



## **Response to Mission Beach Safe Boating Infrastructure Options Workshop Report prepared for Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, February 2013**

### **Overview**

Boat Bay, used since settlement of Mission Beach as a marine access, has never and will never be a viable marine boat refuge like Mourilyan Harbour because it is shallow and has only limited protection from the south-east and no protection from the north-east and north. The fiasco of Port Hinchinbrook is a good reminder of the perils of inappropriate infrastructure. Experienced operators know the only safe haven in severe weather is the mangroves in rivers and creeks. Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation (C4) regards the three options as unacceptable because of their heavy environmental impact, particularly Option 1, failure to observe what has already been happening (Option 2), and vagueness (Option 3). These options are the same as presented in 2011, with the numbering changed.

### **The community**

Mission Beach is a small community with a big diversity of residents. The “big end of town” wants profits from escalating real estate prices and increasing development (although in 2012, more than 1000 residential blocks, stripped of habitat, were vacant). The other residents, including many in the hospitality industry, cherish the village atmosphere; biological richness and closeness to nature such that you are likely to pass a cassowary on your way to work or heading down to pick up your paper or croissant. Clump Point is unique. It is the only basalt headland in the Wet Tropics bioregion and has a distinctive geology, fauna and flora (including critically endangered littoral rainforest) and documented special significance for Djiru traditional owners. For more information see “The natural values of Clump Point”  
<http://www.terrain.org.au/images/stories/programs/terrestrial-biodiversity/mission-beach/clump-map-jan-2009.pdf>

### **The process**

C4 was very disappointed that the formulation of the “options” was a closed shop activity and the result kept secret for more than three months. The workshop apparently included a GHD ecologist but no independent biologist, no community or conservation group representatives or users of any boating facility. This is reflected in the second table column (Page 11): “The relative utilisation by recreational and commercial users, of expanded facilities, is unknown.” There is no evidence of demographic information to support a community need for \$16.3 million of expanded

marine facilities or consideration of the fact that such a big expansion would jeopardise the value of nature-based tourism identified by Mission Beach Business and Tourism as the major activity which draws visitors to Mission Beach rather than Cairns, Townsville, Airlie Beach or Port Douglas.

Why have these options been listed before “Community needs (to be determined via targeted consultation with key stakeholders)” outlined in the methodology (Page 6) have been determined? Are there any options available if the “community needs” do not match the proffered options?

We are being asked to consider options without any accurate idea of the consequences. The resulting document also seems to put undue emphasis on finding ways to avoid mandatory assessments rather than looking for options which deliver value and can be adopted if they pass the due process of assessment to ensure they do not jeopardise the World Heritage values and status of the Great Barrier Reef.

## **The document**

Most Mission Beach residents when surveyed would agree that “safe boating” is a priority. This is recognised in the title and main aim of the workshop. We need to clarify what is meant by “safe boating” as relevant to the options provided, which includes (as on Page 2) the “safe transfer of passengers and goods on and off boats under ambient conditions” excluding extreme weather conditions, but is also likely to include the ability of commercial boat-operators to moor their boats safely through most weather, still excluding gales and cyclones. How this is achieved will need to be discussed.

The proximity and suitability of Mourilyan Harbour for weathering extreme conditions as well as for barge-type commercial operations (as mentioned) is an important consideration.

The title “Mission Beach Safe Boating Infrastructure” should not be misleadingly used to suggest that some built features will make boating safe at Mission Beach, as an alternative to responsible use of tide tables, weather forecasts and good seamanship. For large commercial boats, it will never be a secure haven in extreme weather without the sort of expenditure which only occurs at major cities (such as Townsville, where a major marina was built on an exposed beach) or resource export sites such as Gladstone. The report (3.2.2, Page 9) discusses applying the de minimus principle, used sometimes as a form of “death by a thousand cuts” as environments are slowly and considerably degraded, and which is easier to apply in marine waters as the effects are not seen and much harder to evaluate than in a terrestrial environment.

This principle is a cop-out.

## **The options**

### ***Option 1***

Although the report excludes Option 1 on budget grounds, C4, for completeness, expresses total disapproval of such a greenfield project as it would have huge environmental (terrestrial and marine), social and aesthetic impacts and would be another source of Great Barrier Reef (GBR) siltation from capital dredging and on-going ratepayer funded maintenance dredging. It also overlooks the underwater hazards identified by local boat operators but not apparently considered in the study.

### ***Option 2***

The worst element of this option is the failure to learn from the real-life trial of the existing breakwater, constructed with a westerly kick against the advice of experienced local boat operators. The westerly kick disrupts flow causing siltation (now evident) and making use of the existing ramp difficult at low tide. Option 2 would create a much worse siltation problem requiring costly dredging which would be at odds with the big

and expensive campaign to reduce sediment in the GBR lagoon. Cassowary Coast Regional Council ratepayers, already in the firing line for dredging costs at Port Hinchinbrook, would have to pay for regular dredging to maintain access to a facility with this design. In addition, spoil from dredging would appear destined for somewhere in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The idea of turning Clump Point boat ramp into a barge port is absurd for many reasons including the fact that Mourilyan is a proper harbour only 18nm away, Narragon Beach is a residential/rural/conservation area and the Mission Beach area is not an industrial area.

C4 suggested a third ramp adjacent to the existing two-lane ramp but not particularly “for use by commercial operators” as stated in the document. Although this would not serve the needs of large commercial boats, it would ease one of the most frequent complaints from residents and visitors which is over ramp capacity and parking on busy days (when safe operations from the jetty in its original configuration are safe).

### ***Option 3***

The Yasi recovery-funded replacement jetty was designed and put out to contract and then had to be cut down in capacity because the design did not meet required standards and the extra piling needed would put the project over-budget. This unpredictability of design to construction caused great unease in looking at major structural options which have not been specified in terms of size or location.

If the circling rockwall was built to the scale of Redcliffe Jetty in Southern Queensland it would likely create the same turbidity which ruined Redcliffe as a premier dive site (“we have seen it worse than the Brisbane River (0m vis)”, Jason Blackwell, Dive Dive Dive, [diveoz.com.au](http://diveoz.com.au)). It would also, like a Trojan Horse, provide a defacto boat park. Apart from these problems, there is no way such a rockwall could be anything but an eyesore which would seriously detract from the visual amenity of a unique environment. (A key reason the GBR was listed as a World Heritage Area was its exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance, above and below water.) The report correctly identifies popular sentiment about the aesthetics. It may be that some more effort is required to find wave attenuating designs which will work in the particular conditions of Boat Bay and not create an eyesore.

Under Approval Requirements (Table column 1, Page 19) the text states that “drop camera surveys should satisfy requirements”. Such camera surveys capture immobile bottom fauna (e.g. barnacles) and flora at the limits of visibility and a few larger swimming organisms but in no way replace a proper survey in which humans carry out direct observations. The terrestrial equivalent would be setting up a remote camera in a forest; you will see the trees and plants and a few animals may wander by. If a cassowary did not pass, could you say that cassowaries did not occur in the area? Apart from the larger corals, plants and fish, you will get a skewed idea of what is under the water. Seahorses, for example, cannot be seen this way. Turtles may not swim past during the camera run so would therefore be determined as not present.

## Conclusion

The report provides no low-impact option to improve safety of loading and unloading of passengers and cargo. C4 acknowledges that the safety standards endured throughout the development of reef-based tourism by pioneer operators such as Perry Harvey are no longer acceptable and we would support a solution which met current safety requirements if this could be done without the high-impact options listed in the report. C4 is therefore unable to support any of the report's options because we believe they would destroy a unique and valuable part of our natural heritage and knowingly contribute to siltation of the Reef, saved 45 years ago from mining by a campaign spearheaded from the now heritage-listed former home of John Busst at Ninney Rise, only 3km from the Clump Point Jetty.

It is our earnest hope that this time does not go down in history as the time which cost Queensland and Australia the World Heritage Listing of the Great Barrier Reef through promoting development destructive of the World Heritage values. The further studies listed on Page 23 must be completed and made public **before** final decisions can be made and approvals given.