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Ms Rachel Brophy
Chief Executive Officer
Douglas Shire Council

Via email: rachel.brophy@douglas.qld.gov.au

Dear Madam

VEHICLES ON WONGA BEACH – REVIEW OF ATV ACTIVITY

Douglas Shire Sustainability Group Inc. (DSSG) is an incorporated association active in the Douglas Shire since 2005, in support of sustainability in this region.

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

- 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

Call for Review and community survey

DSSG notes the commencement, on July 1st 2021, of compliance monitoring and enforcement of the Local Laws regarding vehicles on Wonga Beach. It has now been more than two years since the local laws have been operating, and DSSG calls for a review of the compliance and enforcement framework.

We also believe a new survey of residents and visitors to the beach should be undertaken, to test impact on amenity and observed environmental impact. We note that previously Council has required attendance at public meetings for expression of opinion on such matters, and our members observe that for one reason or another, opponents do not speak up at such events. A de-identified survey would provide more accurate feedback on this issue.

Ongoing compliance issues and environmental impact

Our members advise us that motor bikes and 4x4s still use the beach and most ATVs continue breaching driver requirements such as not observing speed limits, not leaving the beach only at designated points, not wearing safety helmets, carrying excess passengers on illegal seating etc.

Illegal access points are still regularly in use by vehicles, contrary to the Foreshore Management Plan. There is still insufficient signage about restricted vehicle access onto the beach, so visitors simply assume it's okay to drive where they see other vehicles.

Soldier crab armies are now entirely extinct (none encountered now for around 10 months) which coincidentally or not, followed repeated instances observed of ATVs crushing many crabs, deliberately - in large numbers on one occasion. Also in the past two years there has been ZERO breeding success by shorebird nesting species along the entire 10 km beach.

Beach drivers still remain ignorant of impacts, and together with compliance failure this creates a situation where there is no pathway for performance improvement. Better education might promote better behaviour hopefully resulting in less environmental impact.

Extension of ATV policy without public notice

One of our concerns is the precedent that Council's 'approval' of ATVs at Wonga may create for other beaches in the Shire. Our members report frequent use of ATVs to access from multiple points along the entire beach between Rocky Point and Saltwater River mouth. This is not Wonga Beach, and according to existing management arrangements, there shouldn't be any vehicles being driven here.

Council has apparently added SBS vehicles to the list of 'approved' for access to Wonga Beach. These vehicles have a bigger impact due to size and weight – approaching 4x4 (which are banned). We have observed trailers being used behind vehicles on the beach – clearly there is a need to include in the regulations some limits on weight.

Our correspondence dated 15 September 2022 (attached as "A") outlined our observations on compliance and asked several questions. Unfortunately when we received a reply on 17 November 2022 (attached as "B"), very few of our questions were answered. We did learn that there had been 28 approvals at that time, and one application from a non-resident.

Please advise us the following information:

1. Number of licence applications and numbers issued per annum.
2. Numbers and types of infringements recorded by Council.
3. Outcome of infringements, including by trail bikes, 4 x 4s.

Our members believe the approval of ATVs on Wonga Beach remains controversial, posing a significant risk to the environment including wildlife, and to people. It also breaches the rate-payers right to peaceful enjoyment of the area, and has proven to be a flash point for conflict in the community.

We urge Council to undertake a review of the approval and compliance framework, inviting submissions and including a confidential survey of residents and users of Wonga Beach.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



Didge McDonald
President

CC: Mayor and Councillors

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