

Collingwood Beach Preservation Group Proposed Amendments to the Collingwood Beach Draft Dune Vegetation Management Plan



Collingwood Beach Preservation Group

The Collingwood Beach Preservation Group (CBPG) was established to ensure Collingwood Beach is preserved and enhanced through the application of sound scientific principles to ecologically sustainable development. Ecologically sustainable development includes taking into consideration, in an integrated way, the wider social, economic and environmental implications of decisions and actions without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The CBPG is a sub-committee of the Vincentia Residents and Ratepayers Association (VRRRA) which is the Community Consultative Body that represents Vincentia to the Shoalhaven City Council.

Background

From time to time Collingwood Beach experiences storm surges and consequentially wave run-up that affects the beach. The foreshore dune provides the only immediate protection for the beach. However, Collingwood Beach is an accreting beach which means that it recovers naturally from storm erosion over time as sand deposits are gradually replaced.

Collingwood Beach is a key tourist attraction for the area. Tourists in turn support the community so it is in the community's interest to maintain the views across Jervis Bay from the coastal walkway whilst at the same time ensuring the resilience of the foreshore dune.

Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) engaged a consultant to produce a Dune Vegetation Management Plan (DVMP). The CBPG was not consulted with regard to the final content of the draft DVMP and maintain that the draft DVMP does not address the primary purpose for which it was produced nor does it address the best interests of the community.

Points at Issue

For many years the community and tourists had unobstructed views over Jervis Bay however those views were progressively blocked by the planting of high growth trees along the coastal walkway. The photos below show the past and current situation in front of 1A Susan Street, Vincentia.



1A Susan Street Vincentia 2001



1A Susan Street Vincentia 2015

The planting of high growth trees has resulted in the beauty of Jervis Bay, and the iconic view of Ppint Perpendicular, being hidden from the coastal walkway. It has also resulted in vandalism of trees in front of some properties which SCC has not been able to control despite its best endeavours. The draft DVMP works with the existing vegetation structure and thus does nothing to address the issues caused by the planting of the trees.

The draft DVMP outlines a case for the need to maintain trees to assist in the build-up of sand deposits on the foreshore dune. Sections along the foreshore dune consist of some areas that have trees and other areas that do not have trees. There is however no difference between the two areas in relation to sand build-up.

The draft DVMP also outlines a case for the need to maintain trees so that sand can be bound together in the face of wave action during minor storms. There are however no records of trees planted at Collingwood Beach resisting wave action and overseas experience demonstrates that planting trees on foreshore dunes has catastrophic consequences as evidenced from the adjacent photo of Culbin in the northeast of Scotland.



Further, the draft DVMP states that dead trees and shrubs are to be retained and mulch established on the dunes however this will only create a fire load in an urban environment which as evidenced from previous bushfires in the area can lead to loss of dwellings.

The Science

The draft DVMP includes references to a wide variety of literature stated to be in support of the vegetation proposed for the foreshore dune. However, a causal link from the vegetation referenced in the literature is not drawn to the specific circumstances of Collingwood Beach, namely a very narrow dune in an urban area. In that regard it is relevant to note that the NSW Government Department of Land and Water Conservation Coastal Dune Management manual does not identify trees as a suitable for planting on foreshore dunes.

At Collingwood Beach there is no difference in dune build up between areas that have high growth trees and areas that do not. This is consistent with the literature produced by various government authorities such as the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment Coastal Works Manual which states that low-growing plants, such as grasses, are more effective at stabilising sand than trees or shrubs as 90% of wind-borne sand is transported in the 0.5m closest to the ground.

Other literature from government authorities such as publications from the Queensland Environmental Protection Authority and Beach Protection Authority state that tree roots cannot provide protection against significant wave action. This has been endorsed by SCC. The literature presented in the draft DVMP claims that trees are nevertheless needed to reduce the impact of more frequent minor storms.

Some members of the CBPG have owned their properties for over 60 years. Nobody has a recollection of an event where the trees have reduced the impact of a storm and SCC has not produced any records to support such a contention. In fact the erosion from the recent significant storms of May and September 2015 did not even come close to the trees planted along the coastal walkway. Where isolated trees away from the coastal walkway have been exposed to wave action they have provided no resistance as evidenced by the adjacent photo at Collingwood Beach near Moona Moona Creek.



Conclusion

The draft DVMP is complicated and is not consistent across the whole of the dune system. Further, the draft DVMP is not based on scientific facts and does not address the root cause of vandalism. In addition, the draft DVMP incorporates a complicated and expensive monitoring regime.

A Simple 11 Point Plan

The CBPG submits the following proposal for the DVMP:

1. Under pruning of established mature trees to be at a minimum height of 5 metres.
2. Reduction and maintenance of all vegetation outside of mature trees (defined as currently 6 metres in height) to a level of between 90cm and 1 metre tall that enables viewing of Jervis Bay by children and wheelchair users.
3. Existing clusters of banksia trees in Zones 3 and 4 to be reduced in quantity and height to a level that enables wide span views of Jervis Bay.
4. All new growth banksia trees to be removed together with existing seedlings and saplings.
5. Removal of dead wood and dead trees.
6. Removal of vandalism signage.
7. Approval of the request from Collingwood Beach property owners and residents to form a dune care management group to maintain dune vegetation consistent with the agreed DVMP.
8. Removal any trees that are potentially dangerous to pathway users or damaging the pathway with root undulation.
9. All new plantings to be grasses or coastal shrubs which have a mature height and resilient effect that are consistent with the agreed DVMP.
10. Removal of pittosporum from all of Collingwood Beach dunes which includes dunes south of Susan St.
11. The exhibition period be limited to 4 weeks.