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DON'T FENCE ME IN

At first I watched with amusement as the wall went up around the Peregrine Springs development. Here was a classic case of planning gone wrong, in fact the very opposite of planning had occurred.

You see normally, it is the case that planners try to separate incompatible land uses. In this situation we have a busy road and a new housing development. The busy road has been there for a decade, but the development is new. So good planning would dictate that as the road was already there, the new development needed to be separated from the road. But not in this case. Apparently, there is such desperation for housing land on the Sunshine Coast that we need to plonk new housing right next to a major road, one that will no doubt be widened to four lanes in the future. To protect that new housing from unacceptable acoustic impacts, a hideous wall is then constructed to provide a barrier to the sound.

I was amused at first because this barrier also meant that we travellers on the road were not horrified by the sight of the houses being erected in this sensitive heathland. My amusement continued as I also realised the folly of the situation, as the barrier helped prevent the occupants of the development accessing the hazards of the road. Locking them in so-to-speak.

My amusement was short-lived though, because it soon occurred to me that there were other dwellers being locked in as well. Like humans, most of the native mammals of this area cannot jump the fence, so it has the same barrier effect on them. No longer can they move around these heathland areas as they did in the past. They are now locked in or restricted to corridors that funnel them to points along the busy road. The gene pools of these mammals will be affected. While the road undoubtedly has an impact, it is a double whammy when these sorts of barriers are put in place.

Are we so desperate for housing land on the Sunshine Coast that we are forced to locate housing in such inappropriate locations? Have we the right to sacrifice the biodiversity of the area in the name of another sea of roofs? Are the circumstances so wretched that we have to replicate city-symbols in hitherto natural bushland areas?

In my view the answer to all these questions is no. The Sunshine Coast's visitor economy is substantially based on its points of difference with other areas of south-east Queensland. Making us more like those places merely means we have to compete in the same glitz and glamour circles, while at the same time diminishing our biodiversity.

So be amused as you drive along the northern part of the Sunshine Motorway, but as you look around at the setting of this development, I hope that your amusement will be tinged with sadness.

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[Back to top](#)

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