

Bob Irwin champions national campaign targeting 1 million people to ‘Click and Save Tin Can Bay’

BOB IRWIN, father of the late Steve Irwin, is calling on Australians to help create the groundswell needed to urgently stop the development of a pristine area, in the heart of a UNESCO biosphere reserve that includes nearby Fraser Island.

Cooloola's pending World Heritage Listing status may be compromised if newly appointed Environment Minister Tony Burke approves the development of a large marina. **A final decision could be made as early as November.** Development approval for a second marina is also being sought.

Tin Can Bay hosts one of few outstanding ecosystems on the east coast of Australia. Since 2004, community groups have banded together in the fight against a powerful developer. The battle has now escalated to a federal issue because of the potential impact on threatened and migratory species.

“Soon there will be nowhere left for our wildlife to breed and live,” says Bob Irwin, renowned wildlife conservationist and founder of Australia Zoo. “If any member of the public were to harm a mangrove tree they would be fined. How is it that a marina can be allowed to be built in such an area?” he adds.

Australians have just a small window of opportunity to have their voice heard in protest against the development. “At this final hour, we hope to create a momentum that involves Australians in this very important decision,” says Carole Gillies, President of the Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group. “We’ve made it easy for people to put pressure on the government to reject the developer’s plans.”

The campaign's aim is to preserve some habitat for globally threatened species. **“The area is unique, unspoilt and special - a perfect habitat for species that are threatened all over the world, and we need to make a stand and save some critical habitat for them,”** says Carole.

Tin Can Bay provides habitat and breeding grounds for many species including threatened Indo Pacific humpback dolphins, and endangered dugongs and turtles.

At low tide, Tin Can Inlet and the Great Sandy Strait are extremely shallow and narrow waterways. “Resident dugongs are highly susceptible to boat strike,” explains Carole. “Boats and our marine wildlife will be forced into the same narrow channels, and dugong have been killed by simply having nowhere to dive and then crushed between the boat and the bottom.”

The highest density of dugongs in the Great Sandy Strait/Hervey Bay region has been found in the southern GSS region between Tin Can Bay and Tuan. **These local dugong densities are amongst the highest recorded anywhere in the world.**

"The population projections and therefore growth in vessel demand for Hervey Bay will increase pressure on the northern dugong population. If we force them upwards from the southern end there literally is nowhere for them to go," says Carole. "The southern GSS was a place of refuge for dugong following the 1992 floods in Hervey Bay and ended up supporting 85% of the total remaining dugong population at that time. It is critical habitat we are talking about."

Pollution and traffic from large boats will impact the health of the ecosystem, including the sea grasses and mangroves that the dugongs, dolphins and sea turtles are reliant upon.

The dugongs are just one species that will suffer collateral damage as a result of the development. Dolphins may not survive the territorial conflict when forced to leave the area.

Dolphins have been interacting with residents at Tin Can Bay since the 1950s, when a badly injured dolphin beached itself after it was struck by a boat. The local fishermen noticed it foundering in the shallow waters and started to feed it to nurse it back to health. They named the dolphin 'Old Scarry' because of a row of scars from previous battles. He recovered and was able to head back to the wild but returned to the beach regularly, forming a strong bond with the locals. "After sixty years and four generations of dolphins, each morning 'Mystique' and other pod members come in and interact with humans – where they swim up to people standing in knee-deep water," says Carole. "They are offered a small amount of food – but they don't rely on it. It's just a fraction of their daily intake, yet they choose to come in."

"We know them by name, we know their parenting," says Carole. "They have chosen over a long period of time to have a high level of interaction with humans, and many people who visit are changed by the experience - they're amazed that they can get so close to dolphins in the wild and are stunned to hear that this special bond is going to be destroyed in favour of a marina."

Developers often rely on the public's apathy when it comes to government approval to develop locations such as this. It is very surprising that an area earmarked for World Heritage listing can find itself on the brink.

"This is a nationally important marine wilderness - we need to make that clear. We don't have to recover it - it's in a pristine state with outstanding biodiversity values," says Carole. "The development of a marina will create irreversible damage. The community has fought the developer and the State government for the last five years, and now we're asking Australians to lend their voice to help protect Tin Can Bay and its vitally important inhabitants."

We have one small window of opportunity to take action to secure this site:

Click and save Tin Can Bay (in just 3 seconds) at

www.marina.tincanbaydolphins.com.au

or visit Facebook: 'Save our dolphins, dugong and turtles'

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AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

BOB IRWIN, wildlife conservationist, founder of Australia Zoo.

CAROLE GILLIES, President, Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group.

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DAVID KREUTZ, Patron, Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group (refer 'Further information' below).

Dr NORM DUKE, Marine Biologist, University of Qld (refer 'Further information' below).

Contact Carolyn Johns: 0418 672 703 kingdomproductions@bigpond.com

PHOTOS AVAILABLE

FURTHER INFORMATION

Dugong

Janet Lanyon BSc (Hons) PhD from the University of Queensland has been conducting research on dugong in the GSS/Hervey Bay region for the past five years.

Population/distribution:

- The GSS/Hervey Bay region supports the largest dugong population in southern Queensland and is a designated site of high dugong conservation significance
- The largest concentration of dugongs in this area are in southern Hervey Bay and the southern half of the GSS (Tin Can Bay to Tuan)
- Following the floods that devastated Hervey Bay dugong habitat in 1992 a significant number of dugongs translocated to the Southern GSS which then supported 85% of the remaining dugongs (Marsh and Lawler 1999)
- "A large proportion of the GSS/Hervey Bay population is found in the southern GSS (Lanyon unpubl. data)...the highest density of dugongs in the GSS/Hervey Bay region (based on 20 years of spatial data) has been found in the southern GSS region between Tin Can Bay and Tuan (Sheppard 2008). **These local dugong densities are amongst the highest recorded anywhere in the world.**"

Dugong and boats:

Dugong are at serious risk of boat strike and disturbance where high boating traffic coincides with dugong habitat (e.g. DoE 1997, Preen 2001, Maitland et al 2006).

"Dugong areas in the GSS include not only shallow seagrass areas designated as Dugong and Turtle Go-Slow zones, but also shallow subtidal areas in which dugong are not afforded protection from passing / speeding boats. Increasing boat traffic in the region will inevitably take its toll on this vulnerable and relatively naïve (in terms of boat traffic) dugong population."

Mangroves

Dr Norm Duke, Marine Biologist. Principal Researcher: 'Mangrove and tidal wetland ecosystems worldwide', University of Queensland.

"Tin Can Bay is a unique environmental setting in which mangroves and associated biota currently thrive. The surrounding area is naturally stable, characterised by sandy catchments and small tidal creeks emptying into shallow sandy flats - ideal for mangrove growth.

Amongst the vital economic and environmental role of mangroves in the region, this essential habitat provides over 80% of fish species. No mangroves – no fish. Despite coastal development along much of the Queensland coast, the Tin Can Bay area has largely escaped environmental declines experienced elsewhere. As a result, mangrove habitats in the area are in near-pristine condition with high species diversity and ecological integrity. Recent surveys by community volunteers with MangroveWatch have shown that Teebar Ck, Carlo Ck and Snapper Ck have some of the most natural, intact mangroves in the Burnett-Mary region – and, possibly any other part of southern Queensland (see www.mangrovetwatch.org.au). However, these important habitats are under threat. In Snapper Creek, the effects of increased human population pressures are beginning to show. In Snapper Creek also, MangroveWatch observations revealed: specific effects of elevated nutrient run-off; increased erosion expected from greater boat wake; and, tree dieback resulting from fuel spills from the nearby boat harbour. These impacts were particularly noticeable when compared to nearby Teebar and Carlo creeks where such human pressures were absent. There is good reason to believe these pressures will increase with further development."

David Krutz, patron of the Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group.

"This is the place where I take my family for holidays. It is the lower reaches of the Mary and part of what we fought for with the [Traveston] Dam."

Great Sandy World Heritage Area

On 4th January 2010 UNESCO World Heritage Centre accepted a submission from the Australian Government for an extension to the Fraser Island World Heritage Area into the UNESCO Tentative List. The submission will remain on the UNESCO Tentative List until a formal nomination from the Australian Government. Justification of Outstanding Universal Value of this area is on the basis that **"the extension possesses natural values that are equal to and enhance significance within the existing Fraser Island World Heritage Area. Many of the attributes for which Fraser Island was listed are represented as well, or better, in the proposed extension."** (refer <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5480/>) World Heritage listing will not occur until after 2011.
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The Great Sandy Strait is located between World Heritage listed Fraser Island and the mainland, forming a double-ended sand passage estuarine environment. Tin Can Inlet is located at the southern end of the Great Sandy Strait with Hervey Bay at the northern end.

The region is widely recognised as one of the least disturbed estuarine environments, containing outstanding biodiversity values. The coastal wetlands are listed as internationally important sites under the Ramsar convention. The region also carries the UNESCO designation as the Great Sandy Biosphere with the following key characteristics:

- **Half of Australia's bird species**
- **More marine fish diversity than the entire Great Barrier Reef**
- **Over 7500 recorded species of fauna and flora, many of which are rare or endangered**

There are currently two proposals for marina construction in waterways adjacent to Tin Can Inlet with provision for approximately 500 wet berths and an additional 100 dry. Both are the subject of a controlled action under the EPBC criteria with the Fraser Straits marina proposal in the assessment phase with public comments open until September 23rd. (EPBC reference 2008/4633)

We strongly believe that this proposed marina development will have irreversible negative consequences on the marine ecosystem. The EPBC controlling provisions where the marina is likely to have a significant impact as cited in the controlled action decision are:

Wetlands of international importance
Listed threatened species and communities
Listed migratory species

The key causes for concern are as follows:

- Potential impacts on water quality through dredging, increased sedimentation and pollution.
- Effluent management within the marina and in the associated waterways
- A dramatic shift in boat traffic from small recreational boats, yachts, kayaks etc. to larger power vessels unsuited to the sensitive estuarine environment and narrow waterways
- Impacts of boat strike, habitat destruction and disturbance on the rare and threatened species in the area including Dugong, 5 species of marine turtle, Indo Pacific humpback dolphins, many migratory bird species as well as lesser known species such as the Water mouse and Yellow Bellied sea snake.

The proponent has placed great emphasis on their responsibility ceasing once the boats leave the marina but in this sensitive environment that is simply unacceptable.

This region is currently near pristine with relatively little development compared to other parts of the Queensland coastline. Its rich biodiversity is widely recognised. The State and Federal government are in the process of applying to have the region World Heritage listed. Allowing the construction of one marina and then another slowly erodes its value and as such we are calling on the Federal government to exercise its powers under the EPBC Act to protect the region and preserve its World Heritage values before it is too late.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- 'Click and Save Tin Can Bay' campaign
<http://www.marina.tincanbaydolphins.com.au/>
- Facebook: 'Save our dolphins dugong and turtles'
- Consortium of three local environment groups that oppose the marina
www.marina.tincanbaydolphins.com.au
- Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group
<http://www.tincanbaydolphins.com.au/>
- SOS Tin Can Bay
<http://www.sostcb.org/>

Issued on behalf of The Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group Inc. The group's objective is to promote, monitor and protect the biodiversity that exists within the marine ecosystems of Tin Can Inlet and the Southern section of the Great Sandy Strait. www.tincanbaydolphins.com.au