

SUBMISSION by the Stradbroke Island Management Organisation (SIMO) for the Draft Land Management Plan for Flinders Beach

9.4.2005

Thank you for the opportunity to make comments on this Draft document. We have made points on the individual sections of the document, and conclude with a summary of our Organisation's position on the future management of this area in relation to protecting the areas natural assets for visitors to enjoy recreationally and educationally.

Executive Summary

Research/studies and monitoring are essential tools for ensuring that the Flinders Beach Land Management Plan accurately reflects the true circumstances affecting the beach, and to enable decision makers to understand fully all issues before developing the necessary strategies for future responsible management of this area. Therefore this document must remain a draft until these (continuing) studies and monitoring are undertaken and the results discussed by the Reference Group and recommendations or changes made to the document to reflect these results.

This does not preclude the Council from proceeding with the immediate implementation of key management initiatives on the basis of doing the least harm, and to correct, monitor and lessen some of the worst environmental damage already evident.

It is curious that the Draft report makes no mention of the common objective which instigated the original public meeting in January 2003, that is, the impacts of the increasing numbers of 4WDs on the foreshore, and the problems they cause of loss of amenity and risks to the safety of swimmers and pedestrians. The critical need for management action regarding vehicles on the beach and camping was made plain in Mary Maher's Flinders Beach Management Plan (jointly commissioned by SIMO, FOSI and Redland Shire Council) back in 1998. An audit of past and continuing damage caused by 4WDs on the beach (and any progress towards rehabilitating the beach environment) is a necessary benchmarking tool that could and should be undertaken without further delay.

SIMO's comments relating to specific sections of the Draft:

Introduction

The last paragraph states the LMP *is not intended to remove any existing legal use rights*. Does this preclude the ban of 4WDs on the beach in the future? What if research on Flinders Beach indicates unsustainable levels of damage caused by 4WDs? We note that a policy of beach closure to 4WDs is commonly adopted by many other coastal Councils in Australia, and consider that an audit of coastal local government policies would be helpful in determining an appropriate policy for Flinders Beach regarding vehicles.

As it stands, the use of the term “existing legal use rights” suggests that a (perceived) existing “right” to drive on the beach is not under question, when this ‘RIGHT’ is precisely what is under question. Any fixation on an outcome that allowed vehicles on the beach under any circumstances would unacceptably skew the FBLMP before the results of research are even known.

Town Planning Issues

The statement – *Overall the objectives of the management do not conflict with the planning scheme.* – Is ambiguous. For clarity, SIMO would like to know what parts do conflict with the Planning Scheme and what criteria are covered under the Zone – Restricted Open Space?

Figure 3

Why is no research sourced from other foreshore Councils on the East Coast concerning their management experiences and the data, statistics and recommendations for closures to 4WDs? This information should be supplied in an Appendix and also listed in the Bibliography.

5.1.2 Attractions

The main attraction to(sic) Flinders Beach is its northerly bushland setting and opportunities it offers for nature-based activities.’ This is not disputed; but it is illogical to follow this observation with: ‘*The opportunity to take 4WD vehicles onto the foreshore also adds to the popularity of the area*’ –without equally pointing out that for many users of the beach, the presence of 4WDs(especially in such great numbers)destroys the nature based activities that they hope to enjoy. It cannot be assumed that the prime attraction of the beach is only its use as a road by 4WD vehicles. Perhaps banning 4WDs would result in a flourishing eco-tourism industry which would far better serve the environmental values of the beach? This consideration needs to be borne in mind if the FBLMP is to be a responsible document that ensures the sustainable future use of the beach.

5.2.4 Fauna

How does this Plan ensure the survival of koalas in this area when dogs are permitted in the campgrounds close to remnant koala habitat? Maher recommends banning of dogs on the beach; this Plan should at least immediately ban dogs in the camping areas.

5.3.1 Camping

Fees charged should be compared to other foreshore campsites on the east coast. This report states Flinders offers a *rare camping experience*. Therefore the fees should reflect this and be sufficient to cover all maintenance costs.

5.3.2 Four Wheel Driving

The beach access permits only raise enough revenue to pay beach ranger wages and the high commission rates to businesses selling the permits. The revenue from the permits does not cover the costs of beach management. So why continue this system when it offers no improvement to beach management and protection, and only garners revenue for the barge company whose prime interest is to bring over more and more 4WDs?

6.2.3 Destruction of Macro and Micro Benthic Species

This is the most important study and needs to be undertaken immediately. It specifically focuses on the impacts of 4WD beach use. It is not enough to dismiss the results of research to date by saying '*Current literature is inconclusive regarding the issue*' If it is the case that '*effects can be very site-specific*'. It is necessary here to cite the references. This issue is the key to the FBMP. It is equally important in this section to point out that it is estimated that thousands of macro-invertebrates living in the top 30cm of sand in the inter-tidal zone may be crushed by a single 4WD trip along the beach.

If this is found also to be the case following site-specific research on Flinders Beach, then the question of whether vehicles are permitted to drive on the beach, or how many vehicles are permitted, cannot be avoided any longer. For this reason it is essential this Plan remains a Draft until these studies are completed and results discussed and included in this Plan.

6.2.4 Disturbance of Shorebirds

This section acknowledges certain legislation but does not relate how this Plan will address the conflicting activity of 4WDs with shorebird protection.

6.7 Welcome the attention to resolve these administrating responsibilities.

6.8 Funding of the Management of Flinders Beach

It was surmised at a recent Community Association Meeting that 20 million dollars per year is raised by RSC from the pumping of water from the Island and 7 million dollars per year is extracted from the island in rates. These monies should be returned to the island in the form of research funding to ensure the groundwater aquifer remains pure and for projects to ensure the protection of significant environmental values and sustainable tourism activities.

Table 6

SIMO has understood that the main focus of the FBLMP was to ascertain what impacts 4WDs were having on Flinders Beach and the consequences for the natural landscape and fauna and amenity and safety of beach users.

We are no closer to knowing the answers to this question, yet this Plan allows for increases in 4WD traffic on the beach. Table 6 indicates an allocation of only \$500.00 for finding the answers.

Concluding remarks:

SIMO's preferred Management Plan is outlined in the Mary Maher Report – The Flinders Beach Management Plan, September 1998. We endorse the Management Plan Key Initiatives set out in Map 5 of that report, and would include a walk-in camp area west of Flinders Beach township retaining the toilet in this area.

The recommendations and Management Plan of the Mary Maher Report achieves an *ecologically sustainable recreational use of the beach and its foredune area and retention of the safe, tranquil and natural ambience of the whole beach setting*, while recommending further scientific study into the effects of vehicles on the littoral zone and camping impacts on the swamp.

SIMO does not believe this draft FBLMP adequately addresses concerns of public safety and amenity, or the increasing number of 4WDs and the associated impacts on the beach landscape and fauna.

Yours sincerely

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