

HOW DOES YOUR GROUP USE THE FORESHORE

DSSG is a community-based environmental advocacy organisation whose objects are:

- To promote and encourage the adoption of the principals of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire;
- To the protection and conservation of the unique environment in the Douglas Shire and its surrounds, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics and World Heritage areas;
- To promote social, economic and environmental balance;
- To promote and support environmentally sustainable practices, education and great environmental awareness amongst visitors to and residents of the Douglas Shire;
- To recognise and promote the sustainable practices of the traditional owners of the Douglas Shire; and
- To promote and encourage the adoption of the principals of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire.

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT AND MEANINGFUL TO YOUR GROUP ABOUT THE FORESHORE ZONE

The Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia ecological community is rated nationally as Critically Endangered. Given the small area remaining, all sites that meet the criteria for the listed community should be considered habitat critical to the survival of the ecological community.

From an ecological perspective, derived native vegetation structures (or patches on the pathway of succession towards Littoral Rainforest) may also be habitat critical to survival of the ecological community, if they adjoin, buffer or connect high integrity remnants, provide habitat critical for functionally important or threatened species, expand the potential habitat available to some species, or have good potential for restoration.

ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC SITES OR AREAS WITHIN THE FORESHORE ZONE WHICH ARE CULTURALLY OR HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT AND NEED PROTECTION? IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE/EXPLAIN.

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HAS YOUR GROUP OR ORGANISATION NOTICED ANY CHANGES TO THE FORESHORE ZONE? IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE/EXPLAIN

All along the coast, we have seen Littoral Rainforest reduced and fragmented by land clearance (including those clearing and colonising the foreshore for personal views and use), weed invasion (including coconuts), recreational disturbance (particularly ATV on Wonga Beach), animal browsing,

fire and natural disturbance; dumping of garden waste and other rubbish, pollution and disturbance to native fauna from domestic pets.

Visitor disturbance in these conservation areas includes soil compaction and disturbance, erosion from foot, cycle, trail bike and four wheel drive tracks, the introduction of pests and the creation of new planned and unplanned tracks.

Climate change effects include rising sea levels; increased rainfall variability; and increased frequency of severe weather events which are projected to lead to major coastal erosion events, storm surges and saline inundation.

ON BEHALF OF YOUR GROUP/ORGANISATION, PLEASE INDICATE HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED YOU ARE WITH THE CURRENT MANAGEMENT OF THE FORESHORE ZONE?

Very dissatisfied

WHAT DOES YOUR GROUP OR ORGANISATION FEEL ARE THE MAIN ISSUES OR THREATS FOR THE FORESHORE ZONE?

Lack of stewardship, lack of enforcement, lack of community education.

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DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS OR SUGGESTIONS ON HOW THE FORESHORE ZONE COULD BE PROTECTED/MANAGED? IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE/EXPLAIN.

Develop and implement a framework for protection and management of the littoral forest and avoid all potential impacts and threats, undertake compliance and enforcement and activities. Immediately stop ATVs on Wonga Beach and all other vehicles on all beaches. Revegetate appropriately and restrict access to revegetated sites. Close all irregular access points. Community education.

DOES YOUR GROUP OR ORGANISATION CURRENTLY PARTICIPATE IN ANY ACTIVITIES TO CARE FOR OR PROTECT THE FORESHORE ZONE? IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE/EXPLAIN.

Members participate in many ways, including monitoring and recording damage, collecting rubbish, advocacy.

ON BEHALF OF YOUR GROUP/ORGANISATION, PLEASE INDICATE WHETHER YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE BELOW STATEMENTS.

People should be allowed to have permanent beach showers, hammocks or picnic/dining tables within the foreshore zone **Strongly disagree**

Informal private access paths to the foreshore zone should be removed **Strongly agree**

Uninterrupted ocean views are important to me **Strongly disagree**

Disability access points are required **Agree**

I/we support minimising the number of access paths to reduce the need to clear dune vegetation **Strongly agree**

Residents who illegally clear foreshore vegetation should be fined **Strongly agree**

ON BEHALF OF YOUR GROUP/ORGANISATION, PLEASE INDICATE WHETHER YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE BELOW STATEMENTS.

Council is currently doing enough to maintain the foreshore zone **Strongly disagree**

More open space areas are needed **Strongly disagree**

Debris needs to be cleared from the foreshore zone **Strongly disagree**

I/we support the rehabilitation of dunes where vegetation has been removed **strongly agree**

Access to sensitive areas of the foreshore zone (e.g. vegetation rehabilitation areas, turtle nesting sites) should be restricted using physical barriers **Strongly agree**

Invasive plant species (e.g. Singapore daisy, lantana or coconut palms) should be removed **Strongly agree**

Vegetation is the best way to protect sand dunes and beaches from erosion **Strongly agree**

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS ABOUT FORESHORE MANAGEMENT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

While acknowledging that the coastal area of Douglas Shire comprises several different landscape features, we are of the view that an overall foreshore management plan is appropriate and necessary. An overall plan would create the framework and include the general principles of foreshore management. The overall plan could then be complemented by individual specific beach plans, where different environmental issues, for example, could be canvassed.

The key features of an overall management plan would include strategies for:

- Protection and regeneration of the Littoral Forest
- Protection of fauna and flora, particularly those identified as endangered or threatened.
- Appropriate infrastructure including access
- Protection of the foreshore areas for resident amenity and quiet enjoyment
- Weed and domestic animal control
- Public Education including signage
- Enforcement policy

Insert specifics for each foreshore area in this part of survey

DSSG has made many submissions to Council about environmental damage to Wonga beach. Of all the impacts on this sensitive area, permitting of vehicles is the most offensive. It is entirely at odds with what we see as responsible foreshore management.

Littoral forest on the northern Wet Tropics World Heritage section of Wonga Beach protects an endangered dune-swale system (a series of parallel small sand dunes with remnants of small lagoons (swales) between them). The Littoral Rainforest habitat which exists along most of Wonga Beach, is currently being extensively damaged by vehicles driving at high tide and into vegetated areas particularly at the northern end.

While Council has jurisdiction over the foreshore, the foreshore still remains part of the Great Barrier Reef Coastal Marine Park and all activities must comply with the relevant management plan.

The foreshore (low water mark) has status of a habitat protected area. The Habitat Protection Zone provides for the conservation of areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park by protecting and managing sensitive habitats and ensuring they are generally free from potentially damaging activities. It is also noted that the area of beach designated for recreational use north of Giblin St is the most pristine and has the greatest environmental values.

A recent scientific study focusing specifically on the impact of low-level vehicle traffic on beaches found a significant decrease in species biodiversity and density. This negatively impacts on many species ability to survive in the face of further disturbance. There are no guidelines that will alter this basic fact. If vehicles are allowed to drive on beaches, damage to the coastal environment and ecosystem is unavoidable. Certain shorebird species require some uninterrupted rest period during the daytime. State law specifies the need for 'resting periods, closures during breeding periods and restrictions on night driving and one hour after and before dark'. None of these issues have been addressed by Council's proposal. There are no closures proposed for breeding birds such as Red-capped plovers and Beach stone curlews. No shorebirds can breed successfully with vehicles driving in the proposed driving zone.

Aside from this critical issue, Wonga Beach is suffering from unlawful clearing, including by commercial accommodation operators, and we are advised previous efforts to revegetate have been abandoned when disturbed by residents. In addition, paths and vehicle access points are being driven through the littoral forest all along the beach. These are often accompanied by uncontrolled fires, including one that burned out acres of forest this summer.

Newell Beach

Our members advise that residents do not want any additional infrastructure, but they do want a stop to illegal clearing.

Cooya Beach

Our members advise us that there is a lack of general education about protection of the foreshore at Cooya Beach. Many new residents do not understand the sensitive nature of the environment. Community education would be helpful. The foreshore is showing signs of pressure from human use and unlawful clearing to make paths etc. Our members also observe that a decent buffer zone between the foreshore and the developments is necessary. There is also concern at uncontrolled dogs chasing protected wildlife and disturbing nesting birds.

4 mile Beach

Unfortunately, Port Douglas residents who live next to Four Mile Beach are familiar with the social problems being experienced in the area. Issues such as trespassing, theft, illegal camping, fires on the beach and in the forest, and the dumping of rubbish, cause constant problems.

The Littoral forest

One of the most iconic and ecologically significant features of the 4 mile foreshore is the many large Weeping Paperbark (*Melaleuca leucadendra*). These trees survived European settlement because their thick papery bark protected them from fires. The largest of these trees are some of the only survivors from the original pre-1877 ecosystem. These *Melaleuca* trees can still be found in the Solander Boulevard, Reef St, Langley St and Barrier St areas. The signs of fire can be seen on some of them.

The small remnant areas of the coastal foreshore especially in the areas from Solander Boulevard to the Mowbray, have started the process of regenerating back to the closed canopy littoral rainforest described by Hodgkinson in 1877.

This process of succession from a secondary to a primary ecosystem is ongoing. Now that a canopy is forming and closing over the new forest, the next generation of new species is growing as part of the succession into a primary forest. This will still take another century, or more. Most of the trees in this forest are still quite young compared to similar old growth forests such as those along the Daintree Coast. The future generation of plants are now germinating and growing under the new canopy and will, over decades, change the species composition of this remnant forest.

Some of the larger long-lived trees such as Mastwoods and Banyans, after forty years of not being burnt, are starting to grow into good-sized trees, however it will take another hundred years or so before they reach the impressive sizes that can be found in old growth littoral rainforests¹.

The preservation of the littoral forest at four mile beach is critical. We note that heavy equipment has been used to harvest coconuts from palms growing in the littoral forest fringing Solander. This is a very destructive process and should be stopped immediately.

Langley Rd

DSSG has done a deep dive into the history of events leading to the destruction of several large *Melaleuca* and other trees and the associated dislocation and probable death of several creatures housed in those trees. Our review of the development approval processes for this site, dating from 2004 and including a contested approval in 2009, shows that there was greater protection afforded the vegetation and wildlife in 2009 than now. In 2009, the prospective developer was prohibited from removing most of the vegetation, and required to provide monetary surety to protect *Melaleucas* and Ant Plants in particular.

Cowrie St

Douglas Shire Council recently installed bollards at the end of Cowrie St and planned to revegetate the area in-line with the Council's Resilient Coast Strategic Plan. Unfortunately, in recent days, Council workers moved the recently installed bollards into the beach esplanade area to make way for bitumen. Local residents are questioning the legalities of Douglas Shire Council building a parking

¹ [Environment / The regeneration of the Four Mile Beach foreshore vegetation | \(douglasnews.network\)](#)

lot in a wetland protection area in the Great Barrier Reef catchment area, extending Cowrie St into endangered littoral rainforest.

Barrier Street

Ongoing illegal clearing and revegetation since 2002, notably 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Council attends and advises residents of illegal nature of clearing, however revegetation is always subsequently removed and paths laid - directly flaunting the laws. Council appears to be unable to deal with this.

Garrick St

Unauthorised littoral forest clearing reported to Council who referred to DNRME as Sheraton land is not jurisdiction of Council. DNRME reported they attended but could not advise us of action, if any, taken.

Four Mile Wangetti Trail

The main areas of concern are the proposal to build the trail through the mangroves at the mouth of the Mowbray and through the littoral rainforest at the southern end of the Beach. Both areas have features of high ecological significance, as identified in the GHD report prepared for the Qld Government.

Residents are concerned that pushing a wide path through the most intact example we have in Port Douglas of what is a very rare habitat, will lead to even further degradation, disturbance and exploitation of a kind already seen further north along Four Mile Beach.

Oak Beach

Our members advise us that there is a major issue with unlawful clearing of foreshore forest, even so far as to engage landscapers to put down hard stand and paths. Inappropriate planting can also be seen. There are also coconut management issues, posing hazards to beach walkers due to lack of de-nutting. Examples provided of occasional vehicle access, particularly concerning at Pebbly Beach where damage has been done to the foreshore. Pretty Beach has seen an amount of illegal camping and fires. The provision of rubbish bins at Oak Beach is helpful in limiting littering.