



PO Box 762  
Mossman Qld 4873

[sustainabilitydouglas@gmail.com](mailto:sustainabilitydouglas@gmail.com)

Date: 28 June 2021

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Douglas Shire Sustainability Group (DSSG) responds to Douglas Shire Council Draft Foreshore Management Plans**

Douglas Shire Council has stewardship of the foreshore and its fringing forests, and must manage it for the benefit of current and future generations of Australians and others.

In Douglas Shire, the foreshore is part of the Great Barrier Coastal Marine Park and the fringing (littoral) forests are protected under the Nature Conservation Act. The tidal area is within a declared Marine Park and the littoral forests are listed as critically endangered.

Authority to regulate activity in these areas is delegated to Council. This delegation attracts a responsibility to act in accordance with relevant Government legislation, management plans and policies to protect this special environment.

Douglas Shire Council has prepared draft Foreshore Management Plans for five beach areas.

The draft plans show that the leading threats to the health of the foreshore are:

- ATVs
- Informal access tracks
- Illegal vegetation clearing
- Environmental weeds
- Erosion
- Illegal dumping

“Now the cards are on the table, Council must reconsider its approval of the use of ATVs on Wonga Beach. That activity is among the highest threats identified and to continue to permit this is negligent.” said Mr McDonald, President of DSSG. “No ecological expertise was sought prior to allowing ATVs and no risk assessment was completed. Aside from erosion, the draft Foreshore Management Plan for Wonga Beach has failed to include an assessment of the threats posed by ATVs.”

DSSG has called for appropriate enforcement capacity and adoption of an enforcement policy by Council.

“Unauthorised clearing of foreshore vegetation is rampant in Douglas Shire”, said Didge McDonald, “Council is responsible for enforcing laws that prohibit unauthorised clearing, including its own local laws. Council has failed to enforce these laws, resulting in severely degraded littoral forests and erosion of foreshore dunes.”

A largely desk-top assessment of five beaches in Douglas Shire has shown 151 'informal' tracks have been unlawfully cleared, including multiple well-established access tracks through vegetation from houses to the beach.

Across all beaches, and particularly in Oak Beach and Four Mile Beaches, residents near to the foreshore have undertaken significant illegal clearing to create viewing windows and have encroached onto Council land by 'landscaping' the foreshore.

The remnant vegetation of these beaches is mapped as 'Essential Habitat' for several conservation significant species. Vegetation loss results in an increase in foreshore dune erosion, exposure of hind dune systems and vegetation that are less adapted to extreme weather events, including weeds, loss of breeding and roosting habitat for nesting shorebirds and sea turtles and loss of food trees for southern cassowary.

DSSG has presented to Council a detailed response to the draft Foreshore Management Plans, acknowledging that generally, the plans have identified management needs and actions that if implemented, will achieve much in helping to restore and maintain the natural assets of beaches that most visitors seek, respect and treasure.

"While we are pleased with many aspects of these plans, the proof is in the pudding as to implementation" said Mr McDonald. "Resources must be allocated, action must be prioritised and Council must enforce the relevant laws – a failure to do so should result in withdrawal of the delegated regulatory power it holds to protect this place"

For comment, contact Didge McDonald 0418852545

Images attached