

TAMBORINE MOUNTAIN PROGRESS ASSOCIATION INC.

“Protecting the quality of living on Tamborine Mountain”

30th June, 2015

Biodiversity Strategy submission

C/o The C.E.O.,
Scenic Rim Regional Council,
P.O. Box 25,
BEAUDESERT, Qld. 4285

Dear Sirs,

Scenic Rim Regional Council is to be commended for its initiative in compiling a far reaching strategy to preserve the wide array of biodiversity species found in the shire. Home to world heritage national parks and widespread flora and fauna, the shire's green image is indeed unique and it is essential to preserve this valuable but fragile component of a very large growing area.

The Draft Biodiversity Strategy is comprehensive and should cover and protect as much as possible the wealth we have in the shire.

There is, however, a major flaw in the Draft.

The Strategy takes an overall view of the shire. The shire is made up of distinctive sections, and whilst areas such as proclaimed national parks are readily identifiable in terms of biodiversity when decisions for change are made, other areas are not.

One such area is Tamborine Mountain.

The Draft lists population growth and development areas as “regional centres including Beaudesert, Tamborine Mountain and Boonah” which “require increasingly larger amounts of land to accommodate new residents, industrial areas.....”

Tamborine Mountain ??

Tamborine Mountain is a small plateau. There is no reticulated water, no prospect of any widespread infrastructure & is widely known by both residents and the annual stream of about one million tourists as a scenic semi-rural area. It certainly is not urban or a regional centre. Nor is there a possibility for increasingly larger amounts of land for further residents.

Where did this idea spring from?

In SRRC Draft Planning Scheme, Tamborine Mountain is listed as one of three urban areas, alongside Beaudesert and Boonah. Consultants drawing up the Scheme mistakenly referred to Tamborine Mountain as “urban”. Whilst a section of Tamborine Mountain comes under SEQ Regional Plan as an urban footprint, the whole mountain certainly does not.

This urban footprint on Tamborine Mountain is a mistake in itself. When State Government was drawing up (in a hurry) its regional plan, the newly appointed head of the Office of Urban Management (Lindsay Enright) actually visited Tamborine Mountain to try to understand the qualities which make each community distinctive. Mr. Enright himself came from North Queensland and had never heard of Tamborine Mountain.

OUM seconded planners across the state to help meet the short deadline imposed by State Government. Other areas, such as west of Brisbane, became a heavy priority, and as observed by the senior planner of Beaudesert Shire Council at the time – “Tamborine mountain was just a blimp on the horizon”.

This was in spite of strong submissions by Beaudesert Shire Council and a coalition of eight Tamborine Mountain organizations, pinpointing preferred urban footprint areas to be centered in and near the mountain's three village centres. The proposed SEQRP footprint appeared to be a haphazard pink colouring of sections of a map from anywhere.

The mountain's urban footprint in the final version was reduced but not enough and much of the mountain remained outside the footprint and is semi-rural.

Herein lies the problem. Decisions are being made, not only by Council staff, but by outside consultants and advisers. People are not being alerted to special characteristics of areas not as clearly defined as Scenic Rim's national parks. One such area is Tamborine Mountain with resultant inappropriate outcomes for protection of Tamborine Mountain's biodiversity.

More than a decade ago, the Howard Federal Government allocated some of the money from the sale of Telstra to a specially formed Tamborine Mountain committee given a brief to formulate a strategy for protection of the mountain's escarpment rich biodiversity. Its three year span produced the comprehensive Tamborine Mountain Escarpment Management Strategy (the Watson Report) and the employment of an environmental officer (mainly responsible for much of the Land for Wildlife agreements).

The report found 60% to 80% of flora and fauna found in the Gold Coast region was represented on Tamborine Mountain's escarpment.

This escarpment management committee, at the end of its three year term, morphed into Landcare.

Currently being processed through the conditioning stage is a recently approved development proposal for an extreme sports entertainment business for thrill seekers on 500 acres of Tamborine Mountain's eastern escarpment.

Situated in the narrow Guanaba Gorge valley, the land adjoins Tamborine National Park and Cedar Creek. In spite of approx. 650 resident objections (28 for) the Development Application received Council approval. The land sits in the Escarpment Protection Precinct of the Tamborine Mountain Zone where this use is not consistent. All proposed activities are located either elsewhere on Tamborine Mountain (Thunderbird Park) or nearby.

Speed bike downhill trails are to criss cross the whole area, with 4WD's ferrying riders back up the slopes. There is to be camping for up to 300 people (max. 6 weeks), with designated areas for campfires. Zip lines, canopy experiences, restaurant (with bar) are added to attract clients. Historically, no level of conditioning can avert a disaster generally, much less on this scale.

And the consequences for the mountain escarpment biodiversity ? fragmentation of various levels of forest and remnant growth, noise, light, fire danger (excessive on the mountain slopes) and general loss of habitat.

The Escarpment Protection Area in the 1997 Development Control Plan is described as continuous forest cover with rock outcrops and water courses and steep vegetated slopes. The preferred dominant use of land in this area is the maintenance of biodiversity through the conservation of flora and fauna and retention of any existing functions such as wildlife corridors.

It is the catchment area of the headwaters of Guanaba Creek. Expert advice is that after a severe rain events (not infrequent on Tamborine Mountain), scoured up and widened downhill speed tracks will lose surface silt and sediment and via the creek this will be visible in Moreton Bay within two days.

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Within the proposed development site there are eight species of threatened flora; three vegetation communities scheduled as critically endangered; ten threatened species of bird; three amphibian species classed as threatened and four species of threatened mammal. At risk are our vulnerable koalas, Albert's lyrebird and the Richmond Birdwing butterfly.

Residents are at a loss to explain how such a wealth of biodiversity could have been missed by council officers faced with an incredibly substandard development application.

And we haven't covered the mountain's aquifer depletion problem and its consequences for the Tamborine National Park.

If Scenic Rim Regional Council wishes to be viewed by the public as a responsible council keen to protect its valuable assets, its officers need to be alerted to sensitive areas (with neon lights if possible) scattered throughout the shire, not just Tamborine Mountain.

Attached is a letter from a visitor to Tamborine Mountain in the current Tamborine Times. He points to mountain residents' deep sense of mistrust and a perception of divisiveness when it comes to Council.

Residents are currently preparing to challenge Scenic Rim Regional Council's decision on the Guanaba Experience in the Planning and Environment Court. So much for the Mayor's statement of Council working proactively to preserve and enhance the shire's unique natural environment "in partnership with the community".

Errors which are compounded by various Schemes and Strategies lead to actions by Council described by a Planning and Environment Court judge as "inexplicable and incomprehensible".

Scenic Rim shire contains much to be proud of and admire. Its semi-rural biodiversity rich brand is strongly supported by all its residents. It's all there if done properly.

The Biodiversity Draft is very well compiled and bearing in mind that the devil is in the detail and the whole is the sum of all its distinct parts, it promises to secure a shire for future residents proud of their area and grateful to a Council which, like our pioneers, thought to preserve a shire component fast diminishing across the world.

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Lockey,
Hon. President,
Tamborine Mountain Progress Association

cc-s SRRC councillors