



Eroded dune fronting Boyd St, Woorim.

The following President's Report is taken from the April 2013 edition of the BIEPA newsletter:

WOORIM FORESHORE – MOVING BACKWARDS

Several informed members of the public and BIEPA members have recently relayed to me their extreme concern and distress at the rapid degradation of Bribie's foreshore, particularly at Woorim. People are expressing their bewilderment as to why Council is continuing to remove all the foreshore vegetation that holds the sand together and continues to knock big holes in the dunes with the only apparent benefits being to those who obtain some advantage or gain from improved sea views. Given the extent of these concerns I feel it is necessary to provide the following response:

As reconfirmed by CSIRO in its latest reports, the past exceptional summer of high winds, storms and resultant huge waves, king tides and the devastation of the eastern foreshore of Bribie Island foreshadows what we can expect more often in the future. Damage as a result of these forces is particularly evident in places like the Gold Coast where decisions were made in a previous, less enlightened era half a century ago, to open up the foreshore to "open-slathe" development, dune and foreshore vegetation removal and foreshore access and use by the public.

As a result the Gold Coast City Council has now inherited a perpetual legacy of massive costs to defend its foreshores which to date totals hundreds of millions of dollars and is rising rapidly. By contrast, in locations such as Peregian Beach, their Councils have ensured that all development is well back from the sea and separated by an extensive buffer of densely vegetated dunes and foredunes with well controlled and designed access points. The result at Peregian Beach is minimal coastal erosion and damage with contrastingly miniscule ongoing foreshore maintenance costs.



The Gold Coast City Council is in the fortunate position of having a large and comparatively wealthy population which provides a substantial business and residential rate base as well as tourism to support the massive costs associated with this sort of high risk, unnatural, heavily developed style of foreshore.

Moreton Bay Regional Council and Bribie Island in particular does not have a bottomless pit of money to entertain a Gold Coast style foreshore policy at Woorim – nor is such an approach appropriate here. Nevertheless, under our Council’s hierarchical structure we are being led by our local Division 1 Councillor, who has no qualifications or experience in these matters, towards an apparent personal vision and desire for a Gold Coast styled foreshore at Woorim, complete with Pacific Ocean vistas, no trees and unlimited foreshore development.

Council has repeatedly denied that the removal of the foreshore vegetation at Woorim has been done to achieve sea views, but this is contradicted by the facts. Over just the past five (5) years BIEPA has recorded in detail, including by satellite imagery, aerial and ground level photography and monitoring, the removal by or on Council’s authority of literally hundreds of foreshore trees and shrubs and the associated rapidly receding and devastated Woorim foreshore. We have observed in horror how Council continually ignores best coastal management practices as detailed in the Qld Coastal Management guidelines as well as the advice provided by Council’s own consultants in their Woorim Shoreline Erosion Management Plan with the following results:

- Every block of units along Rickman Parade has now been provided with a council-sponsored sea view through a large gap in the foreshore vegetation exactly in front of each unit block. Dunes in these gaps have been covered with woodchips from the trees removed and have been given a general treatment that will ensure the permanence of these newly acquired sea views.
- Hardly a single tree remains along the foreshore along the southern end of Boyd Street where just a few years ago a dense, a thick vegetation buffer up to 40 metres wide existed.
- Foreshore residents with new sea views are delighted; real estate agents are ecstatic and have taken to advertising such properties with panoramic photos presenting “magnificent sea views”.
- Poisoning and breaking off of any remaining foreshore She-oaks continues to gather pace.

- Neighbouring councils would, under these circumstances, erect temporary hoardings on the dunes in such locations to obscure and so discourage such illegally obtained sea views – MBRC does nothing.
- Calls by those with interests in sea views for further foreshore vegetation removal, as are now even appearing in the media, are responded to by Council with ever more removal of trees and shrubs along the foreshore and the additional creation of extensive beach access scars.

In 2008 BIEPA foresaw the outcomes above unfolding and wrote to the Mayor MBRC (copied Councillor Division 1) in part warning *“More Woorim foreshore property owners may now feel well justified, following the inappropriate leadership of their Council, in similarly acquiring their own Pacific Ocean vista.”* (BIEPA’s warnings at that time were ridiculed by Council.)

The current disastrous and out of control scenario of a Gold Coast style Woorim foreshore that is occurring brings into question the serious problems that can eventuate when unqualified Council representatives are allowed to take leading roles in decision making and management roles for multi-million dollar projects which will have ongoing severe implications for future generations.

History is being repeated, with Bribie witnessing a rolling series of very expensive misjudgements. I’ll give an example: Back in 2006, the then Caboolture Council followed Division 1 Councillor’s lead when at a Council meeting on 5 Sept 2006 he moved and was supported in his motions (Council file refs: 747/1/4 and 750/1/13) that Council spend \$5 Million/increased to \$10 Million respectively, on the Bribie Bores project to provide up to 10 ML per day. Just six months later the cost had blown out to \$63.5 Million (Caboolture Herald 6 March 2007). The Bribie Bores project is now finally operating but with a capacity of about half of what was initially proposed. The cost of water from the new borefield has blown out by 10 times the amount originally approved by Council, making this water the most expensive in the water grid – more expensive than the Tugun desalination plant. Council persisted with the project despite the warnings of the Qld EPA and detailed advice, briefings and information provided by BIEPA about the risks of this project – all of which have now proven correct. (By the way Bribie already had an adequate water supply piped across the bridge from North Pine dam.) Similar more recent examples exist including some of which are even more startling, but which I won’t go into here.

At the National Coastal Conference held in Brisbane in Sept 2012, BIEPA presented a paper on its groundbreaking project demonstrating best practice foreshore management including the revolutionary FFF dune fence. The project has created interest and applications around Australia. The general theme that emerged from this national conference was a widely expressed concern that local councils are not equipped to take on the role of foreshore management that was being thrust on them by the States. Based on first hand evidence here on Bribie Island I concur with that analysis.



So we have arrived at a critical fork in the road. Which route will we take to protect our foreshore in ways that are affordable and which are in harmony with the nature of Bribie Island?

The current trend towards a built-up coastal environment like that on the Gold Coast, as is now occurring here on Bribie Island, is not sustainable. Moreover this sort of development does not fit with the friendly, family orientated, quiet and relaxing lifestyle in this special, high value natural environment - all of which has combined to create the hallmark and brand of this unique SEQ coastal community.

It is not sustainable in the 21st century, especially in light of the new risks identified by the CSIRO, for Councils to ignore best practice coastal management principles. To continue down the current route will result in spiralling foreshore protection costs and a heavily degraded shoreline.

As highlighted in BIEPA's paper to the National Coastal Conference, Councils still tend to operate in a mindset of very expensive, hard engineering based solutions to foreshore protection challenges. Councils still fail to appreciate that a simple suite of natural foreshore management principles aimed at securing and maintaining a healthy foreshore dune structure, with appropriate vegetation as along the Peregrian coastline, with She-oaks and Spinifex etc. provides an ever changing buffer against the ravages of the sea. And that if this is done well, then expensive engineering works might never be needed or their costs can be greatly diminished.

Let's hope some common sense prevails within Council to secure the future of Bribie's fragile foreshores and in its approach to development generally. The first indicators of such a change will be mass dense plantings of She-oaks all along the Woorim dunes and foreshore to replace the hundreds of trees Council has ill-advisedly removed over the last five years.