

Citizens Helping Inskip Peninsula

P.O. Box 9
Dagun
Q 4570

regl@bigpond.com
<http://www.inskip.org>
07 54843273

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Gympie Regional Council has withdrawn its objection to a 6,500 person development on the Inskip Peninsula between Rainbow Beach and Fraser Island.

The application for the development was made in 2004. The application generated a wave of community objection from Rainbow Beach residents, conservationists and campers who use the adjacent area.

A record 799 objections were lodged against the application. A public meeting was called at Rainbow Beach where the developer and opponents both gave their view points and it was chaired by the then Mayor Mick Venardos. There were 150 votes against and 22 in favour.

After some years the Department of Environment and Resource Management instructed the council to refuse the application. When they did this, Rainbow Shores appealed the decision and the matter is currently before the Planning and Environment Court. The parties are Rainbow Shores, Gympie Regional Council, DERM and a group of individuals and community organisations – the active parties are a group for whom Greg Wood is an agent, a group for which I am an agent and Fraser Island Defenders Organisation. The hearing is currently set down for the June sittings.

At the beginning of the court process all parties were asked to list the grounds on which they believed that the appeal should be allowed or denied. Rainbow shores listed extensive grounds for approval, DERM had already listed the environment and State Coastal Management Plan as reasons and Gympie Regional Council added water supply, sewerage treatment, waste disposal and traffic as additional reasons. In addition Gympie Regional Council said that the proposed development conflicted with its planning schemes as an objection.

When the time came for the parties to nominate their experts the council nominated Mr Feldman, their engineer to discuss water supply, sewerage treatment, waste disposal and traffic. They did not nominate any of their planning staff or any planner to discuss their concerns about defending their town plan. Mr Wood, a private individual, felt that maintaining the planning structure of the Rainbow Beach area was very important. He nominated an expert planner and then had to raise, by subscription, the substantial costs involved.

Mr Feldman and the Rainbow Shores expert met and decided that there were few problems in their fields if Rainbow Shores paid enough money. The only remaining problem was to be set aside to be dealt with as an infrastructure agreement some time in the future.

“On this basis, the Respondent's position in the appeal is that it is supportive of the proposed development subject to the imposition of appropriate approval conditions.

Pending the outcome of the hearing before the Planning and Environment Court the Respondent will remain an active party, although only to the extent required by any further changes to the proposal made by the Appellant in response to matters arising from the hearing.” (from GRC's solicitor letter to the parties)

The council has effectively given the green light to the development and withdrawn from participation in the fight to preserve the environment and lifestyle of the area.

Despite very large and repeated indications of opposition from the local area, the council has sold out. They have said that they support a development four times the size of the current town near the end of a sandy erodable peninsula that will further restrict access to kilometres of the regions beaches. They have not only failed to support their own town plan, they haven't even considered it as they withdraw and leave the battle to private individuals and DERM.

At the 2008 elections Crs Engeman, Gate and Perrett said that they opposed further residential development on the Inskip Peninsula. But when we look to find where they have expressed their views we find that Gympie Regional Council has only had one motion from when DERM instructed the council. That was to reject the development according to DERM's instruction.

So how do council's solicitors know that Gympie Regional Council wanted to

- add additional grounds for rejection,
- supply their engineer as an expert but not an expert on planning,
- agree that the changes that had to be made in the incompetent plan presented by Rainbow Shores,
- agree that the change was a Minor Change
- agree that the development would leave sufficient water for future expansion of the town of Rainbow Beach,
- agree to abandon their town planning concerns and
- agree with the development against the wishes of the people and the expressed view of three of the councillors.?

No motions have been moved to direct all this activity. Council may have discussed it in committee but no motions can be moved in secret committee meetings. We do not know if council has abandoned its own town plan or if council officers are making the decisions for council. Is the Mayor Cr Dyne, Deputy Mayor Cr Perrett or Chairman of Planning Cr Petersen acting independently of Council?

These are all questions that need to be answered.

The council's approval of Rainbow Shores Stage 2 is a total denial of their responsibilities to the people and their own town plan. The method of doing it in secret is undemocratic and probably illegal.

Reg Lawler
Chairperson