggest the number of cassowaries utilising the corridors into the reserve could be higher.

Djiru Native title is held over the mouth and part of the catchment area of Wongaling Creek - mapped in the Foreshore Management Plan Greater Mission Beach as a Heritage Protected area. **Dog use is strongly discouraged from occurring in this area.**

The high environmental values of the foreshore reserve extend past the boundaries of the Heritage Protected area. North and South of the Wongaling Creek mouth comprise an approximate 1600m length of

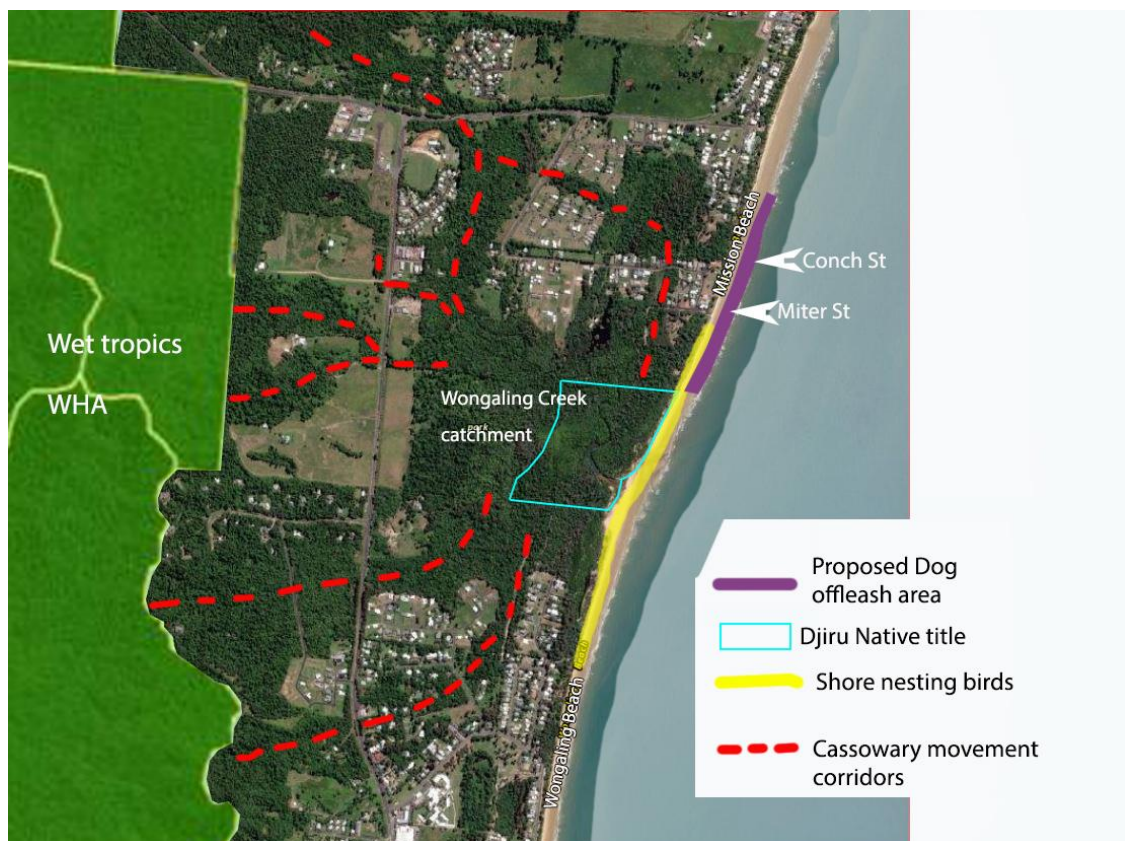
undeveloped foreshore where natural processes occur. This is one of the very few beaches remaining at Mission Beach where cassowaries, shore nesting birds and other wildlife can still be seen.

When given the opportunity, cassowaries forage on the beach along tide lines. Etty Bay is a prime example of cassowary utilising the beach environment; specifically because it is a dog free zone.

CCRC Dog Off Leash survey

Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) is proposing two off-leash dog areas in Mission Beach, one at South Mission and one at North Mission. Both of the trial areas are on beaches.

North Mission Beach proposed off leash area



Map 2

At North Mission Beach cassowaries are frequently seen at the mouth of Wongaling Creek. (Photo below by Whitney Rassip and below left by Ruth Williams).





Cassowaries are also regularly seen using the only cassowary 'corridor' crossing Conch Street and Miter Street (map 2) which is in close proximity to the beach.

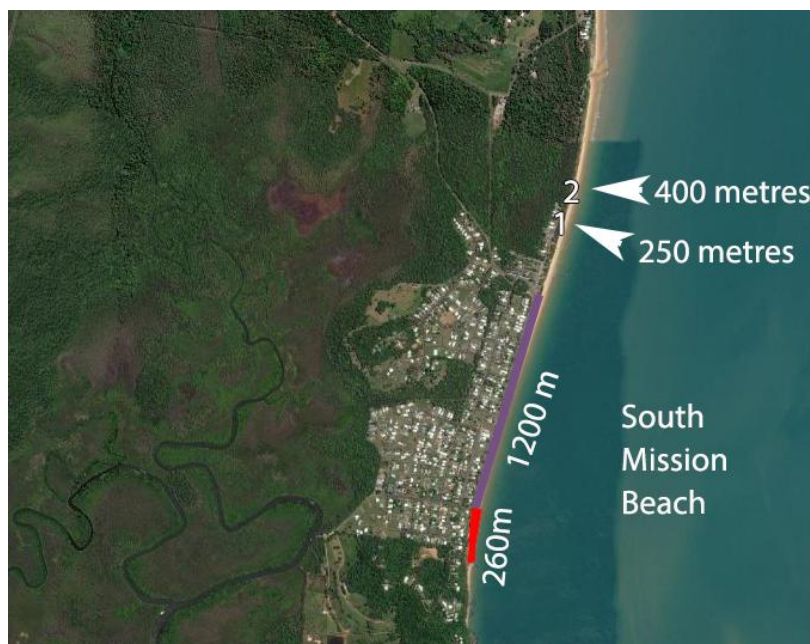
The Wongaling Creek mouth, and foreshore as far north as Conch Street, is known to be used by Red-capped plovers, Beach stone-curlews and other shorebirds for feeding, resting and nesting. Red-capped plovers are not migratory and are regularly found there. Red-capped plovers can breed on the beach any time from July to April but always depend upon beaches and wetlands for feeding and resting areas.

Beach-nesting birds can be hard to see and the tiny chicks are flightless for about 35 days, so are very vulnerable to being trampled or chased by dogs and people.

The photo (by Peter Cox) below of two Sand plovers and a Red-capped plover was taken at the mouth of Wongaling Creek.



South Mission Beach proposed off leash area



Map 3

While the proposed off leash area at South Mission Beach is mostly within a highly degraded/cleared foreshore, (shown in purple Map 3 above) cassowaries have been recorded at the northern end where a nature reserve continues down onto the beach. The locations of the following two photos taken on the foreshore at South Mission Beach, approximately 250 and 400 metres from the proposed boundary of the trial off leash area, are shown on Map 3. It is unusual but a cassowary has been seen on the foreshore right at the northern boundary of the proposed off leash area.



Photo Ron Darlington



Photo Jeff Larson

The instinctive reaction of many dogs to spotting a cassowary, shorebirds or other wildlife is to take immediate chase.

The CCRC assures us there will be enforcement of the off leash rules. How will dogs be kept within the invisible boundaries of the off leash area, and kept under effective control when;

- the council is already under resourced to enforce current laws requiring dogs to be on leash at all times in public places, and;
- Council employees do not work on weekends?

There are constant complaints about non compliance of existing local dog laws and visitors comment negatively about the high number of dogs on beaches ruining the 'natural' amenity of Mission Beach.

Impacts on the high environmental values, particularly wildlife, should be of priority consideration when making any decisions about land use or activities at Mission Beach. There is currently a glaring omission of dog free zones both on the beach and other public areas of the villages.

It should not be assumed, as does the public consultation survey, there is an appropriate place anywhere at Mission Beach for a dog off leash area - on or off the beach. A dog off leash area trial should only be considered, if at all, well away from high biodiversity areas. IF it is decided there must be an off leash area then it MUST be fenced, something that is not possible on the beach.

Concerning public amenity, it should also not be assumed everyone wants to share the beach with dogs, on or off a leash. Most councils provide dog off leash areas in parklands where they can be properly contained within a fenced area. Where there is a designated beach area for dogs it is normally located at the end of a beach where the activity does not impede or inhibit free and safe public access.

If there MUST be a dog off leash trial on a beach, Mission Beach Cassowaries proposes the end of South Mission Beach between Jackey Jackey Street and the boat ramp where it would have the least chance of negatively impacting on native wildlife including turtles and public amenity. The stretch of beach, approximately 260m (shown in red Map 3 above), would provide a relatively contained area that can be easily identified with signage and has the best chance of being monitored for 'success' (or otherwise) of the trial and compliance issues.

Most importantly, the prospect of an off leash dog area has highlighted the critical need for the establishment of dog free areas. Priority would be to protect the natural beach and foreshore areas which currently allow for natural processes and include the rehabilitation areas identified in the Foreshore Management Plan.



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