



31 August 2018

Cassowary Coast Regional Council

via email To enquiries@CCRC.qld.gov.au

Re: Mission Beach Strategic Masterplan

To the Project Team

The community has long called for a Mission Beach Master Plan to address the development/conservation conflicts that increasingly threaten the natural and cultural values and village character of Mission Beach. It is with disappointment that to date the local council has not seen the value in a Master Plan for the greater Mission Beach Area i.e. from Muff Creek to north, Hull River to the south and to the Bruce highway, consistent with the numerous studies and reports, including the Mission Beach Habitat Network Action Plan, that have been produced that outline the exceptional natural values of the Mission Beach area. If we are to retain the ecological, aesthetic and lifestyle values it is imperative that Master Planning of any part of Mission Beach be approached holistically. Each location must be seen in context, not in isolation, of the immediate and broader Mission Beach land and sea (World Heritage) environments.

The incremental loss, through a piecemeal approach to development, with little or no regard to the intrinsic values and amenity within the whole landscape is resulting in a 'A death by a thousand cuts' to Mission Beach despite being recognised as the 'Jewell in the Crown' of the Cassowary Coast, located between two World Heritage areas and being home to an important population of cassowaries.

"Mission Beach occupies a narrow strip of land between the Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage areas and contains significant areas of ecological significance including essential habitat of the endangered southern cassowary" FNQ Regional Plan

"While Wet Tropics Vegetation Management Codes regulate clearing, housing development still threatens local (cassowary) populations as supporting habitat is cleared. In Mission Beach incremental losses to severely fragmented habitat may eventually destroy the viability of the local population. Even low density housing brings more traffic and dogs. As small incremental habitat loss is a major threat, it warrants more attention in the planning process". Cassowary Recovery Plan.

World Heritage environments

Both the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics are recognised as containing **"superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance"** (World Heritage criteria (vii). Two World Heritage areas actually meet north of Narragon Beach but the World heritage values including the cassowary and its important role as a keystone species, occur outside the WH boundaries. The exceptional beauty Mission Beach described and enjoyed by locals and visitors does not refer to the built area. It is not governed by trends or fashion. As more people visit and settle at Mission Beach there will be

more pressure to provide facilities that replace or encroach on the natural environment. As the bar is lowered with each incremental loss of the natural environment, so is the community understanding of what used to be and of their expectation. With the current approach to development, Mission Beach is heading quickly toward becoming 'just another place'.



The underlying consideration of any planning for Mission Beach needs to be recognition and protection of the World Heritage values of our land and sea environments irrespective of the WH boundaries. Priority considerations when making development decisions including Master Plans should be;

- **What impact will the action have on the natural environment, the low key village character and the endangered cassowary? and**
- **Including actions to reinforce community identity by; rehabilitating and protecting the natural environment, maintaining the relaxed village character, securing robust cassowary habitat corridors and providing a safe cassowary road crossing environment.**



Identifying and maintaining character

We appreciate the CCRC acknowledgment that the Mission Beach village is 'tired looking' and welcome the idea of a Master Plan. However, MBC would like to impress on the Master Plan Project Team the

importance of a wholistic approach and that the small area being focused on will have a major influence on the whole tone and direction of our future in terms of; the integrity of the natural environment, overall character, community identity and how Mission Beach, as a tourism destination, will be used and perceived by both locals and visitors. It needs to be noted that a natural area in pristine condition would never be described as 'tired looking'. It may be altered through natural processes and weather events but it is dynamic and without intervention will continue to change and recover to a pristine natural state of beauty. If the built environment is planned to be sympathetic to, and not dominate a well maintained natural environment, the character of Mission Beach will never be seen as tired. Less concrete is more for Mission Beach.

A set of built environment policies and guidelines needs to be developed and incorporated in the Planning Scheme (similar to the focus on Art Deco for Tully and Innisfail) to protect and reinforce the village character. 'Low key' 'low rise' and 'Slow Down' are key phrases for the Mission Beach identity consistent with the FNQ 2031 Regional Plan ie " **Densities are to be kept low and building heights limited...**"

Master Planning already a piecemeal approach

Each time a Mission Beach is broken up into master planned sections, the opportunity to maintain the natural and cultural values and character of is diminished. Current foreshore management practices are guided by the Foreshore Management Plan, a master plan that was developed for the foreshore only, which segregated areas into categories of high, medium or no maintenance and beach use. The legacy of this approach is over manicuring of some areas and no management of others including weeding and rehabilitation. There is no acknowledgement in the Foreshore Management Plan for the protection of shore bird or turtle activity.

The more 'natural' the vegetation is left the less maintenance is required except for safety issues and weed management. What we are seeing is the over landscaping approach of some of our parklands resulting in a clear delineation between wilderness and 'manicured' areas. A good example of this is the Ulysses Park. One by one live trees have been removed and most of the established red beach and almond trees have had all the lower branches lopped to about 15 feet high. The result is a now a clear view from Porters Promenade through to the beach, reducing shade within the park and reduced shelter from south easterly winds during the winter months. The removal and lopping of the shade trees has been incremental, driven by overzealous management of a high use area and has significantly altered the 'feel' of the park. Many of the trees look unbalanced with no resemblance of their natural shape. The approach has been to alter the vegetation to accommodate use when the opposite approach of *'use being determined by maintaining the natural processes'* is the only way we can achieve an ecologically sustainable future for our economy, community and environment.





Dog access and control

There is continued and increasing conflict of dog access to all beaches with no enforcement for on leash compliance. Community spaces such as the markets and town centre are subject to dogs urinating, defecating and fighting. There is no beach for visitors or locals to go without being exposed to dogs, their unruly behaviour or the health risks of their excrement. The fact there are no 'No Dog' zones at Mission Beach is puzzling given the status of being a high biodiversity area and the number of shore bird species that were historically present along the dunes and shore. There are no areas along the foreshore where nesting birds and turtles are not at risk of predation.

Considering the length of beach at Mission Beach, the exceptionally high natural environment and the presence of native wildlife. Even if dogs are on leashes they can disturb nesting shorebirds or turtle nests. Compliance is difficult and costly to enforce. There is an urgent need for regulated dog access areas clearly designating, no dog, on leash and off leash areas. The decision should not be left to popular vote but based on good science. Many visitors who are attracted to Mission Beach to enjoy the natural environment and are bewildered that dogs are allowed such a free reign on every beach. There is almost no built up area in Australia that does not have clearly marked and strictly enforced dog laws. It may be there is no place on any beach suitable for dogs to be off leash but instead a vacant block of land allocated for off leash exercising. The peaceful and healthy amenity of our beaches should not be determined by the forceful wants of dog owners. Many visitors including those attracted for birdwatching, a highly lucrative tourism market, and are appalled at the number of dogs allowed on all our beautiful beaches.

Popularity vs science

Regardless of their 'popularity', coconut palms are listed as transformer weeds and are replacing the rainforest along our foreshores. We are not a Pacific Island destination despite the continued promotion by some businesses of Mission Beach as a palm fringed beach.



One of our major points of differences as a tourism destination is the rainforest growing down to the sea. Large areas of the naturally growing vegetation along the different beach areas have been lost to unlawful clearing, development encroachment and coconut invasion. Coconut palms have virtually and completely replaced large sections of the critically endangered littoral rainforest that used to dominate the Mission Beach foreshore. Not only are coconuts an increasing cost burden on ratepayers, they do not provide the shade of natural vegetation, do not perform the critical role of protecting the dune against erosion and are destroying the unique biodiversity of our shoreline between Garners Beach and Tam O'Shanter Point.

The lack of enforcement of local and state vegetation clearing laws has already had a significant affect on our foreshore vegetation and wildlife. There are many people within our community who have understanding and science based information of the high ecological values of our area. Council has the opportunity to lead the direction of the future by gaining expert advice to support sound decision making for good governance of the World Heritage values of Mission Beach. Such leadership would be based on stronger protection through recognition and education of our special natural environment.

The high biodiversity values of Mission Beach is demonstrated by the different metamorphic types and land forms supporting an outstanding diversity of ecosystems and exceptionally high diversity of species. The small area being covered in this Master Plan should focus on rehabilitation of the naturally occurring vegetation to the specific location as it should also be for any upgrading of any area within the whole of Mission Beach.

Recognising and protecting biodiversity

Different locations can be identified by signature landforms and vegetation, i e;

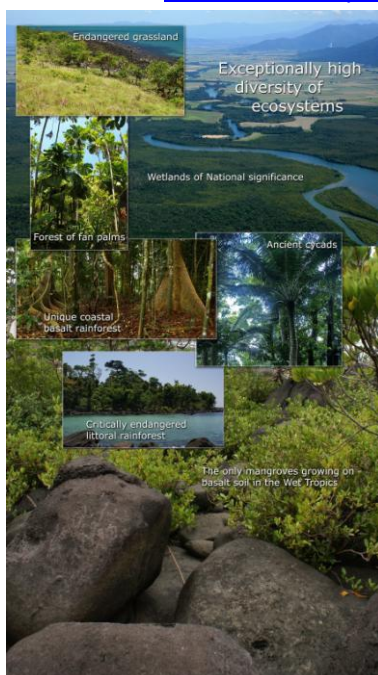
Garners Beach/ Brooks Beach/ Bingil Bay; Metamorphic dominated by beach *Callophyllum* and the Arenga Palm.

Clump Point/Mission Beach;, Complex mesohphyll Rainforest with giant Milky Pines and the Pink Flowering Guest Tree.

Wongaling Beach; Sandy, wetlands, *Melaleuca*,

South Mission Beach; Granite, *Melaleuca*.

You can read [the Biodiversity significance of Mission Beach here.](#)



Establishing identity through consistent community message and suitable Branding - 'Don't reinvent the wheel'

When presenting Mission Beach, these distinct natural values and our rich natural and cultural heritage can be reinforced through interpretation within the low key village environment. These points of difference are what underpins the [Mission Beach - naturally](#) branding and vision for which the CCRC has supported with funding and Mission Beach Tourism has incorporated into their Strategic Plan. Please take the time to [view this online version of the promotional booklet](#).

The community message has been consistent and documented over decades of community consultation and involvement and documented in the countless surveys, reports and planning for Mission Beach, including the majority of feedback so far for this master plan. (Please refer to the **vision statements** for Mission Beach in the past **Cardwell and Johnstone Shire Planning Schemes**, the now superseded **Coastal Management Plans** which have detailed information about the natural and cultural values of Mission Beach. (The values have not changed only the level of protection within legislation strategies and plans). The countless reports and documents written about Mission Beach should be referenced before making decisions based on community feedback much of which could be a simple wish list without any understanding of the significance of our natural environment.

Contrary to comments made recently by one of our councillors, our planning scheme reflects community feedback and should not be referred to a 'moveable feast'.

Is the Master Planning team aware that In the 1990's, the Johnstone Shire Council was the recipient of an international award (ICLEA) for a Regional Planning Scheme which incorporated measures to guarantee the survival of the endangered cassowary? The award was the result of exhaustive community engagement with scientists, landholders and government agencies. Two councillors travelled to Thailand to accept the award that used to be proudly displayed within the Council Chambers.

Similarly [The Mission Beach Habitat Network Action plan](#) (MBHAP) was developed with a coordinated approach by community, industry and government representatives to protect an ecologically viable network of habitat aimed to protect community identified values related to lifestyle, culture and the natural environment. Community Vision for the future of Mission Beach, developed through the collaborative efforts of all parties, lay at the heart of the Plan.

Both the FNQ Regional Plan and The MBHAP were incorporated into the Cassowary Coast Regional Council Planning instruments and provide important reference material and partnership actions relevant to this Master Planning of a small part of Mission Beach.

The following is from the [FNQ Regional Plan](#) identifying Mission Beach as a village activity centre with a particular focus on protection of the endangered cassowary. These important documents were produced with lengthy community consultation and are relevant to the Mission Beach Master Plan.

"Mission Beach consists of North Mission, Wongaling and South Mission Beaches. ...occupies a narrow strip of land between the Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage areas and contains significant areas of ecological significance including essential habitat of the endangered southern cassowary. The survival of this ecologically important species is critically threatened by continuing habitat loss and car strikes. The urban footprint at Mission Beach will be constrained to minimise future impacts on ecological values, coastal hazard risks and loss of the village character. Densities are to be kept low and building heights limited to avoid increasing traffic generation and urban impacts.

Future development should occur around village nodes and avoid linear form, maintain and restore cassowary habitat, and ensure good corridor connectivity.

Much higher levels of self-containment will need to be achieved in Mission Beach to avoid travel to Tully and Innisfail.

Additional local employment generators will need to be developed based on protection and enjoyment of the natural environment.

Car travel will need to be managed and traffic impacts on cassowaries mitigated".

'Low key development' 'uncommercialised' and 'wildness' are some of the key words in the feedback received from visitors to Mission Beach, particularly international visitors. The current 'unmanicured' nature of the Ulysses walk segues gently from the natural areas to parkland to the built environments. The granite pathways accentuate the natural character and allow for natural processes to occur. A major contributing factor of the village atmosphere is the low rise buildings.

Examples of inappropriate development contrary to public input

We have seen particularly beautiful natural areas replaced with signature style architecture or standard engineering solutions that failed to reflect community input, gave no consideration to natural processes or were not 'sensitive' to the aesthetic or environments they have been placed.

The Bingil Bay Picnic Area is an example that not only robbed the environment of natural processes but now requires costly maintenance. The development proceeded despite community despair and two professionals offering , free of charge, to 'soften' the design to be more sympathetic to the location. [Please see the background of the development here.](#)



Another example of the community wishes being ignored was with the establishment of the **Ulysses walkway** at a sensitive waterway location, part of a cassowary corridor (recognised nationally as environmentally significant) that joins two rare vegetation types right onto the beach.



The community saw an opportunity to restore the small rainforest corridor in the heart of Mission Beach while directing visitors to the information and environment centres past a seldom seen public art installation. Despite consensus from many community groups including Mission Beach Tourism and considerable input and lobbying to council with a better solution, the bridge was established and now directs visitors to a particularly degraded area at the back end of a nursery work area. While building the walkway, council workers made a unilateral decision to establish an extra walkway through to the beach at a location that had long been identified by both council and C4 as inappropriate. Please take the time to [view this short video and read the background of the decision here.](#)

Placement of utilities

An ad hoc approach has also been applied in many of the placement of amenities and utilities. Examples of this are the location of the RV dump in the middle of town between the village and the visitor centre and directly next to the children's playground. It could not be more central or in full view.



The recent placement of the BBQ in Ulysses Park was in the middle of an unshaded area away from and on a different angle to the seating nearby. It also inhibits practical use of the park for other activities and events. Seating has been placed at ad hoc locations along the beach (Narragon an example) without providing formal pathways to the beach encouraging trampling of dune vegetation.

Although the scope of the project is between Seaview Street and Boyett Road, particular importance needs to be given to key locations in the whole of the visual catchment of the Master Planned area, from the first glimpse of the sea at the approach to town on Seaview St to the hillside backdrop and access to the beach. A wholistic approach to the plan is integral to maintaining the low key character of Mission Beach.

The Main Road cuts through the middle of the village inhibiting the developing of a village centre and character. Vehicles, particularly buses dominate the village and detract from the village green.



The following are some points for consideration specific to the area being Master Planned between Seaview Street and Boyett Road.

- Provide off street parking to minimise vehicles in the village centre particularly large buses.
- No encroachment into high environmental areas without full consultation with indigenous owners and community.
- Carefully selected cyclone resilient native trees planted in new nature strips along Porter Promenade as part of the plan. (Palm Cove could be used as an example of redesigning parking in the village)
- Built environment to be sympathetic to, and not dominate, the natural environment. Avoid hard edges or jarring bright colours
- Create shade with native trees (selective cyclone resilient species) as opposed to shade cloth.



- Encourage shop owners to establish native plant gardens with advice from CCRC, C4 or Terrain
- Maintain the 'natural look' with granite pathways, avoid over formalising with standard engineering solutions or 'concretisation' wherever possible.
- Maintain views of the ocean through rainforest vistas.
- Avoid locating facilities or any structures including public art that will detract from the 'natural' amenity



- Avoid concrete landscaping especially where proximity to trees inhibits natural processes.



- Maintain the Rainforest to Reef experience with small sandy pathways through the rainforest using beach ladders (if necessary) in preference to steps onto the beach.





- Particular focus on rehabilitation and interpretation of foreshore areas especially where access is provided from the village.
- Rehabilitate the waterway at the visitor centre and highlight its importance as a cassowary corridor (as above).



- The hillside backdrop- to be taken into account in the broader visual context and master planned accordingly.
- Building heights not to exceed two storeys as per the Planning Scheme.



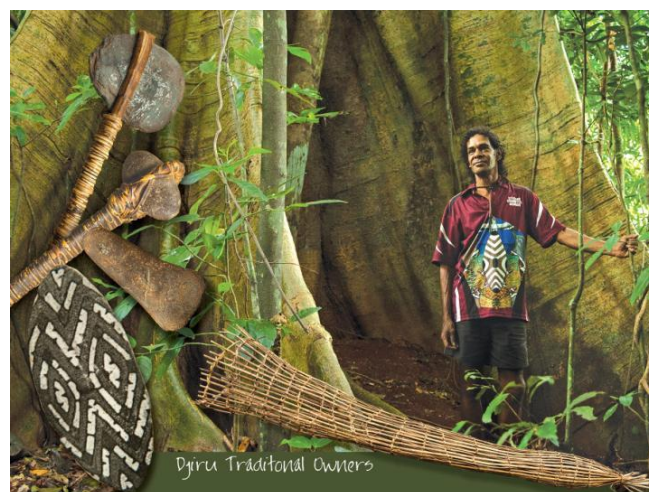
- Bundle electricity wires to allow trees to be grown both sides of Porter Promenade to form a canopy at the approaches to the village.
- Caravan Park to be retained in Public control.
- Council take control of management of the road from Seaview St to the Jetty to allow for calming to enhance village centre and provide safe pedestrian access
- Remove parking area and extend the village green toward the beach.
- Relocate toilet block to another central location away from the Village Green
- Native Vegetation screening for service or utility zones.
- If public art is incorporated into the Plan it should merge with and compliment, not dominate the natural environment, and reflect the natural and cultural values.
- Seating placed under shade and built using natural or natural look recycled or sustainable materials. Opportunity for outdoor furniture to be designed and made by local artists and craftspeople.



- Establish no dog zones at identified wildlife corridors, clearly sign areas where dogs can be on leash and establish an off leash area (not necessarily on the beach).
- No encroachment into natural vegetation without full consultation with indigenous owners and community.
- Carefully selected cyclone resilient native trees planted in new nature strips along Porter Promenade as part of the plan. (Palm Cove could be used as an example of redesigning parking in the village).
- Selection of consultant off vital importance.

MBC recommends the following to be given priority consideration and define all planning for the future of Mission Beach.

- **Celebrate our local indigenous culture and local history**



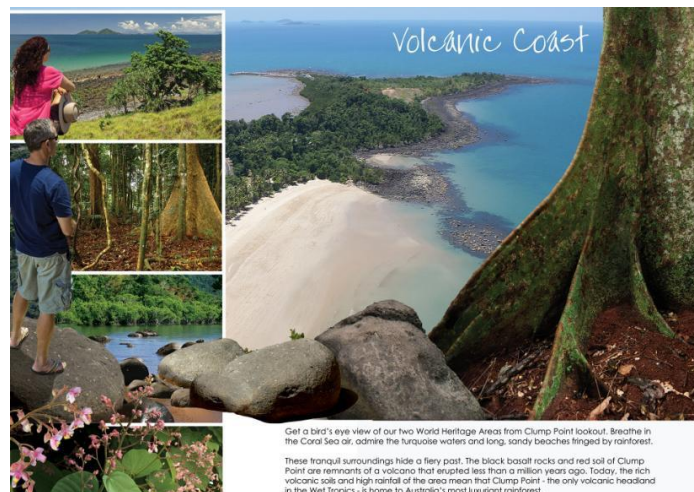
- Reinforce Mission Beach's position as a premier ecologically sustainable tourism destination where two world heritage areas meet and where you have the best chance to see a cassowary.



- Help foster community pride and reinforce sense of place, highlighting our points of difference by telling the stories of our world heritage areas and our conservation and tourism pioneers. i e J Banfield, John Busst and Ninney Rise



- Highlight our unique volcanic headland including the cassowary corridor right at the visitor centre connecting two rare rainforest types from the Wet Tropics to the Great Barrier Reef. (Matters of National Environmental Significance.)



- Tell the story about the importance of the cassowary to our community, indigenous culture, environment and economy.



- Reinforce the message that Mission Beach is the 'Cassowary Capital' and a 'Slow Down Town'.



- Reinforce the identity of low key relaxed village atmosphere of villages set in rainforest separated by farmland.



Selection of consultant

Engagement of a consultant with experience and skill to approach the Master Plan with priority consideration of the World Heritage values is crucial. Any 'makeover' of Mission Beach should not be something suited to an urban or resort setting or based on a signature architect 'style'. Nor should it be simply a wish list focused on current landscaping trends or individual wants.

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment.

Yours Faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

President Mission Beach Cassowaries Inc

0414 402315

missionbeachcassowaries@gmail.com