

PHOENIX!

NEWSLETTER OF

THE ALLIANCE TO SAVE HINCHINBROOK INC

Oyster Point round-up

The construction of breakwaters at Oyster Point is now said to have been completed. The wall has however continued to shed some of its rocks. The northern foreshore, where an artificial beach was being developed, is now being attacked by the afternoon north-easterly wave action. These wind driven waves are being channelled along the northern side of the northern wall to the property line, where they are carving out the "beach" as fast as trucks can replace it.

Port Hinchinbrook Services (PHS), the body corporate for Port Hinchinbrook residents, is facing not only unexpectedly high expenditure for the breakwall construction, but also continued dredging costs – in recent times even tinnies have been going aground.

The foreshore generally continues to erode. A recent missal from the Queensland Environment Minister's Office suggested that Cyclone Larry has made it worse. Although it's disappointing for an environment minister to blame a cyclone for impacts of development approved for a cyclone-prone area, at least it is an acknowledgement of the fact that the foreshore is eroding.

The single most important factor in erosion at Oyster Point was the State Government's own 1994 decision to permit removal of the protective fringing mangroves. Surely the government must have expected that cyclones would worsen the erosion that would result from stripping away the fringing mangroves, the land's natural protection.

Despite the constant advertising about a new Port Hinchinbrook Stage II proposal, the Cardwell Shire Council has advised that no such application has yet been made to them. Council has advised that informal negotiations are under way for Banana Land (on the western side of the Bruce Highway) and for rezoning from 'industrial' to 'residential' near the Ship Maintenance Basin.

NOTICE

GENERAL MEETINGS

(1) *date/time* Monday **11th June** 2007
at 2pm

(2) *date/time* Saturday **30th June** 2007
at 2:30 pm (following the AGM)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

date/time Saturday **30th June** 2007 at
2pm

To be followed by a General Meeting
(as (2) above)

Venue for all meetings will be
'Galmará', Cardwell

How to get there?

For directions to 'Galmará' please
phone Margaret Thorsborne on

07 40 668 537.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS WERE DUE 31st MARCH 2006

ARE YOU ON EMAIL?

Or has your email address changed?

Please advise your current email address on your ASH renewal form.

Sometimes it is important to reach members quickly to facilitate urgent responses to an issue.

Meunga Creek boatyard – good news!

The lessees of the unlawful boat building business near the mouth of Meunga Creek, opposite Edmund Kennedy National Park and a fish habitat reserve, seem to have ceased boat building operations on the site.

Only a few yachts remain, out of the twenty or so of May 2006, and no new boat work has been started.

Glider and cassowary habitat – new threat

The Everett Family Trust proposes an 80 hectare resort ("Hinchinbrook Habitats") on the Seymour River near Ingham, entailing clearing of 8 ha of rural land listed as essential wildlife habitat for the mahogany glider and cassowary; boat ramp; 190 houses and cabins; convention centre; gym; pool; store etc.

Commonwealth, state EPA and Council approval would be required.

Will Keith Williams

Fire as a tool for ecological sustainability

land a bulldozer on Hinchinbrook Island?

For some years Keith Williams has been negotiating the purchase of the Hinchinbrook Island Resort. He and the present resort owners have now reportedly agreed on a price which we believe to be in excess of \$20m.

The resort site is a Special Lease within the national park. The Queensland Government has the authority to refuse an application for transfer of the Lease and to change the conditions of the lease.

Keith Williams also claims to have acquired the only ferry service to the Island. If these transfers go ahead Mr. Williams will have a clear monopoly over all tourist access to Hinchinbrook Island.

The developer's environmental history and past demands for increased tourist uses of Hinchinbrook Island should be enough for the government to stop Hinchinbrook Island from falling into the hands of a Williams company.

Will the Queensland Government protect its most famous national park and its wilderness concept?

Sadly, the present state government seems more than ever disengaged from its real business. The environment department seems more than ever unwilling to actually protect the state's natural assets.

Keith Williams long ago made clear his desires for mass visitation on the island. Although we are not privy to his current plans, one only has to think like a developer. Imagine a seawall at Zoe Bay to protect moored tourist vessels from the ocean swell, track-hardening of the Thorsborne trail, or built facilities along Ramsay Beach. And what about a road or two? Or an airport?

(continued on page 3)

(from page 2) Keith Williams has argued that 10,000 people could walk up and down the Ramsay Bay and Zoe Bay beaches and do less damage than gale

The controversy over the rationale for the regular burning of Hinchinbrook Island and other protected areas continues. Some very heated words have been said by the many locals and tourists who hate to see smoke piercing the sky over Hinchinbrook Island.

The preservation of some rare habitats from over growth by rain forest is the reason often cited by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS - unkindly known as "Sparks and Wildfire"), but this seems to be an over simplification of some very complex ecological issues.

Australian rainforest has been inadvertently popularised at the expense of other forest types, such as the north's wet sclerophyll areas, now facing multiple threats.

Wet sclerophyll areas are believed to have been formed by fire, hence can only thrive as long as hot fires kill invasive fire-vulnerable species.

Wet sclerophyll species occur only on specific soils, hence cannot "move" with changes in climate or nearby land use.

Wet sclerophyll areas are now seriously fragmented and subject to edge effects. These and associated ecotone areas are vulnerable to invasion by introduced and native species.

Some animal species such as the Yellow-Bellied Glider are dependent on wet sclerophyll habitat.

The promotion of "aboriginal burning" as a model for the present day has some serious flaws:

- Although there are lots of theories, no-one really knows enough about ancient burning practices.
- Landscape and ecology are believed to have been changed dramatically by ancient burning practices.
- The significance of naturally caused fire (eg lightning strike) is not clear.
- Global warming is already resulting in ecological changes.

Proposals for tourism on Hinchinbrook Island

1993 - 1994

- The land is no longer intact in terms of plant life. There has been widespread invasion by pasture plants and weeds into natural areas.
- The land is no longer intact in terms of area. Is it wise to burn "what's left" now - small fragmented areas - in ways that were developed or evolved on large scale landscapes?

These issues have been raised with the QPWS at a recent meeting of the Conservation Sector Liaison Group (CSLG), an advisory group to the Wet Tropics Management Authority.

Many people believe that burning contributes to the greenhouse effect. Bushfire however is a cyclic phenomenon, carbon dioxide uptake occurring as the burned area recovers; whereas greenhouse carbon dioxide is that accumulated from the burning of millions of years' worth of fossil fuels.

The control of QPWS fires is another issue. Much community distress has arisen from QPWS fires run wild, such as when nesting birds have been threatened.

Burn injuries to wildlife are inevitable in a landscape formed by fire.

Sometimes it is difficult to accept that the life of the natural world cannot be separated from suffering and death.

The government agencies must make some hard decisions about how to protect biodiversity and sustain our fragmented ecosystems.

Global warming has added new and little understood conditions to the difficulties of setting conservation goals.

Burning is always cited as a tool for conservation.

At the recent CSLG meeting, the QPWS was asked to determine what are their conservation goals and how burning serves them.

We await their response.

"... I am leaning towards the idea of simply filling in the hole and thus minimising or eliminating involvement with DEH."

force winds - **see adjacent box** →

Conservationists fought hard and long to achieve the wilderness designation that presently exists over much of the Island, under the Hinchinbrook Island National Park Management Plan (HINPMP) (1999).

Wilderness cannot be “managed” to accommodate mass tourism as can other zoning classifications. Wilderness designation protects a lot of biodiversity by simply ensuring freedom from human presence.

The HINPMP calls for its surrounding waters to be protected to the same standard as the adjacent Island national park. Seven years later there is still no State Marine Parks Plan for the Hinchinbrook Channel.

The only marine plan in operation is the GBRMPA’s Hinchinbrook Plan of Management (HPoM). This plan has introduced permits for very large tourist vessels to anchor or moor in the shallows off Hecate Point (near the northwest tip of Hinchinbrook Island). These tourist ships are capable of disgorging hundreds of day trippers in small boats that would be classed as private recreational vessels, subject to no restrictions at all.

Of great concern is the developer’s long and appalling history of unpermitted earthworks, environmental vandalism and dislike of surveillance. Hinchinbrook Island would be so conveniently out of reach of any official inspection.

ASH has made a submission to the Queensland Environment Minister arguing against the transfer of the special lease to a Williams company. The Minister has advised that a response to our letter will be prepared by 8th May.

See pages 4 and 5 for the ASH submission to Environment Minister Nelson-Carr.

Keith Williams to GBRMPA and QDoE, 22 October 1993:

“... Ramsay Bay and Zoe Bay face east ... they are both being constantly battered by the seas whipped up by the prevailing south-east trade winds. One cyclone or even near gale force winds do more damage to these beaches in a matter of hours than 10,000 people could do walking up and down the beach daily.”

Cardno & Davies Report, draft, 23 March 1994:

“... the limitations which QNPWS has placed upon the Thorsborne Trail are recognised and in the hope that there may be some extension of such limits resulting from practical and sustainable hardening, an application to QNPWS is foreshadowed for an allocation of permits ..”

Environment Review Report ‘Port Hinchinbrook’, draft, 1994:

“The developer intends to negotiate with Department of Environment and Heritage for extensions of existing limits to commercial use of sites on Hinchinbrook Island and the Brook Islands ... The proponent states an intention to negotiate an extension of the existing numbers to cope with the requirements of Port Hinchinbrook ...”

**Lobbying,
Keith Williams-style
1994-96**

Keith Williams to Coordinator General John Down, 6 September 1994:

“I write this letter to you personally and it might be best to destroy same ...”

Keith Williams to Coordinator General John Down, 21 Sept. 1994:

“The final approval ... must be available to me no later than Friday, 30th and to achieve this you and Terry Mackenroth may need to have a few words with Council about approving the subdivision ...”

Keith Williams to Coordinator General John Down, Cairns International Hotel, 23 Sept. 1994:

“I also confirm our agreement ... that if I refrain from commencing operations prior to Monday morning you will ensure that on Monday I am provided with all permits necessary for me to proceed ...”

“ Have a pleasant stay in Cairns because next week is going to be either real good or real bad.”

Keith Williams to Coordinator General John Down, 29 September 1994:

“Unless I receive ancillary permits (as agreed ...) by 3 pm this day ... My proposed “expose everything” media campaign will no doubt include an open offer to the Government to buy the site ...”

“I have already issued instructions to my solicitor to prepare the basis of my case against the Queensland government and specified individuals.”

Keith Williams to Senator Robert Hill, 27 March 1996:

“Yesterday I mentioned to you briefly that I was anxious to speak with you on a private basis ... it might be best for you to phone me at a time convenient ...the subject is one that I would not like to commit to paper and it is not in regard to your future decision re “Port Hinchinbrook”.”

ASH MEDIA RELEASE 12 April 2007

HINCHINBROOK ISLAND RESORT: TO BE OR NOT TO BE ?

The Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service is facing the ultimate test of its parks management ethic – whether or not to transfer to Keith Williams an existing special lease for an old resort that should never have been allowed on Hinchinbrook Island.

ASH has long held the view that the resort lease, acknowledged to be an historical anomaly, should lapse when the present owner quits, not be sold on for private gain and public loss.

There is nothing in the *Hinchinbrook Island National Park Management Plan* to prevent expansion of present resort size or activities.

Despite Keith Williams’ recent assurances that he would not double resort numbers, ASH has no doubt that he has been lobbying for increase in numbers and access to island sites such as Zoe Bay, Ramsay Bay and the Thorsborne Trail. These desires are evidenced in documents going back to 1993.

Old documents (received under Freedom of Information legislation) also evidence the developer’s desire for a commercial monopoly over Hinchinbrook Island, his views against public consultation, and his practice of renegotiating agreement conditions after signing.

In view of the developer’s environmental record and expressed expansionist desires for Hinchinbrook Island, ASH has no confidence that Hinchinbrook Island’s unique wildlife and wilderness character would survive should the resort lease be transferred to a Keith Williams company.

ASH calls on the Minister to heed the history of the developer’s latest development endeavours – just across the Hinchinbrook Channel, at Oyster Point.

- Oyster Point is where a King Canute inspired attempt to build breakwater walls has resulted in six months of rock dumping with no end in sight. As the wall is raised, the lower rocks sink ever deeper into the mud.
- Oyster Point is where acid sulphate soils were exposed, allowing sulphuric acid to leach into adjacent lands.
- Oyster Point is where some 10 hectares of coastal forest, listed as “high conservation value” and destined for national park declaration, have died as a result of Port Hinchinbrook related site works.
- Oyster Point is a prime example of the inability of Commonwealth, Queensland and local governments to contain the adverse environmental and aesthetic impacts of development construction activities.

Ms Moorhouse said “The precise reasons for the appalling situation at Oyster Point are not important. What counts now is that the Oyster Point record stands as a continuing saga of poor environmental management with little remediation and no end in sight – so why would anyone expect anything better from this developer, on Hinchinbrook Island?”

“The Hinchinbrook Island Resort has been kept low-key in size and character solely through the philosophy and environmental sensitivity of past lessees, in consultation with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Even so, the resort’s sewage treatment plant is outside the lease area, in the national

park proper. The resort is already too large.”

“Given the history of Oyster Point as an example of Keith Williams’ development ideas, it would be foolish to expect a sudden change of heart and philosophy for the resort on Hinchinbrook Island.”

“Can the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service resist the demands of the developer and the developer lobby within the Queensland Government machinery?”

“We call on the Environment Minister Lindy Nelson Carr to support the QPWS in securing full protection of this unique island national park from inappropriate developer pressures – no transfer of the special lease.”

PLEASE ADD YOUR VOICE –

See pages 4 and 5 for the substance of our submission to the Queensland Environment Minister, the Hon Lindy Nelson Carr, Minister for the Environment. Please write to her at PO Box 15155, CITY EAST QLD or send by email to: EandM@ministerial.qld.gov.au.

Please write to Queensland’s previous environment ministers including:

The Hon Rod Welford, Minister for Education and Training; GPO Box 15033, CITY EAST QLD, 4002; educationandarts@ministerial.qld.gov.au;

The Hon Desley Boyle, Minister for Child Safety, GPO Box 806, BRISBANE, QLD, 4001; ChildSafety@ministerial.qld.gov.au;

The Hon Dean Wells, PO Box 532 DECEPTION BAY QLD 4508 Murrumba@parliament.qld.gov.au

and of course our Premier:

The Hon Peter Beattie, PO Box 15185, CITY EAST, QLD, 4002; premiers@ministerial.qld.gov.au



*Across the world, people think much as we do, in contexts so very different yet so very similar ...
the following story by Sanitsuda Ekachai appeared in the Bangkok Post on 23 June 2005*

Doing one's best for a better world

We all die. What matters is how we live so the world we leave behind is a better place than when we first came into it. While many of us still have to wrangle with this question, Miya Hawa has passed this criteria [sic] with flying colours.

Affectionately called Jaya by her family and friends, the cheerful Muslim mother and dedicated grassroots environmentalist passed away from heart ailment early this month, at her seaside village of Ban Jao Mai in Trang province. She was 47. Miya is survived by her husband Yahed, a fisherman and active grassroots environmentalist, and five children.

My deepest condolences to Yahed, the children, and all fisherfolk at Ban Jao Mai who share Miya's dreams and determination to return life to their once-barren sea.

I first met Miya at Jao Mai in 1994 during my trip to do a story on Tone, a dugong cutie that became the symbol of Trang fisherfolk's conservation movement.

Outgoing and opinionated, Miya - with her trademark toothy smile and contagious laughter - did not fit one bit the submissive stereotype of traditional Muslim women. Through the years, Miya always worked shoulder to shoulder with her husband and other fisherfolk to fight against commercial trawlers which were destroying their seas. But she would cringe at the idea of being called a feminist.

Her reason for rehabilitating the sea grasses and protecting the dugongs in the Trang sea was very simple. "I do it for my children," she said.

You see, Ban Jao Mai, like most other fishing villages in the South, have long cried foul against big trawlers which sweep clean their sea, destroy sea grasses and corals which are nurseries for young marine lives.

Around 1990, the Jao Mai villagers, together with environmentalists from the Yad Fon Foundation, started rehabilitating sea grasses in front of their home village. Only three months after, abundant sea creatures returned. For Miya and other Jao Mai villagers, there was no looking back.

The trawlers, however, remained a threat until a lone, young dugong named Tone became their godsend in 1994.

In a rare phenomenon, Tone came to feed on the sea grasses in front of Jao Mai every day. Tame and trusting, it also allowed humans to touch it. When news spread, people came to visit and learned about Jao Mai fisherfolks' conservation efforts. Ensuing public concern finally forced the authorities to keep trawlers at bay.

"Before, we villagers said we protected the sea to save seagrass and dugongs. Now it's the dugong that protects us," said Miya. "I then must protect Tone for my own children." The little dugong was later killed by trawlers' nets. Its skeleton is still kept at Miya's home as a reminder for her family and her community to

continue their fight against destructive trawlers more vigorously.

Miya was proud of the changes she helped bring about in Ban Jao Mai. The fish have returned. Husbands no longer have to work as hired hands on big trawlers and wives no longer have to leave their children to work in factories in the towns, she once reported.

From helping found fisherfolk's clubs in her village and in Trang province, Miya was also one of the driving forces of the Federation of Small-Scale Fisherfolk to campaign for better fishery practice and conservation policies.

Last year, she was honoured with the Conservationist Mother Award from Mahidol University.

Miya blamed state greed for the vast environmental destruction in the country. The government, she charged, sees nature as a mere resource to be exploited for monetary gain, which is why the authorities shun the poor in favour of the rich and powerful, who destroy nature for their own profit.

"Forget money if it ends up destroying community ties," she once cautioned policy makers.

"Also take good care of the environment. For we cannot live if nature dies."

What if the government still turns a deaf ear? "We then must get organised," she said with deep conviction.

Miya has done her part to leave a better world behind. Have we?

Sanitsuda Ekachai is Assistant Editor, Bangkok Post.

~~~~~ Politics ! ~~~~~

The recent year has been particularly disappointing.

It was difficult enough under the previous Environment Minister (Desley Boyle) to speak to the Minister directly, but when we did we had the impression that the Minister did listen and did pay attention.

This year ASH has had few substantive ministerial responses to our letters, and has not been able to meet the present Minister at all.

The increased sequestering of ministers fails the democratic test. It allows power to be concentrated in the hands of developers and bureaucrats.

Advisers who have seen four ministers come and go have great power to control information and interpret the world of lobbyists and developers to Ministers.

As one minister explained, he read few letters. He merely scanned the response drafted by his adviser and, if it sounded OK (that is, wouldn't get him into trouble), he signed it.

COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT

Throughout the year 2006-2007 ASH committee members have (as usual) been constantly in touch with each other by phone and in physical meetings.

ASH's general bank balance is minimal and our organisational expenditure frugal. The Fighting Fund, dedicated to potential legal and related action to protect Hinchinbrook Island and Channel, remains healthy even after the unsuccessful Breakwalls challenge in the Cairns Supreme Court.

Image recording equipment was purchased in the financial year 2006-2007. The new digital camera, digital video camera and digital video recorder have proved invaluable in producing easily copied still and moving images, including copying of video tape to digital form, with possibility of fast reproduction and email transmission to ministers, departments and media.

Ten years of coastal surveillance have worn out the original outboard motor on our surveillance vessel, the MV *Ian Fairweather*. The replacement (purchased in the financial year 2006-2007) is a new Suzuki 5hp four-stroke motor.

Ken Parker (Cardwell) cares for *Ian Fairweather* and also the visual records. Ken's boating experience, local knowledge of the Hinchinbrook Channel and of things mechanical has been invaluable in keeping ASH armed with relevant information.

Some years ago, on behalf of ASH, Ken Parker made selections of past videotape recordings of direct action and site views. In Sydney he had these copied onto long-lasting Beta tapes. In 2006 ASH had the Beta tapes cleaned in Cairns and copied onto DVD. Committee's intention is to have ALL past video tapes copied onto DVD (which Ken can now do using our new equipment), after which the original tapes and Beta tapes will be lodged with a relevant archival library.

The coming year will require ASH input into the important "FNQ 20-25 Plan" for coastal towns from Cardwell north. Margaret Moorhouse will continue to take our issues to the Conservation Sector Liaison Group (a Wet Tropics Management Authority advisory group).

Margaret Thorsborne, Margaret Moorhouse and Malcolm McLean have agreed to stand again for the positions of President, Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer respectively. No other nominations have been received at this time.

Margaret Thorsborne, Margaret Moorhouse, Mal McLean

EPA won't remove spoil ponds to protect USL Lot 33

The EPA continues to support the disposal of dredge spoil into above-ground "ponds" on development land (Lot 17, adjacent to USL Lot 33).

ASH has made a written objection to the suggestion of a deal contained in a letter from the Minister's office dated 16 Jan 2007:

"Should some form of development on this land [Lot 17] gain approval in future, the disused spoil ponds will no doubt be subject to removal."

These ponds contain spoil from Port Hinchinbrook Stage I works and dredging. These are the responsibility of the developer of Stage I – not Stage II.

The same letter advises that the EPA has, by court order, restricted the use of the spoil ponds adjacent to Lot 33 to one pond approved on the basis of permeability testing.

This relates to acid drainage, not to the diversion of the natural overland freshwater flow. The ponds act as a kilometre-long dyke, diverting fresh water away from Lot 33.

ASH awaits substantive responses from the Minister on the stalled conversion of Lot 33 to national park, the failure to rehabilitate dead and dying areas in Lot 33, and the removal of the spoil ponds.

OBJECTS of the ASSOCIATION (ASH)

To protect and promote the conservation of biodiversity generally, To protect and promote appreciation of the terrestrial, intertidal and to do so specifically in the area approximately bounded to the east by the Great Barrier Reef from approximately Dunk Island in the relevant World Heritage, National Estate, National Park and north southward of the Palm Group of Islands, and to the west by the Marine Park integrity, values, and conservation purpose; Cardwell and Kirrama Ranges from approximately Tully in the north southwards to Ingham.

To protect the ecological, aesthetic and wilderness integrity and intertidal and marine environs described in the objects above, to values of Hinchinbrook Island, Hinchinbrook Passage, the Family and Brook Groups of Islands, Garden and Goold Islands, other nearby islands and the marine area described above;

To protect the ecological, aesthetic and wilderness integrity and environs described in the objects above and consistent with those values of the Cardwell and Kirrama Range district and of the area between these ranges and the sea;

To contribute and to support management planning and review of management planning related to human use of the terrestrial, intertidal and marine environs described in the objects above, to values consistent with the objects above;

To encourage and actively contribute to monitoring and rehabilitation measures of the terrestrial, intertidal and marine

STOP PRESS ----- IMPORTANT NOTICE
re RESORT ON HINCHINBROOK ISLAND

The Environment Minister's office has written (letter dated 3 May 2007) referring us to the Department of Natural Resources and Water (DNRW), which has control of the Special Lease even though it is within the Hinchinbrook Island National Park. The letter also advised the Environment Minister's reliance on the Hinchinbrook Island National Park Management Plan (HINPMP) and the conditions attached to the Lease.

The HINPMP (available on the net - just type in the full title) is silent on some aspects of the lease (eg no reference to water supply or quarrying) and interpretable on others. The current Special Lease conditions are minimal or obsolete, and are no doubt being renegotiated right now by the developer and the DNRW.

An earlier letter (16 Jan 2007) from the Minister's office informed us that the EPA had obtained a court order to force the developer to dump dredge spoil only in a location determined by the EPA. The necessity for court action as a mechanism of control provides little confidence that site works on Hinchinbrook Island would be carried out in accordance with management plans or lease conditions.

Please write urgently to the Minister for NRW, expressing your concern about the future of Hinchinbrook Island and Channel under this proposed access monopoly:

The Honourable Craig Wallace
Minister for Natural Resources and Water
PO Box 15456,
CITY EAST **QLD 4002**

Ministerial email address: NRW@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Electoral email address: Thuringowa@parliament.qld.gov.au;

phone : (07) 3896 3688

Fax : (07) 3210 6214