

Understanding and Caring about our Place

Wild weather associated with two cyclone systems on the 27th January saw several boats at Clump Point breaking their moorings and being damaged on the rocks in Boat Bay.

Questions are being asked why the boats were left unattended during an extreme weather warning and in an exposed mooring situation.

When a cyclone watch was declared and the north was being advised to make abatement plans Dunk Island called for an emergency evacuation. The tourists were collected by Calypso and taken to the Clump Point Boat Ramp where they were successfully disembarked. There was no attempt to use the Clump Point Jetty which the tide levels and calmness at the time would have allowed.

Although the Clump Point Jetty is exposed to rough weather that at times may make passenger loading and unloading less comfortable, most tourist operators will not venture out in weather more than 20 knots when the tourist experience can be less than enjoyable anyway and is more likely to be counted by how many paper bags are used.

As experienced boat owners at Mission Beach know, Boat Bay is not a safe haven in the summer months with the prevailing northerly or nor/easterly winds. In the past boat owners used the 'wet season', (off season) when the tourist numbers are very low, to do maintenance work on their boats.

Understanding of the monsoonal weather patterns that affect our environment needs to be seriously considered when decisions are being made for any development at Mission Beach and especially marine facilities.

The recent incident of boats slipping their moorings has once again had calls for a safe boating facility and claims that the existing jetty is unsafe.

The jetty had been used successfully for many years and the first time it was 'condemned' was when a Boat Bay marina was being proposed. Many people still believe the jetty is a safe facility.

Tourism boating operators often choose not to run because of lack of numbers even at the height of the season. Having a boat out of action during the cyclone season would not necessarily pose much of an income loss which questions the suggestion made at the last MBCA meeting that tourism is suffering at Mission Beach as a result of inadequate boating facilities.

There is no doubt that there needs to be suitable boating facilities at Mission Beach to accommodate tourist and local needs especially with the anticipated population increase associated with the current approved development.

Perhaps some of the existing boat ramps around Mission Beach i.e. South Mission, North Mission and Bin-gil Bay need to be upgraded to accommodate the smaller boats to take the pressure off the Clump Point boat ramp.

Mission Beach is identified as a village activity centre and recommended for development constraint in the FNQ 2031 Plan. It is unlikely to ever be the first port of call for reef trips as tourists are well catered for at Cairns and Port Douglas so a large marine facility is not warranted.

Again we must start looking at quality not quantity to offer a unique experience. Mission Beach has a lot to offer over other wet tropic destinations with its low density, uncrowded village atmosphere, its natural areas and the best place to see a cassowary in the wild.

Tourism operators should not be expecting, and pushing, to be a 12 month tourist destination. Businesses, unless they can provide a wet season activity or attraction should be looking at ways to promote Mission Beach as a unique destination

within the natural weather friendly times of the year and focus on the natural values which set Mission Beach apart from other coastal towns.

That would allow our area to develop in a sustainable manner with first consideration and protection given to the spectacular environment Mission Beach is renowned for.

C4 identified the opportunity for Mission Beach to become a premier ecotourism destination and has campaigned as a policy that this is the only sustainable way forward for the health of the community, environment and economy but as each economic boom and change of government(s) overrides achievements in this area the natural values continue to be eroded.

It is happening again now. It is disappointing to see Mission Beach Business and Tourism, who receive > \$80,000 subsidy from the CCRC, focusing on adventure tourism as their main 2010 marketing strategy.

The MBBT promotional material relies heavily on the natural values of Mission Beach and yet ecotourism rates a minor mention in favour of the come one come all approach. The cassowary, always associated with Mission Beach also only rates a couple of mentions.



Boat Bay is not a natural marina, It is a tidal bay, the mangroves being the breeding ground and nursery for many fish and crustacean species. The waters of the bay supports a number of endangered, vulnerable and migratory species including dugongs, two species of turtle and Irrawaddy dolphins. The bay is lined with some of the best developed rainforest on a littoral zone in Australia. The unique vine forest is the only example of this type on basalt soils in the Wet Tropics coast area.

The most recognisable aerial photographs of Mission Beach are taken looking south along the coastline with Clump Point in the foreground. It retains the look of a natural area which is recognised in the coastal management plan as having high visual amenity on a World Heritage area scenic tourist route.

It seems that there are some who do not respect the value and pristine nature of the bay. There have been several reports of fuel spills in the bay and at least one report of a turtle surfacing in a distressed manner.

It was also reported from a community member who dives around the edge of the drop off that when they surface there is a very strong smell of fuel.

The photos were sent to C4 and show the unsafe (illegal?) method of fuel being transferred from a tank on the back of a truck into the plastic tank on the dinghy by a long fuel hose. They show fuel running off the pontoon into the waters of Boat Bay.

It is sad to note that there seems to be a general lack of understanding or respect for the natural values of our special place by some who now call Mission Beach home.

Liz Gallie