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Why Heritage Estate is caught in limbo

IF the instances of community engagement and environmental management in the Shoalhaven are any concern, then the Heritage Estate can stand front and centre.

The paper estate remains one of the abiding environmental and social issues in the Shoalhaven but drifts along in a government and media silence and an embarrassing void of environmental management.

The last major public news was in May 2011 and concerned the application by Shoalhaven City Council and partners for federal funding to support a buy-back of the estate. The application is being handled for the partners by the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, which in itself may be a good decision.

A decision on the application from the Commonwealth was due in September 2011 but councillors were not informed until February 2012 and council itself not formally informed until the general manager's report in March 2012. So 10 months slipped by.

The application failed but this went by far too quietly.

This was a serious setback on the touted "the federal government has got to help us" scenario. It was noted that the application needed development.

Despite this, the original application was submitted again in the 2012-13 round of applications. There it rests at the moment with no better chance of success

than the first. The general manager in his report to council [March 2012] notes that the application is unlikely to succeed for reasons he explained. The decision on that application is due in September 2012.

Now, enter stage right, the revision of the Shoalhaven Local Environment Plan.

The council staff report to the Development Committee recommended a rezoning to E2 Environmental Conservation for the Heritage Estate. A swag of submissions involving government agencies, community bodies and a host of concerned individuals favoured rezoning. Presentations to the committee supported the rezoning. A basic accord reached? No, not likely. Councillors vote 4-2 in committee to maintain a rural zoning thus rejecting all other input [March 12, 2012].

This decision does not rest at all well with environmental management priorities given the known Commonwealth judgment that rezoning to E2 Environmental Conservation is critical to the biodiversity of the estate, which is of national significance, and the longer term management of the estate.

And what of the estate environment?

Parts continue to be treated as a rubbish dump. Vehicles use both "unmaintained roads" and illegal tracks to further exacerbate the run-off, road erosion problems, damage and disturbance, including destruction of two of the listed "threatened species".

A trail bike circuit covering

approximately 30 or more privately owned lots and at least 5ha, including one or more council owned lots, has been allowed to be developed with impunity over the last four years. It has wrought quite intense destruction of vegetation in that part of the estate, which is acknowledged and is a serious disturbance to fauna.

Trail bike use in other parts of the estate has the same consequences.

The riders have no specific permission, ride predominantly unregistered bikes and are very often juveniles without a licence.

Trail bike riding is totally out of place in the estate, especially in the "endangered ecological community" reserve managed by council itself.

Council then resolved [May 15] to rezone to E2 if they receive federal funding! Council has been warned the funding application will not be successful and have previously promised that if it was, the estate would be handed over for incorporation in Jervis Bay National Park – an E1 zoning.

So the years and months drift by and continue to do so in the absence of informed and responsible decision making, public information or any specific management plan for the estate, short term or long term. So – what if the federal funding application is unsuccessful? Plan B? There isn't one.

**C. Grounds,
Old Erowal Bay.**