

# Beach tax grab

4th September 2008

THE Queensland Government has adopted, almost lock stock and barrel, the major recommendations of a secret Noosa-centric committee to ban, tax or restrict most recreational uses of the Cooloola National Park.

The recommendations were reported exclusively in The Gympie Times in May last year and were immediately denied even by one of their authors, former Noosa councillor and current Sunshine Coast councillor Vivien Griffin.

Her denial was supported by fellow Cooloola Coast conservationist, Greg Wood, who appeared to claim knowledge of the report, despite the facts that it was confidential and that his and Ms Griffin's remarks contradicted a copy of the report which had come into the paper's possession.

Yesterday, Sustainability Minister Andrew McNamara announced new rules which almost exactly reflect the recommendations which Cr Griffin and Mr Wood denied existed.

Presented as the result of "two years of asking the community how to protect the Cooloola Coast," the new rules resulted in immediate calls for the word "consultation" to be culled from the language because it "obviously has no meaning".

Mr McNamara announced a new \$37-a-month tax on beach driving, minor school holiday increases in camper numbers, increased camping fees and a ban on vehicle access to what now amounts to a private beach for elite Noosa conservationists at Double Island Point.

The Minister's announcement contradicts the assurances from his predecessor, then Environment Minister Lindy Nelson-Carr, that the government would make changes reflecting a range of views and would not "be influenced by any particular group".

A new proposed management plan for the Cooloola Coast recommends speed limits, caps on holiday camper numbers and protection for rare migratory birds.

The new rules, which the Minister says will be subject to further "consultation", appear to reflect almost exactly the wishes of the Noosa Parks Association, a body which gained great respect for its lobbying efforts to have the area protected from development under the Bjelke-Petersen government.

However, they also appear to reflect the personal preferences of some NPA members, with vehicles banned from the beach in front of their exclusive eco-resort, on leased land at the Double Island Point lighthouse.

The NPA was heavily represented on the body which recommended most of the new rules, the Teewah Beach-Cooloola Working Group, which was also dominated by representatives of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, a body noted for its anti-camper agenda, especially after the grave misuse of powers which resulted in the forced evacuation of campers from Inskip Point at Christmas-New Year on the pretext of a non-existent cyclone emergency.

The committee listed then NPA executive and former Noosa Mayor Noel Playford as its "community chair", with Michael Gloster officially representing the NPA, Cr Griffin (an NPA member) named as a "community" representative and NPA associate Paul Summers as secretary.

The committee also included nine State Government department representatives, a representative each from Cooloola and Noosa councils and one from the Teewah Residents Association.