

Council rejects road closure request

The Cassowary Coast Regional Council has rejected a request from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to de-gazette sections of the Licuala Track and Banfield Road in the Mission Beach area.

Council's vote was not unanimous to reject one of its officer's recommendation to support the de-gazettal, nor did it meet with approval from some conservationists (see Letter to the Editor on page 4).

Debate at last Thursday's Council meeting also revealed a suspicion by some councillors about the true intentions of the QPWS and its ability to keep promises.

Manager Strategic Planning, Aletta Nugent, presented a report to Council outlining correspondence from QPWS and its request to de-gazette the roads.

The roads run through Tam O' Shanter National Park and if de-gazettal was approved then the roads would be incorporated into the park.

QPWS stated it was concerned about certain activities on the roads, including its use by people driving vehicles and riding horses, and the presence of other domestic animals, specifically dogs.

Horses, motorbikes and dogs would have been banned from the area under the QPWS's proposals.

The QPWS also claimed that not having control of the roads limited its access to funding to maintain the roads.

De-gazettal would allow QPWS to improve and maintain the walking track network in Mission Beach and to regulate activities associated with visitor activities at these sites.

It would also allow improvement to

habitat management consistent with the Cassowary Recovery Plan.

QPWS tried to have the then Johnstone and Cardwell Shire Council's agree to a similar approval in 2004 only for both councils to reject the request.

The report found there was community support to "upgrade" the roads as walking/cycling tracks and approving the request "is likely to produce the best outcome for the community and environment".

Mayor Bill Shannon and Councillors Carmel Silvestro, Ross Sorbello, Ian Rule and Bill Horsford disagreed.

Cr Shannon stated firmly he would not vote in favour of the recommendation.

"I use it (the track) for riding horses and too much is being closed to the public," he said.

"QPWS is using this as an excuse.

"The road is not actually where the road reserve is.

"They are taking away our existing rights."

Cr Silvestro agreed stating she was wary of any promises made by the QPWS as "they don't keep them".

Cr Sorbello was also firmly against the recommendation.

Cr Jennifer Downs and Mark Nolan were in favour of the recommendation with Cr Nolan stating he was in favour if it meant more facilities for Mission Beach.

"I'm not sure about (banning) horses but I am happy to exclude dogs."

Cr Shannon responded there were already "lots of dogs in there - dingoes".

The recommendation was rejected five votes to two.