

REDLANDS CITY PLAN

COOCHIEMUDLO ISLAND - "UNIQUELY COOCHIE"

A THINK PIECE



1. UNDERSTANDING THE ESSENTIALS

Coochie is a unique jewel in the crown of Quandamooka: Coochie; underpinned by its natural world, the biophysical expression of formative forces and biological evolution, collected in an integrated and dynamic confluence of the terrestrial and seaboard worlds, and, overlain by human occupation - Coochie today.

Coochie is not a mythical island retreat but a unique and tangible expression of these forgoing aspects that needs particular sensitive and informed sustainable management to ensure that these essential underpinning attributes, that make it what it is - uniquely contributive and attractive - are not degraded by uninformed and ill-advised external vested interests and interference. Coochie is a goose with a priceless golden egg that can easily be compromised by unbalancing rather than improving the status quo.

Coochie's future now comes under the lens of scrutiny and discussion / debate to determine how City Plan parameters might direct Coochie's future management - its SUSTAINABLE management. That journey begins with setting a Headline Objective for Coochie's future.

Goal setting: It is important in setting a target for Coochie's future to determine a Headline Objective which succinctly encapsulates a defensibly ideal outcome. All forward planning stems from that realisation, and all objectives, policies and implementation methods must be constantly and intelligently tested against this primary goal. Planning for Coochie's future also has to fit into a big picture of quadruple bottom line determinants (environment/ social/cultural/economic). There is no other option in an informed 21st Century world. It is suggested that the overall big picture outcome for Coochie should be:

A healthy balanced natural world, people with a quality sustainable lifestyle, which is underpinned by socio-cultural equitably.

Translated to the "Vision for Coochie (November 2008)":

Living in harmony with Nature and each other

Aspirational thinking: There is no rational alternative objective. All decisions around issues and aspirations (such as will be contemplated) need to be intelligently tested against that primary determinant. Where there is inadequate information to safely make a decision that defers to that objective, precaution must be exercised; the 'precautionary principle' applied.

For responsible decision making - governance; terms like *progress, success* and *growth* need to be deeply understood, and specifically defined for the host environment / community in that regard, e.g. an aspiration like "sustainable growth" on a finite biosphere is implausible. However, as a sub-set of sustainable development, aspects of growth can be legitimate and contributory components, just like stability and retraction have their place. Human endeavour is inevitably a complex, dynamic and a continually evolving moving feast and it needs to be intelligently managed to be justified.

Fine-grain planning: Because Coochie is a unique boutique and complex world with particular attributes, opportunities and sensitivities, planning for Coochie's future does not need to be lumped in with general planning approaches for the likes of Redlands and the other bay islands, it needs specific and considered attention based upon robust and appropriate immediately local information. Fine-grain planning is required to enable the management of Coochie to be definitely applicable across the board. To achieve such a position, aspects such as the historic natural and cultural base-lines require understanding, overlain by continuing state of the environment monitoring and interpretation, all aligned with the delivery of the Plan's tailored and targeted aspirational objectives.

2. CORE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS IDENTIFIED

Group 1

This group is the group of primary importance to the whole viable future of Coochie, across the board. Be assured, and scientific evidence abounds, that without an understanding of and a deference and commitment to this group, the quality future of all of Coochie's other stakeholder groups will be irrevocably compromised. **This group comprises Coochie's natural biota**, the living organisms - from micro-organisms to whales - that inhabit and rely upon host Coochie's inter-connected terrestrial, intertidal and freshwater drainage network systems.

Group 2

This group carries the ancient wisdom that enriches human relationships with Coochie. **This group is comprised of the people of the land, sand and sea, the people of the Quandamooka** tribes whose ancestral place includes Coochie and its material and spiritual realm - key elements of their cultural world. This group, and this group's ancient culture and continuing commitment, informs Coochie's contemporary human occupiers about its rich and deep history, and also offers a tangible philosophical platform for the necessary custodial care of Coochie in the context of its human history, with applicability to human behaviour / intervention in today's world.

Group 3

This group is comprised of the present human inhabitants of Coochie - permanent and casual residents. These people have consciously affiliated with the unique Coochie natural and built world and human community, by choice. Coochie is their home. Coochie's human community is a diverse one, and like the bulk of modern western society, many residents are simply challenged by meeting the demands of each and every day; just paying the way for their families - mostly working (and being educated) off-shore. A small number have employment on the island. Many of Coochie's residents are retired people. The median age of the population is quite high.

The casual human inhabitants are those with housing and land interests on Coochie, and who reside elsewhere, either using Coochie as a regular holiday base and / or an investment opportunity. It is important that the needs and aspirations of these core stakeholders are respected in planning for Coochie's future.

Like its island circumstances, the human characteristics of the Coochie community vary from to those on the mainland. To understand the context of related consultation it will be necessary to explore the demographic profile and statistical attributes of the Coochie community, as well as looking at the expected varying aspirations for Coochie's future through a lens of science, both natural and social. Discussions around infrastructure, building and development and issues involving economics must follow on, intelligently, from that view and understanding.

Group 4

This group is comprised of the Visitor Community. Coochie has stunningly special visitor attractions; two special "point of difference" attributes come easily to mind as visitor motivators:

Firstly, Coochie is a much loved and long-standing visitor destination for a meaningful sector of the local - wider Redlands / Brisbane community. This is because Coochie offers something rare and special in today's over-developed and contrived world. It delivers a quiet, natural world setting, linked to social safety and close to the city, for ordinary families who wish to visit a coastal environment with its uniquely special beaches in an affordable way - day and longer-stay options are available.

Secondly, the outstanding natural world packaging of Coochie, with its easily accessible significant and variable natural attributes, such as the Melaleuca Wetland, the west coast mangrove colony and the extensive, largely indigenous, green canopy, along with the diverse inter-tidal and native bird colonies are a draw-card of particular interest for local, wider state and interstate visitors, as well as being attractive to a seeking and sensitive cohort of overseas visitors / tourists - day and longer-stay options are available.

This aggregate stakeholder group values Coochie for these unique attributes which its present low-key state continues to offer; a rare and disappearing visitor experience. And, with consistent and informed management, these key attributes can be protected and enhanced to improve their condition and inherent attractiveness. This is Coochie's particular point of difference, which needs to be cherished and retained by the host community for the wider visitor community, in contrast to an increasing suite of tourism attractions that are patently unsustainable and a 'same as' and boring repetition of many other tourist destinations.

VERY IMPORTANTLY, Coochie provides an invaluable real world healthful tourism experience for the Visitor Community, whilst, very positively, maintaining quality living amenities for its residents. This is because the very attributes that have charmed the resident population and retained their affiliation are those attributes that attract visitors.

3. KEY PREVAILING POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES (consequent concerns at their possible loss)

- A unique and precious natural world, particularly the Melaleuca Wetland, the west coast mangrove colony and the extensive, largely indigenous, green canopy, all validated by the abundant and diverse native birdlife.
- Wonderful golden beaches
- An externally observed landscape invisible of human occupation

- Indigenous people who have remained in the area
- A relative low human population / population density
- A diverse human population, which provides a 'reality check'
- A sense of community
- Low density road traffic - cars remain subservient to people; a totally refreshing change
- Social (and health) benefits of foot and ferry travel
- Everywhere is largely walk-able / wheel-chair-able
- A low-key safe anchorage for recreational craft
- A green riparian margin, with a largely uninterrupted bio-linkage between the terrestrial and coastal marine environments
- Sensational vistas to and from Coochie
- Very convenient access / proximity to the main-land, whilst retaining the island isolation; an excellent ferry and vehicle barge service
- Quietness
- Fresh air
- Moderate, highly attractive, climate
- Development at human scale and within the green canopy
- Socially-safe resident and visitor environment
- Relatively affordable living
- Diverse and numerous socio-cultural infrastructure; clubs and organisations and the like
- Several community groups with a committed approach to nurturing Coochie's natural and human worlds
- Largely non-invasive tourism
- Collective characteristics comprising outstanding living amenities

- An exciting opportunity for informed, sensitive and balanced visitor economy, including eco-tourism, based upon restoring / remediating / sharing and carefully managing the unique natural world of Coochie. Some Notes follow:

One of the very negative aspects of tourism for a community (studies abound) is that its impacts on the aggregate receiving environment are seldom offset – unacceptable cumulative adverse effects; both locally and globally. How then can tourism opportunities for Coochie positively serve both its natural world and support the quality of the lives of Coochie residents? See notes in the attached appendix - **not included in this version** - around the notion of *Restoration Tourism*.

4. ISSUES OF CONCERN:

4.1 INFORMED CARE OF COOCHIE'S NATURAL WORLD

A very important part of Coochie's fine-grain planning involves Coochie's natural world. Primarily, the human settlement needs to be managed in the knowledge that its presence needs to defer to that natural world, in that all building / civil / development work should at a minimum maintain the status quo but, desirably, work at enhancement; restoring eco-connection / integration, managing away pest species and intelligently nurturing the various and combined habitats as a whole.

For this to be archived soundly and efficiently, there needs to be a thorough understanding of the historic balance of Coochie, its current state and what is necessary to foster improvement. Regular monitoring of key indicators is necessary. Access to related science and knowledge about required physical management practices is essential. Realistically, an informed long-term management strategy needs to be developed and regularly reviewed to enable continual reference to informed big-picture management priorities and considered ways of responding to issues of concern.

4.2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COOCHIE'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

An understanding of Coochie's natural and human heritage /history and its relevance to our lives today is not only enriching to the journey but essential to wisely charting the way forward. Outstandingly, Quandamooka is one of the very few locations in Australia where the indigenous tribes have been and remain a part of the collective community, bringing tens of thousands of years of cultural history and practices into the experience of modern community life. This is a real cause for celebration, and a prompt to ensure that within the community's functions and responsibilities, the deep local knowledge and the richness of the indigenous people's culture have wide means for expression.

4.3 RESPECT FOR THE KNOWLEDGE, VIEWS AND ASPIRATIONS OF COOCHIE'S CORE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Local knowledge is a fundamental resource in the continuing discussion to take the management of Coochie intelligently forward. It is an essential part of that big picture. In aggregate terms, it would be foolish to underestimate the knowledge held at large by the Coochie community and the wider stakeholder groups. Experience has shown that this very valuable coal-face knowledge is often not understood, respected, deferred to or utilised by managing agencies, including the local council.

It is important to foster a collective community attitude of local custodianship and commitment - divided we fall, so that as concerns and opportunities present themselves the community can respond and contribute to management decisions competently and positively, e.g. the emerging review of the Redlands City Plan. To that end, there is merit in promoting opportunities for information sharing amongst stakeholders and to draw on wider expertise, to consolidate and enhance the community knowledge about the natural and human worlds of Coochie and their immediate and wider context.

4.4 UNFETTERED GROWTH

The simplest way to lose the Coochie golden egg is for regulating authorities to simply defer to the development community and promote unfettered growth by minimum regulation. Open planning parameters, that support growth as a disconnected goal for the economic welfare of a few, have the potential to destroy the unique Coochie world, in the service of focal short term gain and long term loss.

Formal planning instruments, which defer to intelligent and locally relevant sustainable outcomes, are necessary to ensure the sensitive and applicable sustainable development of Coochie. If this cat (unfettered growth) is let out of the bag there is absolutely no way back; examples of parallel catastrophic outcomes abound on Australia's east coast.

4.5 CHANGE IN THE SCALE AND DENSITY OF BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT

This concern relates to the generic growth concerns above. If maximum height, site density of buildings - the general bulk and location of all and any structures - is not constrained / directed in sympathy with Coochie's core attributes, particularly in the context of retaining the relative scale of buildings to the on-street / on ground human experience (and of paramount importance, containing structures within the green canopy) the very factors that provide the special attractiveness of Coochie will be lost, and with that, the vitality, vibrancy and viability of future Coochie communities.

Critically, this concern also extends to the retention of the Coochie coastline, much as it is, with no coastal intervention that dismantles the current enchanting,

mysterious and enticing natural island world - no place for hard retaining structures, other wharves and jetties or marinas on this coastal fringe; a death-knell. The mooring cluster in the vicinity of the ferry jetty and barge ramp needs to have an intelligently-determined sensitive holding capacity in this regard.

4.6 SAME OLD, SAME OLD

What's at stake here is the retention and continuing expression of Coochie's particular unique point of difference. Related action / planning must be based upon an intimate understanding of Coochie's special core attributes and the associated resonance and ambience of those collective factors in small island context - fine-grain planning, again.

Same old, same old is about the unthinking infusion of architecturally impoverished urban housing in a small island setting, as opposed to *beachie*, coastal sympathy. It's about the danger of a simplistic non-critical-thinking approach that can justify and celebrate paved and kerbed and channelled streets, which are aesthetically and functionally inappropriate in this location. It's about understanding the need to limit and manage storm water run-off from impervious surfaces in a particularly Coochie-sensitive way, and it's about public open space being planned, designed and developed / arranged sympathetically, not with same old same old park and street furniture and boring, uninspiring and generic landscaping solutions.

Boring and insensitive same old, same old will definitely kill the goose and the golden egg. What is needed is deeply informed, sympathetic and creative commitment, to express Coochie's idiomatic self, in an exciting and locally focal way.

The flip-side of same old, same old is all about maximising opportunities to enhance the local and visitor experience through intelligent creative thinking.

4.7 MANAGMENT OF PEST PLANTS BY CHEMICAL MEANS

The informed 21st Century journey is all about giving rein to our maturing understanding of how all life, including human life, is totally dependent upon the health of the underpinning natural world - a balanced and functionally complete ecological web. Hugely relevant to that understanding is the progressive cessation of chemical solutions for plant pest control. This is what's styled a 'no-brainer'.

Very fortunately, there are informed and active groups on the island keen to work with the regulating bodies and aligned community groups to achieve a transition to a spray free management regime of Coochie's particularly sensitive natural world. As things stand, this very desirable and critically important aspiration is being negotiated between Coastcare Inc and the Council.

Byron Shire; a way forward:

4.8 STORMWATER MANAGEMENT (largely taken from an earlier paper)

The natural world of Coochie is fragile, diminishing and under continuing threat from unsympathetic building and civil development works, and any intervention may have exponential detriment, viz. upset the integrity of the gross ecosystem health, particularly through a diminished inter-connectivity between the various ecosystem elements which struggle to maintain their functional health / integrity because of their limited area. Bluntly, the future of the human world depends upon the health of the underpinning natural world; a scientific fact. So, any intervention in terms of civil work must start with the premise of enhancement as a net outcome. The works themselves must give due regard to the primary value of the Coochie ecosystem.

All of the storm water issues at hand are as a result of uninformed human intervention; not giving intelligent consideration to the consequence of the aggregate area of storm water run-off from impervious surfaces; roofs, paving, road surfaces. etc. Now is the time to use clever engineering solutions to best accommodate the sins of the fathers, and these solutions are about 21st Century informed civil engineering works.

The primary storm water issues of Coochie are:

1. **Volume:** Arguably the system should have primary capacity to deal with a 10 year storm event and a secondary capacity, to deal with a 25 year to 50 year event - beyond that, the overall approach to storm water design/control should over-view and broadly accommodate the consequences of a cataclysm like a 100 year return period storm event. After that we are in the hands of God. And the system: It must not be more of the same contained, constrained, channelised concrete inverts, culverts, etc - *same old, same old* - It's about intelligent innovation, using the best of the prevailing geomorphic conditions, the inherent catchment characteristics, along with the subtle use of the proximity of the sea. It's about diffusion, retention/detention, soakage, clever energy dissipation and the use of the ground media and riparian vegetation to minimise silt impact and to eliminate scour.

2. **Contaminants:** Usually petro-chemical and other mineral-based fines from vehicle wastes plus fines / silt material from raw soil / raw ground surfaces. Coochie has the blessing of very light vehicle traffic, so the vehicle based contaminants should be negligible. However, the scour of fines, sand in particular, is a very real and urgent problem, and the essential contaminant. It is gutting to observe the habitat loss of the sand mobilised by SW velocity and volume and carried into the inter-tidal zone at Morwong Beach - an environmental obscenity; see image below; totally unacceptable and a total failure of adequate SW management design. There is a need for back-blading remedial works here, with manual completion, to remove the smothering deposit of sand from the substrate and to open up the inter-tidal benthos to natural remediation.



UNACCEPTABLE: A lens of sand, displaced by storm-water run-off, smothering the intertidal habitat at Morwong Beach - April 2015

3. Peak event velocity: Arguably this is the main villain; lots of water with lots of energy going fast and furiously and often focused into incised containment infrastructure. The solution is clever design. First up, there should be a progressive diminution of hard paved surfaces. All design, both housing and paving infrastructure should be biased to immediate infiltration options, particularly on-site for houses on sand, which covers a very large part of Coochie. So, pits into the sand containing spalls, shielded by regularly maintained open-weave filter-cloth and providing infiltration galleries of various extents to receive various volumes. Additionally, the use of alignment meander, lateral swales, punctuating water courses that take significant amounts, along with intelligently contrive bed obstruction and vertical fall elements that assist with energy dissipation. There are many open-space public land siting opportunities (e.g. Morwong Beach vicinity) to include ecology enhancing detention basins / ponds as interim-control measures.

Follow this link: "Greater Dandenong - Water Sensitive Urban Design":

<http://www.greaterdandenong.com/document/26017/water-sensitive-urban-design>

As far as **Curlew Creek** goes, the only mechanical intervention should be in the form of constructing energy dissipation lenses and infiltration galleries into the sand and down to the median water table level. The habitat at large must remain in place - eco-corridor continuity is essential.

Each component of engineering works must come out with a net environmental gain. The removal of a linear stretch of mangroves should attract capital punishment. It may be that spot vegetation is taken out to enable intervention for meander, infiltration galleries and the like; then tailored local remediation follows.

4.9 UNINFORMED SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVE MODELS

Beware of uninformed, if influential, advocacy from parties with economic vested interests, where the ambitions for development fail to align with the essential principles that have been expressed in this paper, particularly if these ambitions are promoted from outside of the Coochie stakeholder groups. In promoting that warning, however, it is very important, and just, to emphasise the rights and opportunities of the owners of undeveloped property on Coochie. These people are Coochie stakeholders. The strategic planning direction of the legal instruments that will shape Coochie's future must positively enable those rights to realised, in constructive concert with the overall delivery of *Uniquely Coochie*.

5. IN CONCLUSION

The following summary points require emphasis:

- The need to understand the original natural-world baseline, determine a current baseline - State of the Environment - SOE, and intelligently chart an aspiration baseline as the way forward.
- The application of quadruple bottom line analysis to all decision making processes, so *real value* underpins and enables defensible and responsible decision making.
- Recognition of the special and applicable knowledge held by the committed local community - ask the knowledgeable, committed custodians, which include the indigenous people.
- Coochie's future must not be sacrificed on the altar of external profit focused vested interests, but rather be excitingly anchored to and managed forward, with sympathy to Coochie's unique inherently precious and valuable attributes.

- Finally: Don't take these view-points at face value: Walk the beaches and the wetland, discover the mangrove colony and also look at the scale and idiom of human occupation and confirm Coochie's unique attributes, AND, talk to all of the stakeholder groups.

About the writer

The writer grew up in the bay and connected with Coochie as far back as the 1960s, with very regular contact over the last 30 years; a Coochie property owner for nearly two years. The writer is a professional planner, a Full Member of the New Zealand Planning Institute, which has reciprocal Australian recognition, and has been a specialist in planning around seaboard communities for the past 30 years.

The writer has also 'worked on the tools' and operated earthwork and construction machinery, designed and supervised substantial building and civil work and authored a number of codes of practice for subdivision and development, and for earthworks and plantation forestry management. The writer has a respect of and an affiliation to indigenous peoples.

In a diverse working life, the writer has had extensive experience in transport planning - 20 years lead planner for regional land transport strategies, with ongoing professional critique of roads' management / roads' projects, and has also had substantial experience in concrete and asphalt technology, from design, to the laboratory, to works supervision to practical involvement in ground placement.

Ian K Shapcott

Coochiemudlo Island - August 2015



Appendix

"Restoration Tourism"

(Taken from a recent paper targeted at a particular 21st century tourism opportunity for indigenous people - the Maori people of Picton, New Zealand. This material is the writer's intellectual property; happy to share it appropriately.)

Kiatiakitanga / Restoration Tourism