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Cooloola Coast under siege

November 3, 2010 By [Editor](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

Sustainability most simply means ensuring continued access to adequate nourishment. This is a common and vital need. It is not an 'extreme greenie' notion, nor should it be a shallow marketing tag. In essence it is the difference between basic comfort and desperation. Ultimately it is the difference between life and death.

Its pursuit requires us to separate the green seeds of genuinely beneficial local development from the green-wash that masks proposals for resource depletion and asset stripping, especially by investors or corporations that have no long-term local community interest.

Events now underway on the Cooloola Coast offer a compelling case study of how we can be sincere about sustainability, or fail at it. **Greg Wood** reports



The Cooloola Coast is largely composed of World Heritage Values and Wetlands of International Significance

The Cooloola Coast is a special place. It is impressively unique in its own right, being largely composed of World Heritage Values and Wetlands of International Significance. It is also made special by the extent of development that has changed the surrounding coastal landscape. This has left it an island of ecological and open space integrity within a sea of mainland development and disturbance.

Many coastal species depend upon this large natural remnant for their genetic survival.

Many South East Queensland residents depend upon occasional escape to it for their

peace of mind. This residual value is a powerful argument for secure preservation of the area's natural and recreational qualities. However, as this remnant value is elevated by the rising tide of SEQ development, its potential value as real estate also escalates. The remnant beauty is a seductive sales image but an eventual victim of the sale.

Rhetoric about 'balanced outcomes' and community benefit is being laid on thick in support of some large local development proposals. Constructed by well-resourced professionals this narrative can sound plausible if taken at face value. The grim reality of landscape balance shown in figure 1 should dispel this rhetoric, as should our experience of an array of negative socio-economic impacts throughout SEQ due to over-development.

Concerned locals say that preserving the integrity of the place is not a cost but an investment, both in nature itself and in the broad community benefits that accrue from maintaining access to genuinely natural places. They say this investment will generate solid gold returns for the most people for the longest time, whilst only fool's gold glitters within massive development proposals now active in the area.

Rainbow Shores Stage 2

Inskip Peninsula stretches northward from the small village of Rainbow Beach to the southern tip of Fraser Island. Immediately to its west are the Internationally Significant Wetlands of The Great Sandy Straits. Along Inskip's eastern side is the only surf beach in mainland southern Qld., outside of a National Park, that is not flanked by urban development.

Inskip is rich in significant natural values. World Heritage Values, old-growth coastal forest, rare species and an absolute myriad of bird life are just the start of a long list.

Large amongst these features is the tranquil and spacious amenity of Inskip and surrounds. The quiet, compact village of Rainbow Beach complements this idyllic atmosphere and is itself enhanced by it.

Visitors and residents thoroughly enjoy simply being immersed within the locality's abundance of space,

tranquility and nature. The experience provides a highly pleasurable contrast to the disturbance, hustle and din that, increasingly, is everyday life across SEQ.

Looming over this landscape is Rainbow Shores Stage 2, an application for intense urban development across 200 hectares of State land on Inskip. The proposal extends along six kilometres of ocean frontage and would accommodate 6,500 people.

The application is possible due to a lease enacted in 1984 under the Bjelke-Petersen government. A large lease segment has already been approved and partly developed as Rainbow Shores Stage 1.

Unapproved portions will expire in 2014. Intense public objection, including over 800 formal objections, and a damning EPA assessment report lead to the State Government refusing the Stage 2 application in July of 2009.

The developer promptly appealed this refusal. Whilst not surprising, this action directly contradicted the developer's earlier request to the community to trust the formal process and accept its decision on the application. Hindsight suggests this confidence stemmed from the large contingent of ALP lobbyists that Rainbow Shores Pty. Ltd. had retained to help 'communicate' its proposal to decision-makers. With the lobbyists flushed out of the way by community research and media publicity, the applicant's confidence in the decision seems to have evaporated.

The matter is now before the court for final resolution. A number of community members have elected to co-respond to the appeal to help support the refusal against assault by the applicant's legal battalion. They are committed to securing a result that is sustainable, both locally and regionally

To do this they have engaged experts in Town Planning (Paul Summers) and Economics (Tor Hundloe) to assist the court's understanding of the issues. The essence of their case is that the proposal is not consistent with the town plan and that it would consume valuable public assets without returning real community or economic benefits.

"Much better results can be had by committing the area to uses other than intense urban development," says Reg Lawler of Citizens Helping Inskip Peninsula (CHIP).

"Bird watching is a multi-billion dollar global industry perfectly suited to local development. Yet this selfish and short-sighted proposal would directly ravage core habitat for the Black Breasted Button Quail and the Beach Stone Curlew, two rare species highly attractive to birdwatchers. The edge effects would seriously disturb many more species".

Mike West, Birds Queensland member and frequent Inskip visitor, says Inskip is a bird-watcher's paradise. "Inskip presents an area that is the best square kilometre of bird-watching in Australia," said Mr. West.

"Birds Queensland members would love to see the habitat quality and bird populations of Inskip protected. The public benefit and economic opportunity in doing this is huge".

Walking tourism is another multi-billion dollar growth industry that is not only complementary to local ecology and amenity, but which is substantially benefited by it.

It seems confounding then, that prominent local business advocates are ignoring these and other profitable niche tourism opportunities whilst stridently pushing the Shores 2 barrow. Reg Lawler explains that the local Business and Tourism Association operates under a clearly apparent conflict of interest.

"The long term President of the Association has publicly declared his employment by Rainbow Shores Pty. Ltd.," said Mr. Lawler.

"The recently past, previously long-term Secretary of the Association is the Managing Director of that company. The Association is quite obviously pushing local businesses to support the proposal rather than acting to properly inform them on the full range of options available to best address their business interests. Everyone but a few will lose if this skewed approach wins the day – business, employees, residents, visitors and the local environment will all suffer".

This pursuit of this long-term public interest takes a lot of volunteer effort and money. If you'd like to help in any way, particularly with a tax-deductible donation via the SCEC gift fund, please contact info@saveinskip.org.au or download a donation form from www.saveinskip.org.au

Fraser Straits Marina

Eight kilometres inland from Inskip, deep inside the confined pristine waters of Tin Can Inlet, lies the site of a 300+ berth marina proposal. Most of these berths are for large boats not presently common in the

narrow local waterways. If approved that will change.

The project's viability requires the developer to successfully entice hundreds of large boats from elsewhere into the new berths and thus into the local waterways. Save Our Shores–Tin Can Bay (SOS-TCB) president, Ian Donald, says the consequent impacts would be hugely negative to local sustainability at every level – environmental, social and economic.

“Estuary dependent populations of Indo-pacific Dolphin and Dugong will be devastated, as they already have been in Moreton Bay,” said Mr. Donald. “Migrating and local turtles face similar fate. Migrating birds, seagrass and tidal banks would all be badly affected. General water quality within the low-flush tidal environment will suffer”.

“Current community activities in the public waterways in and around the development site will be evicted and have nowhere else to go. This includes junior and disabled sailing, dragon boating and dolphin interaction. General boating safety will be severely reduced.”

“All of these factors completely undermine the local economy blossoming around small boats and eco-tourism,” said Mr. Donald. “As things are we can develop carefully to service a real need for relaxation and equitable access, and be locally profitable in the process. It will all be blown out of the water by this rich man's indulgence”.

Mr. Donald said that the marina offers no local benefits whatsoever, only losses.

Locals are now depending upon a Federal Government refusal to save this precious resource from being asset stripped. For a full outline of the proposal, its impacts, and how you can give urgently needed help, visit [SOS Tin Can Bay](#) or [Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group](#).

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