

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED BLUE HOLE RESERVE DRAFT LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

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Contents

- 1.1 Background of consultation
- 1.2 Purpose of consultation
- 1.3 Who was consulted
- 1.4 Methods of consultation
- 1.5 Summary of management issues identified during consultation
- Appendix 1 Letter to Stakeholders
- Appendix 2 List of people consulted
- Appendix 3 Summaries of issues identified by major stakeholders
- Appendix 4 Media release re consultation process
- Appendix 5 Flyer distributed throughout the Daintree locality

1.1. Background of consultation

The consultation for the draft report relates to the area including Flame Tree Road, and part of Cooper Creek known as the ‘Blue Hole’.

The Blue Hole is the name given to a deep pool situated on a bend in Coopers Creek, at the end of Flame Tree Road, Diwan. The place has important aesthetic and environmental values, the name refers to the colour of the water, which is very clear and appears quite blue. The planning area is 1.394 hectares in size and includes Flame Tree Road, which is 9990 square metres. The road currently provides the sole mode of access to residents of Lot 51SR76, to the north of Coopers Creek, and to residents of Lot 180SR739774. The area north of the southern bank of Cooper Creek is inside the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

With the growth of the tourism industry and the increase in rates of settlement in the Daintree/Cape Tribulation area, increasing numbers of visitors and locals have been attracted to the Blue Hole for swimming, particularly in the wet season, when it is inadvisable to swim in the sea.

The Blue Hole site has incurred deterioration of the surrounding vegetation due to the increasing usage of the area. For the traditional owners of the area, the Kuku Yalanji people, the site has particularly high special cultural significance, and they believe that the current level of recreational use is inconsistent with the protection of cultural and environmental values.

The Douglas Shire Council have put a proposal to the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DRME) to:

- permanently close Flame Tree Road;
- create Lot 1 SP 144713
- establish a Reserve for Environmental, Cultural and Recreational purposes; and
- establish easement to provide residential access to Lot 51 and Lot 180
- Become Trustees for the proposed Reserve

Therefore a Land Management Plan for the proposed Reserve has been prepared on behalf of Douglas Shire Council (the Trustees), pursuant to the *Land Act 1994 Section 31*, under the control of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DNRME), for the following reasons:

- the proposed reserve has sensitive/significant environmental and cultural values

- the current land use/s are largely unplanned or unmanaged;
- some members of the community have strong views on how these land and waters should be used.

1.2 Purpose of consultation

A community consultation is required by law under the Land Act 1994. The purpose of this preliminary community consultation was:

- To ensure stakeholders have accurate information about the proposed change of tenure
- To enable stakeholders to participate in the process of developing a land management plan for the Blue Hole
- To identify the major issues that need to be considered in regard to the proposed change of tenure
- To identify possible solution/strategies in regard to the proposed change of tenure

1.3 Who was consulted

The terms of reference for the project set out, as a starting point, that all relevant stakeholders be identified and consulted, including: local, state and federal government bodies such as Douglas Shire Council; Wet Tropics Management Authority; Department of Natural Resources Mines and Energy; landholders in the immediate and nearby vicinities; the regional and local conservation sector (Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, CAFNEC; Daintree Planning Group; Daintree Task Force and Daintree Rainforest Foundation); Cape York Land Council; Kuku Yalanji Traditional Owners; local tourist operators and associations, and accommodation providers.

(See Appendix 2 for actual names of people consulted).

1.4 Methods of Consultation

Letter of invitation to all stakeholders

Letter headed invitations explaining the consultation process were mailed or emailed to all interested stakeholders

A copy of this letter is included in Appendix 1.

Recorded Interviews

Recorded/ Face-to face Interviews

With the permission of the interviewees, taped interviews were conducted for obtaining accuracy of information.

Face to face interviews have been conducted with 20 major stakeholders including all of the immediate landholders in the vicinity; Department of Natural Resources; Douglas Shire Council; the Conservation sector; Cape York Land Council; Traditional Owners, and Daintree residents.

Meetings

Before this project, on May 8th, 2004 twenty-four people, including the Traditional Owners of the Julanwarra clan of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people attended a meeting at Blue Hole in response to their concerns about the cultural degradation of the Blue Hole. They identified their cultural heritage values, and actions to maintain environmental and cultural values of the Blue Hole. A document was produced that outlined management plan proposals from a Traditional Owner perspective.

The Kuku Yalangi identified Blue Hole as a place of cultural significance, and wanted to see protection of their cultural values. Documentation of this meeting is held by the Cape York Land Council and is not to be made publicly available.

In this current project, at the request of the Traditional Owners, a meeting was held at Diwan Community Hall on April 13, 2005 for an initial consultation, and minutes were recorded. 13 people of Kuku Yalangi attended.

Telephone interviews

8 telephone interviews were conducted with landholders, and local residents have been consulted with those consulted who are not within travelling distance.

Public Consultation

- Approval was given by Douglas Shire council to place a public notice of consultation in the Port Douglas And Mossman Gazette, and the Cairns Post. The notice appeared in the Public Notices section of the Port Douglas And Mossman Gazette on , and in Cairns Weekend Post of 09 April 2005 (see appendix for copy of notice).
- A flyer was distributed in the Daintree area to advertise the consultation (refer Appendix No ..).

1.5 Summary of Management Issues Identified During Consultations

The following concerns were identified during consultation:

Loss of Kuku Yalanji cultural values

- The Eastern Kuku Yalanji people are the traditional owners of this part of the Wet Tropics
- The custodians of this place are women from the Kuku Yalanji clan within whose traditional country it is located, namely the Solomon and Johnston families.
- According to traditional custom other women, including other Kuku Yalanji women, cannot go there without permission and men may visit the place (with appropriate permission) but not use it.
- The traditional custodians consider that the Blue Hole is not being treated respectfully because of inappropriate activities that have been and are still occurring. Such activities include: horse riding; swimming; erecting a swing on trees; barbecues; drinking alcohol; smoking and dropping cigarette butts; littering; washing of cars and dogs in the creek, and parking of cars in the creek (occasionally blocking access to Lot 51).
- Inappropriate activities and a lack of management of Blue Hole is leading to cultural degradation according to the Kuku Yalanji people consulted.
- Concern was also expressed by Kuku Yalanji people about whether future developments such as boardwalks are appropriate.
- One of the aspirations expressed by those Kuku Yalanji people who were consulted is for the area to be managed by Aboriginal people from this locality.

Loss of Environmental values

- Many of the people consulted recognised that the Daintree area and specifically catchments such as Cooper Creek, are have exceptionally high biodiversity values, incomparable to any other areas in Australia.
- Many people were concerned about the increasing numbers of visitors to the site and lack of management which led to problems such as litter, unmanaged informal trails creating a high level of soil erosion under roots along track; environmental weeds not only in the proposed reserve but through out the entire catchment; and water quality.

Loss of Recreational Values

- Several people were concerned that the Blue Hole would be closed off completely and that there would be no swimming allowed during the summer months.

Increasing levels of visitation

- Many people expressed concern with regard to increasing numbers of people accessing the Blue Hole. Some of the blame for this was considered to be due to tourist buses bringing in large groups of people. In addition it was believed that a number of backpacker hostels and other accommodation houses were recommending the Blue Hole as a destination to independent travellers.
- Several people (including one accommodation provider) recommended that tourist accommodation providers should be informed of the cultural and environmental degradation issues and advised not to recommend the Blue Hole as a destination to their visitors.

Alternative swimming holes as a management solution

Several people consulted had ideas regarding the management of alternative swimming holes to reduce the number of visitors to the Blue Hole:

- If Lot 179 was bought back, Little Cooper Creek could be turned into a swimming hole, has all year round swimming
- Hutchinson's creek also has a potential swimming hole - a part of the buy back blocks
- Heritage Lodge

Appendix 1: Letter of Invitation to Stakeholders for Consultation



JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

Ms Ros Anderson

Research Officer

School of Tropical Environment Studies and
Geography

Telephone: (07) 40421696

Facsimile: (07) 4042

Email: rosalind.anderson@jcu.edu.au

23/03/2005

Dear Stakeholder,

Re Blue Hole Management Plan

As a representative of the conservation sector in the Daintree, I would like to invite you to a consultation meeting to facilitate the development of a land management plan for the area known as the Blue Hole.

Background To The Consultation

The Douglas Shire Council approached the School of Tropical Environmental Science at James Cook University to investigate the management issues surrounding Blue Hole and to prepare a management plan to give effect to the State's offer to gazette the area as reserve for Cultural, Environmental and Recreational (CER) purposes.

They provided some funding for a Research Officer to investigate the natural, cultural and recreational values of the Blue Hole, to facilitate the development of a land management plan. Consultation is a necessary part of this process, in accordance with the requirements of the Land Act 1994.

Who Is Undertaking The Consultation

Ros Anderson Bsc, MA, Research Officer, TESAG, J.C.U. Cairns

Purpose Of Consultation

To enable stakeholders to participate in the process of developing a land management plan.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

A two stage process

1. Pre-draft Stage

Purpose

- To identify the major issues that need to be considered in the development of a land management plan
- To identify possible solutions/strategies to consider in the development of a land management plan
- To ensure stakeholders have sufficient information about the land management plan process

➤ Desirable Outcomes

- Identification of main issues
- Identification of possible strategies/solutions
- Resolution of differences

2. Draft Stage

A draft management plan is drawn up, and stakeholders consulted for feedback.

Methods of Consultation

The terms of reference for the project set out, as a starting point, that all relevant stakeholders be identified and consulted, including: landholders in the immediate and nearby vicinities; local and state government bodies (Wet Tropics Management Authority, Department of Natural Resources, Douglas Shire Council); conservation sector (CAFNEC, Daintree Task Force and Daintree Rainforest Foundation); Traditional Owners (the Kuku Yalanji people, individuals to be identified by the Cape York Land Council), and the local residents.

I propose to ensure that the consultation methods be as flexible as possible to facilitate the greatest possible involvement of stakeholders. To this end, I shall be contacting relevant individuals and arranging consultation by whatever method is most suitable for them. I envisage that I will attend several meetings with conservation sector representatives in the Daintree. I will also be ensuring that all parties are kept informed and are able to have input by other methods such as phone and email.

I would be grateful if you could please contact me on 4042 1696 or email rosalind.anderson@jcu.edu.au to arrange a mutually convenient time. I look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Regards

Ros Anderson.

Appendix 2: List of people consulted during the preparation of this Management Plan

Main Stakeholders Consulted

Douglas Shire Council

Terry Melchert , Chief Executive Officer,
Mike Berwick, Mayor,
Bob Jago, Environmental Officer,
Kevin Shellard, Engineering Section,

Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy

Phil Boulton,
Desley Luxton, Senior Lands Officer
Ian Sinclair, Land Planner,

Cape York Land Council

Jane Holden, Project Officer,

Traditional Owners of Jalunwarra clan of Kuku Yalangi

Wet Tropics Management Agency

Bill Carroudos, Senior Land Management Officer, Area Conservation,
Campbell Clarke,
Josh Gibson, Executive Director

Conservation Sector

John Rainbird, Co-ordinator, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre
Chris Bennett, Daintree Forest Foundation

Neighbouring Landholders

Rosemary Hill, Lot 51,
Henry and Sheila Michel Lot 51,
Neil and Prue Hewett Lot 52,
Mr S. Cole and Ms T. Cole Lot 236,
J.Gulbin, Lot177, Turpentine Rd, Diwan
Dean Jewell, Turpentine Road
Mr Lot 180

Tourism

Daintree Cape Tribulation Tourism Association
Stephen Cole, Proprietor, Heritage Lodge

Other consultees

Allan Sheather (Conservationist and local resident)
Barbara Maslen (Conservationist and local resident)
Phillip Smith (Conservationist and local resident)
Hugh Spencer (Conservationist and local resident)
Marina Gurtzis (local resident)
Tina Alderson (QWPS)
Bruce Wannan (EPA)
Keith Smith Environmental Protection Agency

Appendix 3: Summaries of issues and Concerns to Major Stakeholders

WTMA

10/03/2005

Issues for WTMA

- Environmental degradation evidenced by site inspections. However they are localised impacts.
- The WTMA nature based tourist strategy 2000, recognises the environmental degradation occurring at Blue Hole
- Resolution of tenure issues associated with public access
- The site should not be promoted for large scale tourism purposes.
- Site should be managed to enable visitors to enjoy passive recreation without destroying its natural values
- Degradation of Blue Hole by local use is no greater than natural erosion, such as flooding

Preferred management strategies

- Close road to vehicular access by providing a locked gate
- Do not advocate boardwalks on the grounds of spoiling the natural values
- Formalising a car park with gravel, signs and bollards
- Interpretive Signage at roads – informing prospective visitors that the Blue Hole is part of World Heritage Area; no dogs; no litter; explanation of cultural values.
- Prefer interpretive signage to be located away from the site itself because to protect the natural and cultural values
- Site hardening may be required from proposed gate to Blue Hole area where roots are exposed, a containment strategy, so that people do not walk over other vegetation, so they are directed to walk on one track only
- Benefits of site hardening include arresting current rate of erosion
- Gravel could be sourced from local area which would not affect integrity of natural values if it washed away occasionally

Department of Natural Resources and Water

25/02/05

- Phil Boulton met with Ros Anderson and represented the views of the Department
- If reserve to be gazetted for cultural purposes, this needs to be justified.
- DNRMW identified recreational use and need,.
- Need to clearly document so that the public can see how this area is going to be managed, and how each of the 3 uses *can co-exist*, so that if a member of the public wants to go swimming, they are clearly informed about what, if any, restrictions are in place and what they are required to do
- Draft should provide very clear direction on how the 3 uses are going to be managed.
- However, the access to the property needs to be clearly spelt out, where it is going to be
- Trouble has been conflicting interests, is 'public need', rather than individual needs.
- Complexity, even of access issues.
- Concern with the issue of how to explain to the public that a landholder can take his car down the track, and cross the creek, and not do environmental damage, but not members of the public.
- Access issues for Lot 180.
- The terms and conditions of restricted access need to be linked to Easement Agreement.
- Those terms of access will be considered as Secondary Uses, and their terms and conditions, restrictions etc. set out in the Easement Agreement, which will set out the width of the Easement, where it will be etc. Will be set out clearly their rights as property owners, that they do enjoy dual access as their rights of property owners, so that the public can read and understand those Lot 51 owners access terms and conditions, and also the reasons for those terms and conditions
- Management plan needs to address the future intended developments of the area.
- Signage to address people putting up swings or penalties could be addressed in plan
- What is acceptable? What is not acceptable? This has to be spelt out clearly and reasons provided.

Meeting with Bob Jago, DSC Environmental Officer on 16/09/05 at Blue Hole

Went to Blue Hole. Met also with neighbours Pru and Neil Hewett on their property.

Meeting with John Rainbird, Cafnec (stakeholder):

March 2005

CAFNEC had previously submitted a points of management for the Blue Hole, and a combined signed agreement between CAFNEC, Rosemary Hill, CYLC
Blue Hole was important for a number of reasons:

Environmentally important because of flora

Culturally significant for Kuku Yalangi so it needs proper management

Unique formation- aesthetic

Geological significance

Freshwater animals- turtles, catfish

From an environmentalist perspective, important to ensure its values are adequately managed and protected.

Part of the problem of the blue Hole is that lies at the juncture of several jurisdictions eg it borders on the Hewett's property Lot 51. Because it is a waterway, it involves the DNRMW, it involves WTMA, and then the issue of the road access which involves the DSC. There's a no of individuals and orgs that need to be aligned in order to get some proper management.

It seems now that while access to Blue Hole is not widely advertised it seems easy available to anyone who wants to go there. There's a road leading up to it, you can see there's a significant amount of traffic. People speaking to people who have live there a long time, they have noticed degradation. It would be good to get photos. Not everyone who goes there is environmentally sensitive so one would expect trampling. Swimming cannot be great for the freshwater ecology.

Been an issue of driving further, and crossing the causeway, and parking in the water.

The main problem seems to be who should have access to the area, and how do you manage that access?

From CAFNECS perspective, they prefer the option of restricting access to it.

I think it's a sensitive area, not an area that would cope with e.g. access to commercial tour operators. I think there's already a lot of local people using the Blue Hole, so if you have tour operators as well, its going to impact much more significantly, especially on the banks, and the waterway.

I've heard there are still tour operators who take people up there. It's only going to increase, cos it's a spectacular site, most beautiful, natural phenomenon. So, not an area that can cope with tourism, particularly people jumping into the Blue Hole.

I'm not keen for hard engineering solutions to manage traffic, because it's an area of great cultural significance to the Kuku Yalangi people, and that should be respected. Not a boardwalk, not appropriate cos once you do that, you still have people that ignore those barriers.

No need for site hardening, just cut down the numbers that go there.

There are many beautiful places in the Wet Tropics. I don't think they should all be exposed to anyone who wants to see them.

Putting in infrastructure just encourages people to go there, then you end up with secondary complications, then more engineering solutions. Just need to see others. End up with a great visual blight.

I think the best solution is to keep it quiet, and local people that go there, they need to understand that it is an important site, that they are careful when they visit, but must exclude commercial tourism as an option.

Address the issue of access to the area by putting a locked gate near the beginning of the road, and stop people from driving up the road, and across the water.

Rather than just providing a solution to current impact, try and reduce the impact so you don't need those kinds of solutions.

So, short term strategy is to reduce the numbers of people who go to the Blue Hole, and for people who do go there make them aware of being careful while they are there of the sensitivity of the area.

It's something the Council need to take on board. Most of them will be local. Accommodation providers need to tell tourists about the Blue Hole. Closing it off altogether is going a bit too far.

It is part of the landscape for people who live up there; many people who live up there recognise its very special, and they go there with respect. That's O.K.

Short term is to reduce numbers

Long term is to create awareness and understanding for people up there, particularly people who areas sending tour groups

Once you've got an accurate handle on how much environmental degradation has happened so far, you will have a better idea of what the consequences of too much visitation will be.

It's one of those little jewels in the Wet tropics, not for opening up to Tourism. It will destroy the spirit of the place (putting infrastructure there)

Only people allowed to drive down are the landholders who live there.

Gate needs to be say 30 metres down the road so people can pull off the road, so that it does not draw attention.

There is no adequate parking space. Maybe they need a permit to go there.

Signage at the actual site, or on the way, telling them about the cultural and environmental significance, asking them to respect that and to behave accordingly.

The bottom line is protection of environmental and cultural values, so if there is still problems they may have to revise their strategies, or reclassify accordingly, as a longer term strategy.

Blue Hole is one of the areas that should be allowed to just to be, if that's what's best for the area. If it can cope with some visitation, then O.K, but not if it can't.

Daintree Rainforest Foundation–DRF

Ros Anderson spoke with the Director of the Daintree Rainforest Foundation, a not for profit, environmental organization. DRF are concerned with the conservation of the entire lower waters of the Daintree region, and the Blue Hole falls in that area, and has been a 'festering sore' for many years now, and we would like to see it resolved.

The area has a no of sensitivities, not just environmental values or flora values. It is located on Coopers Creek, an area of unique ecological significance. It has significant cultural value to Kuku Yalangi.

It is popular, it's a great swimming hole, haven't visited it myself out of cultural deference, a woman's place. I was an interpretive guide with the Hewetts in 1995, 1996, 1997, walk passed the Blue Hole, and over that 3 years saw serious degradation. It was popular with the locals, but it was being promoted as somewhere to visit by accommodation providers. Was being used by backpackers as a bathroom. Then it was promoted as a place for relaxation. At least 4 bus companies were taking busloads down, so it didn't take long for the riparian vegetation to be totally destroyed. Especially the southern banks, but also the northern bank where swings were put.

Access of the easement needs to be resolved.

No rehab work done, and continues to be degraded, because of trampling of vegetation leading to erosion during flooding. Cooper Creek is highly prone to flooding.

The actual usage by the community has increased in direct relation to the settlement of the area, the Daintree lowlands. It is a popular local swimming hole.

As a local resident, I respect cultural significance, and stay away.

I know with discussion with people from within the community, and discussions my son has at school about going to the Blue Hole, it's still actively used, but there's been management plan to manage this use.

My overriding concern would be the assessment by the T.O's.

I don't think they want to exclude everybody.

I would say it would need to be closed off altogether for a while in order for rehab to take place. Germination of banks etc. That would take a couple of years to take effect.

Boardwalk, interpretive signage of the values of the place. Then exclude or leave it optional to swim.

In that period of 2 years, there should be education/information about the environmental and cultural values to the local community, but by singling out a place you make people curious.

Locked gate- not much success. E.g Cow Bay.

Locks had to be changed, and the gate was taken off, so now it's open access.

If the site is to be taken off the map, there needs to be a road closure (longer term strategy)

Enforcement strategies need to be administratively effective, do not need constant patrolling etc.

Site hardening does not work because it gets washed away.

1st choice would be to close access, shut road.

Vandalise the road

Accepts the T.O's views.

Problem of community perception. Hewetts take people to Blue Hole further down, and cause environmental degradation themselves by taking people on walks, and exposing roots themselves. so it looks like

They could at least only allow access to the stream. They could fence off all of the rest of the embankment leading down to the Blue Hole, and start rehabilitation works. That would not interfere with any other management decision.

Context

Other local spots. e.g Hutchinson's Creek, a popular local spot, that's got vehicular access, and Cow Bay beach (there are Friends of Cow Bay) to delay Native Title claim

Taken off the tourist map, but they get identified in government publications.

Blue Hole serves as a model for how other places are the subject of conflicting interests.

Local community need to be more aware of cultural values. Strategy of closing it down for rehab purposes would be something community could understand rather than because of cultural significance. While this land is still crown land, cultural significance will not play a primary role.

Procrastination is a problem. Nothing stopping them from rehabilitating.

Another issue is the mouth of Cooper Creek where there is boat launching access

Locals go to easy access places, not difficult, and drops off the map by tour operators.

Doesn't want a road, talking about a boardwalk instead of the road!!!!

Further up, there is a causeway, on the other side is a swimming hole, provides opportunity for recreation.

Immediate action

Rehabilitate the embankments and riparian now. But there are natural timing for areas for planting etc.

Will support T.O's

Wants a real solution. Not an enforcement solution. There are safety issues around locked gates. What if there is a flood?

Solutions that take care of themselves.

There are not enough people to monitor it (unless T.O's had some management as in their own monitoring it)

Context of local community vandalising any signs, gates that would be erected, and not enough manpower to enforce it.

Daintree 'local', and conservationist 20.04.2005

Blue Hole is an example of appalling mismanagement, mishandling, a political football

"A failure to engage".

Provides a Context

Daintree is a settlement rather than a community. Fragmented. A survivalist, isolationist mentality. They are not informed very well. There are no common points of reference. There is a legacy of bureaucratic orgs going to people telling them this is how it is, we know best, e.g Wet Tropics Management Agency of 15 years ago. History of Hewetts issues with the WTMA and the EPA which explains their obsession and persistence with management of the Blue Hole. The govt. gave them a hard time over permits etc.

Blue Hole is a microcosm of broader group dynamics.

Hewett's perspective is personal interest

Issues

Would be a nice swimming hole if the use density was extremely low

Water hole access is an issue. (Ashram uses it) Not many accessible swimming holes. (easy access)

It is part of a permanent water course which is very pretty, part of an eco-system which is very fragile

Aesthetic values

Flora fauna animals

It is part of Cooper Creek which is World Heritage, fragile, unique area

Environmental degradation, it has been seriously trashed on the south side. It needs to be consistent that both sides are equally protected

The cultural significance should be more clearly defined and explained in a direct way

Inappropriate land use on the southern side because of clearing

Riparian zone is not protected, at risk from Lot 177 to 180 on the southern banks because they are freehold.

Immediate solution

Locked gate with pedestrian access. Need unrippable gates, and substantial bollards to prevent vehicular access, and being pulled out of the ground (Avalon Place as an example and Cow Bay)

Ongoing solution

Indigenous involvement in rehabilitation of the area, ongoing management, and presence.(e.g weed work) maybe once a week.

Would need to be trained (they already have T.O's trained as Rangers.

Eliminate parking area, purely walking

20 metres up the road a Car Bay with 2-3 cars initially but then eventually get rid of it.

Lack of access to swimming . Current ones are Hutchinsons by the bridge

Long term strategies

Close off completely

Turn Flame Tree Rd into a walking track

Allow road to be revegetated

Education of local people (e.g Ashram where people go swimming in the Blue Hole)

To have a continued presence

Possibilities of 2 alternative locations for swimming in the area

- If Lot 179 was bought back, Little Cooper Creek could be turned into a swimming hole, has all year round swimming
- Hutchinson's creek is a potential swimming hole a part of the buy back blocks

The current one is Hutchinson's Creek(near the bridge)

Henry and Sheila Michel (Lot 51 Landholders)

Their interest is

Access issues

Specialness

Concerns about environmental degradation

Blue Hole is on the map now.

Been there 25 years, seen changes, trees have come down, vulnerable to erosion, over and above natural erosion

Would like to see a reduction in the number of people visiting the Blue Hole and more control over where they walk. It's been a cumulative effect. The number of people varies. Sometimes 5-10 cars per day, cars parking

where the car park is, some down right at the creek, at the part where they cross. 20-30 visitors per day.

Constant people. The pool goes black at certain times.

Environmental issues

It's not just the Blue Hole itself, but all the little ferns and delicate things other flora growing on the banks, and that's what gets destroyed. People don't even know that they're missing.

They've observed definite changes.

Access Issues

Council has policy of not maintaining the road. No other access. The easement on Lot 52's property is not appropriate because it goes through rainforest. Flame Tree Rd is their only access.

Acceptable Solutions

Have a gate to keep people out. Would accept a locked gate. Would deter people.
Signs to inform people. Signage to inform people about private property, and their access.
Reduce no's of people.
Better protection needed, so prepared to change access arrangements.
What happens when the creek floods? Car would be left on other side of the creek.
Cultural Awareness needed
There was a crocodile sign, and it was taken.

Rosemary Hill (Lot Lot 51 landholder)

Meeting with Rosemary on 04/03/2005

Summary of meeting

Issues concerning Blue Hole

She supports closure of Flame Tree Road on the grounds that there is no necessity for road use from both a Property owner access perspective
Supports the preservation of natural and cultural values

As part owner of Lot 51, closing Flame Tree Road is not an issue for her. She can still gain access to her property.

Issues (while Flame Tree Rd is still open)

Parking –blocking her access to property 51
People b-b queing
Car washing
These are inappropriate uses of the area.
Not the right place to develop as a swimming hole

Environmental Issues

Rare and threatened species
Uniqueness (geological structure)
Trampling /Trashing
Vegetation Death
Creek banks exposed
Pollution from urine in water/ dogs in creek/ oil and petrol/BBQ's

Soil erosion

Low nutrient

Affects micro-climate

Not suitable for site hardening as it is likely to be washed away in the wet season (safety issue for public use?)
also site hardening would create more impact in a high protection defined area (could the environmental assessment /audit address this issue?)

Blue Hole has reached its limits for acceptable change

Visitation to be reduced

Blue Hole turns black and stinks in dry years,

- Richard Pearson JCU- study available to show comparative fragility of low nutrient area and the impacts?

Cultural issues

Sacred site for Yalanji people

Solutions/ Strategies

Close Flame Tree Road (rationale being, will stop overuse and inappropriate usage such as the previously listed issues, but will still be accessible by walking)

Put a padlocked gate on it with a key

Signage up at the pool, not the road, to discourage tourism. However the signs need to be maintained

Cultural Heritage Values

Spoke to Dr S.Pannell CRC Rainforest

She suggested that the project could be scoped in stages; the consultation and gathering of data and evidence is the first part with positive recommendation for next steps. Could include recommendation for Indigenous management of cultural heritage.(Cultural Heritage Management Plan)

Marina Gurtzis (speaking as a local resident of 15 years who is interested in conservation (she is a tour guide))

Wants to see protection of environmental and cultural values.

It is a special place, beautiful (aesthetics)

In her 15 years has seen environmental degradation, and site is currently environmentally degraded.

Soil is compacted down, walking tracks have been made. It is trampled.

Do not want to see commercial tour operators

Management Options (ideal)

Closed down permanently and revegetated.

Supports Yalanji claims

People need to be made aware of cultural significance

No boardwalk because it encourages tourists and visitors, and then that leads to more infrastructure and banks will disintegrate.. There are other boardwalks in the area to direct tourists to

Water Quality – swimming is not good for the freshwater ecology. What about the fish, turtles, eel already in it? Crocodile issue (it is breeding territory). In the wet season could be an issue.

Observations of Tourist Use

About 3-4 years ago, in the peak tourist season, there were 4 wheel drives and cars, 30-40 people.

numbers should be discouraged, and made only accessible to small numbers.

Signs disappear (the crocodile sign disappeared)

Issues with a locked gate is that it is an excuse for locals to vandalise it. She mentions Thorntons Beach

Strategies

Limit vehicle access

Limit Parking Bay

Defined Parking Space

Encourage resorts and accommodation providers to tell people about other swimming pools in the area. E.g Wilderness Lodge

Masons

Any laws that are created will be hard to police, unless there is a regular presence (Yalanji?)

So need creative solutions e.g Cassowary Care could revegetate (what about Yalanji being involved?)

Allan Sheather, Barbara Maslen, Phillip Smith 20.04.2005

Members of Cassowary Care and locals

Values

Flora

Recreational- Locals perspective

Historically has been used as a swimming hole. There are few other places to go. Limited opportunities.

Dogs and horses should not be allowed to go there.

Strategies

Need a balanced approach

Declare it a reserve

Signs at the hole

Local government by- laws

Explanations

Should be no walking tracks. Close riparian sections

No tourist infrastructure

Closing it off altogether is neither achievable or practical.

Reduction in numbers

Achievable protection

Stephen Cole Landholder Lot 236 Daintree Cape Tribulation Heritage Lodge

Long term lease for 25 years so keen to preserve environmental and cultural values

Issues/Values

It is a delicate area, important to minimise degradation effects

Cultural values should also be respected

Strategies

He is supportive of a plan that protects these values. E,g if the strategy is not to tell guests about the Blue Hole, they will comply with that.

Education/Awareness

Signage to explain cultural and environmental significance

Appendix 4

Media Release for Blue Hole Consultation Process

Douglas Shire Council has applied to change the tenure of the Blue Hole from Road Reserve to Environmental, Cultural, and Recreational Reserve. In order to do this they have approached James Cook University to investigate the natural, cultural and recreational values of the Blue Hole so that a land management plan can be developed for the area. Local residents of the Daintree, and any other interested parties are invited to take part in this process. If you are interested in the future management of the Blue Hole please contact, Ros Anderson, Research Officer, Telephone: 40421696, E.mail: rosalind.anderson@jcu.edu.au, Face-to-face interviews can be arranged upon request. All views will be taken into consideration in the drafting of the land management plan.

Appendix 5 ; Flyer

Blue Hole Land Management Plan

Do you want a say?

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