

# Garners Beach is special!



## The last northern wilderness area at Mission Beach is under threat

A subdivision and development of eleven houses is proposed at the end of a sandy track at Garners Beach.

The Proposed Development in relation to the size and position of the lot, being on a largely undeveloped, rocky knoll located on the Pacific Coast at the far end of Garners Beach, is most likely to have a significant impact on three matters of National Environmental Significance (NES).

### 1. Impact on Endangered Species: Southern Cassowary

The Commonwealth's recovery plan for the southern cassowary identifies Mission Beach as an area which is seriously threatened by development activities.

The proposed development on Lot 441 has the potential to introduce at least four known threats to the southern cassowary, listed as an endangered species (as listed in the recovery plan for the southern cassowary)

- habitat fragmentation: much of its remaining habitat is fragmented, isolating groups and disrupting movement
- habitat degradation: through invasion of weeds
- roads and traffic: cassowaries are killed by vehicles on roads and traffic may intimidate cassowaries preventing them from crossing a road to access resources
- hand feeding: brings cassowaries closer to vehicle traffic and the risk of aggressive interactions with humans

### 2. Critically endangered littoral rainforest and coastal vine thickets

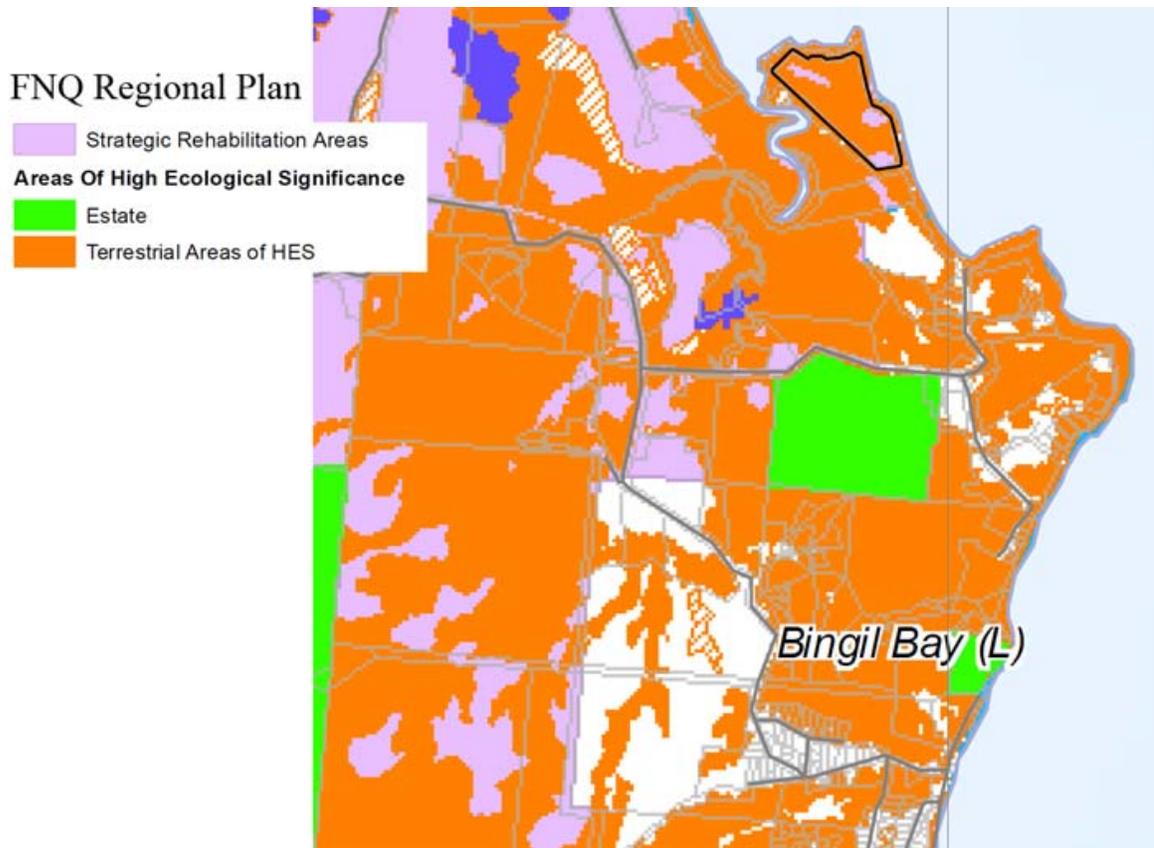
The required upgrade of the bush track along the Garners Beach esplanade would require destruction of littoral vegetation. At least two of the walking tracks marked in the proposal lead residents through the littoral rainforest for beach access which will result in degradation of the littoral vegetation

### 3. Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

The soil on the lot is described as unstable to very unstable. The impervious rock and sandy soil would make water harvested and disposed of on site very difficult to control and has the potential to impact on the existing vegetation on site, the stability of the natural landscape and the waters of the Green zone directly adjacent to the lot.

### Lot 441 is mapped as

- a High Ecological Area with the cleared areas mapped as rehabilitation areas in the FNQ 2031 Regional Plan



- remnant essential habitat under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999 (Qld)*
- critical habitat adjacent to vulnerable wetlands, as shown on the Johnstone Shire Council Local Planning Scheme, Map 7C Natural Areas Plan which also shows wildlife crossing areas.
- being within a priority area for retention of wildlife corridors identified in the 2003 Wet Tropical Coast Regional Coastal Management Plan.

The massive house and associated infrastructure recently built on lot 4 of the site has won state and national awards for its 'eco-friendly' design, giving the impression that the Proposed Development is environmentally sensitive and will result in the rehabilitation of a degraded area that "suffered intensive quarrying and devastation from past cyclones".

However this house makes no contribution to the sensitive environment it is placed within.

An example of misleading information publicised about this development as being of benefit to the environment is shown in the August 2009 Building Designer magazine.



**Garner's Beach House** stands at the top of the market as a stunning eco friendly home, both luxurious and practical in design.

With a low environmental impact, entertainment is a big feature of the home incorporating massive open spaces both internally and externally, also enhancing the indoor/outdoor connectivity.

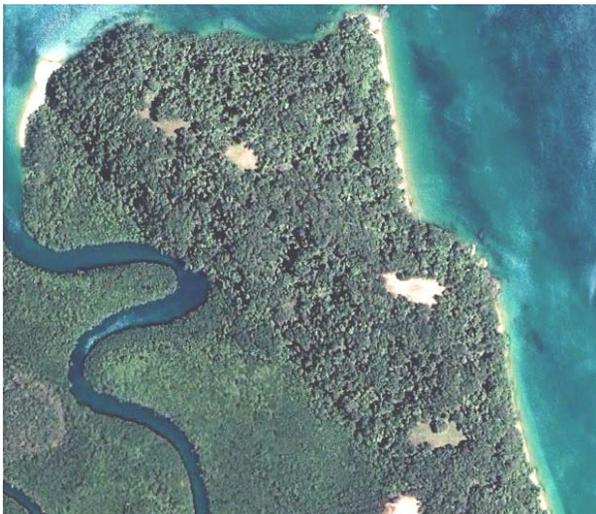
A neutral colour palette and warm timber features create a light, relaxed home, complementing the sensational surrounding landscape.

The site had suffered intensive quarrying and devastation from past cyclones. The challenge was to utilise only the quarried section, leaving the rainforest undisturbed. Area not required for the house has undergone intense rehabilitation.

This is a large house which puts more back into nature than it takes out. Who can argue with a design that uses no electricity created using coal of any kind, uses no reticulated water and treats its own waste in an environmentally friendly manner.

It certainly dispels a lot of myths about what constitutes sustainable housing.

The Building Designer No.156 August 2009



It needs to be acknowledged that there were never any permits granted for clearing on Lot 441. The degradation of the lot was challenged by the community at the time.

The current status of clearing should not be considered a given against the important value of the site - shown in the 2031 plan as a rehabilitation area. If such planning schemes are written then surely they need to be referred to in the decision making process.

Lot 441 on NR4953 was preemptively cleared in the early 1990s to create level building pads for a development that was abandoned after a long court battle with local conservation organisation C4. The site of the Proposed Development was never utilised as a quarry. Lot 441 has been vacant since then until it was purchased by the present owners in August 2003.

The photo below (top) was taken after Lot 441 was 'cleaned up' after Cyclone Larry in 2006. Photo below (bottom) was taken late 2008, two and a half years later as the first building/s were being constructed. It shows the massive size of the footprint of the building/s and the dynamic rainforest recovery.



Locals can testify that cassowaries have been seen for many years on the secluded beaches on the northern part of the lot (see photo below). The steep cliffs on either side of the cleared proposed house sites and the rocky points separating the main beach from the small beaches to the north mean the only access a cassowary would have is via the corridor on the gentle slope where proposed lots 1 and 2 and the access driveway are situated. Cassowary footprints are frequently found on the sandy cleared area to the southwest.

Sightings on the beach by locals



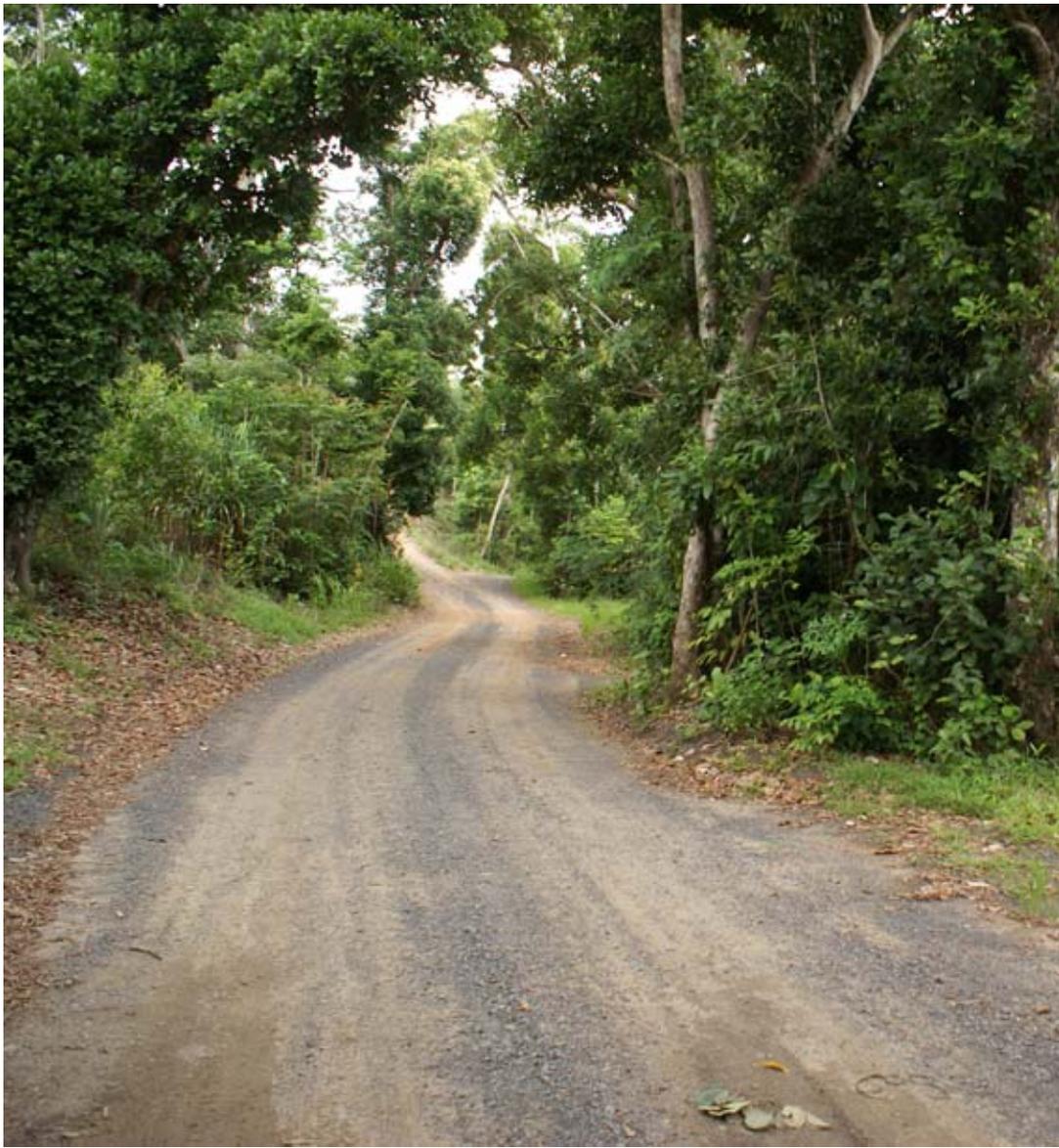
This >40 yo female cassowary (known as Bella) was observed at the entrance of the development site on 19th Feb 09 and seen on the southern side of Bingil Bay Road on 21st Feb 2009.

The Proposed Development is at the end of a gravel road which narrows down to a small single lane bush track along the beach leading to the development site. The wilderness aspect allows continued cassowary access to the beaches where they are often seen. The picture below was taken by a Garners Beach resident in August 2011.



An upgrade of the road along the Esplanade, as proposed and required as a condition of Council approval, would require destruction of critically endangered littoral rainforest to cater for between 22 and 33 extra residents with an additional 11 to 22 cars. Any upgrade would permanently alter the wilderness aspect of the area and fragment habitat in one of the last places left at Mission Beach where cassowaries have access to the beach.

Development of Lot 441, as proposed, will reduce or eliminate one of the last few remaining cassowary access corridors to the beach and will also forever change the amenity of the area in relation to community identity. In its current condition, the Proposed Development site and its environs at the far northern end of Garners Beach, 'feel' like the 'real' Mission Beach, where the rainforest grows down to the sea and where the cassowary is safe in the wild.



The critically endangered littoral rainforest at Garners Beach is well developed with little invasion of exotics including coconuts which are becoming a monoculture replacing natural vegetation on the foreshore in other developed areas of Mission Beach.

There have been five known cassowary deaths on roads in the Mission Beach area since February this year. There are frequent reports of near misses. Recently the local community placed signs along the road near Garners Beach.



Garners Beach has no shops, public facilities or public transport. All traffic would need to travel from the far end of Garners Beach through the relatively remote roads for any activity conducted away from this site such as work, to access general supplies and social engagements.

It is stated in the article about the house presently on site that “entertainment is a big feature” of the “massive” home. This would suggest a larger than normal number of vehicle movements on these quiet roads leading to the Proposed Development.

The proponents claim the lot is not good cassowary habitat, has no water and is too steep so the birds do not utilise the area. Cassowary food trees are identifiable from the boundary of the lot. The following photos show the diversity of vegetation.



The majority of the 70% of the lot set aside for covenanting is too steep for cassowaries with the only access available dominated by the configuration of the lots, new roads, and general human presence rendering the access corridor on the site mostly inaccessible to cassowaries



Development at Mission Beach is rapidly corralling the birds into more and more confined areas incrementally denying them free movement in the landscape not only for foraging but also sufficient space to avoid territorial conflict and for juvenile dispersal.

The Proposed Development is continually being promoted as being environmentally friendly but pays no reference to the impact it will have on the actual environment.

Despite being damaged by cyclones, left alone, lot 441 would have recovered to the state shown below left. The amount of interference on the lot already and the sheer size, style, and number of houses incorporating swimming pools storage sheds and other facilities is not consistent with low density development, and would never allow the lot to return to the level of vegetation cover shown in photo below left.

There has been a greatly reduced area marked as remnant vegetation from earlier EPA mapping to now shown below right.



Google image 2005

Surveyed remnant vegetation

The impact of the proposed high density development on Lot 441, **by the increase of vehicles alone**, cannot be overcome. 10 more houses will forever alter the low key character of Garners Beach, disturb the critically endangered littoral rainforest community on the site, and place the large number of cassowaries known in the locality under unacceptable increased risk.

A recent report found that there is enough land for sale at Mission Beach to cater for the next 100 years. The precautionary principle must be applied to reject the subdivision and development of 10 additional residences and associated infrastructure on Lot 441 at Garners Beach.

Should the Proposed Development be approved it will mean the entire coastline in the Mission Beach area has been compromised by development that has unacceptable impacts on the endangered cassowary. To date there have been no successful solutions to avoid, mitigate or offset the human-associated threats from increased development. Those threats continue to proliferate. Garners Beach is the last 'corner' that can be kept as a low-density, near wilderness area with gravel roads a natural traffic calmer.

Incremental fragmentation of essential habitat for development poses the ultimate threat to a species that relies on a large range for its survival.

The Proposed Development is simply too big for this sensitive location and threatens to result in significant adverse impacts upon Matters of National Environmental Significance.

**With the Minister's recent announcement that Mission Beach is a potential listing as an ecosystem of National Environmental Importance**, there are compelling reasons why the Proposed Development should either be denied or reduced in number in line with the low density of development in the rest of Garners Beach.

Please write to the Minister asking him to deny this inappropriate development at Garners Beach [Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au)



[www.missionbeachcassowaries.com](http://www.missionbeachcassowaries.com)

