

Quick Facts: 'CLICK AND SAVE' TIN CAN BAY CAMPAIGN

'No more talking while our wildlife disappears,' says Bob Irwin

AN URGENT national campaign is currently underway to halt the destruction of a pristine marine wilderness next to World Heritage listed Fraser Island.

- The Tin Can Bay region is unique – one of the last outstanding and diverse ecosystems on the east coast of Australia. It is home to a plethora of precious wildlife including endangered dugongs and sea turtles, and rare humpback dolphins.
- Two marina developments proposed for the southern Great Sandy Strait waterways will severely damage the region and its critically important inhabitants. Should development be sanctioned, it will put at risk a World Heritage Listing which is currently pending for the Cooloola region.
- Australians have just a small window of opportunity to help stop the development, before a final decision is made by Environment Minister Tony Bourke as early as the end of February 2011.
- Wildlife conservationist Bob Irwin is continuing his son Steve's legacy as the active champion of this campaign: "Enough is Enough!," says Bob. "I will fight as long and as hard as necessary to save this magnificent area from development. This is no longer a local issue – this is the habitat of species that are threatened all over the world, and we need to make a stand and save some critical habitat for them."
- Campaign organisers have made it easy for everyone who cares about an issue like this to vote against the development - it takes 3 seconds to send a letter directly to Environment Minister Tony Burke, asking him to reject the developer's plans.
- To date, 35,000 votes have been collected at www.marina.tincanbaydolphins.com.au. Responses received State by State can be seen here.

SEVERE CONSEQUENCES:

- The United Nations says that the dugong is at serious risk of extinction in the next 40 years. Of those now remaining, the Southern Sandy Straits supports among the largest density of dugongs found anywhere in the world. It is a designated site of high dugong conservation significance.
- The marina construction process combined with ongoing dredging and vessel pollution will impact on water quality – the increased sediment will destroy sea grasses, the sole food source of dugongs. It will also cause severe deterioration of mangroves. Mangrove forests are the nursery for 80% of our fish. "This is the nursery for the Great Barrier Reef and the Pacific Ocean," says Bob Irwin. "This is where life begins, where it all gets started. We shouldn't be interfering with it at all. Please join me in protecting this marine wilderness on behalf of the many varieties of wildlife that call this area 'home'."
- Boat strike is a significant cause of death for dugong and turtles – this is another reason why development is inappropriate in this area. Tin Can Inlet and the Great Sandy Strait are very narrow waterways that vary greatly in depth. At low tide, boats and marine wildlife will be forced into the same narrow channels. Dugong have been killed by simply having nowhere to dive and then being crushed between the boat and the sea floor. Increased boat traffic will markedly increase boat strike:

- The Fraser Straits Marina will bring 240 wet and 120 dry berths; while the nearby Carlo Point Marina will bring an additional 257 wet berths to these narrow waterways.
- **Wildlife is being dramatically impacted by the recent flooding across Queensland.** Marine wildlife still has the worst to come as habitat and food sources suffer damage from pollution carried into our marine environments with flood plumes. Scientists expect that sea grasses, the sole food source of endangered dugong, will not survive due to the murky water blocking sunlight.

“The Queensland government is devoting a huge amount of effort into monitoring water quality and the impacts of flood plume on the marine environment, and seagrass beds in particular,” says Carole Gillies, President of the Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group. “While this is important, it is once again taking a reactive stance to a problem that cannot be reversed. We are seeking some proactive and decisive action by the Queensland government to protect recognised high biodiversity areas that at this stage remain relatively pristine and free of many of the problems more urban marine environments face - before it is too late for species most at risk, such as the dugong.”

The Tin Can Bay region provides a safe haven for dugong herds and turtles from these muddy floodwaters. Now more than ever, a safe haven is urgently required, explains Carole Gillies. “Without long term protection by the federal government, the only remaining safe haven for dugong and sea turtles will be destroyed by the proposed marina development.”

- The dugong population in the Great Sandy Strait was able to recover from the 1992 Mary River flood thanks to the sanctuary provided by the southern Great Sandy Strait (Tin Can Bay area) where the seagrass meadows provided an alternate food source for the northern population. While many dugong died in this flood, the southern region was able to sustain sufficient dugong to enable the population in the entire Great Sandy Strait/Hervey Bay area to recover to pre flood levels with local dugong densities consistently found to be among the highest recorded anywhere in the world.
- The resilience of the marine environment to recover from these natural events is being eroded by the impacts of coastal development. Development directly removes or damages mangroves and seagrass meadows as well as increasing the pollution and debris flowing into the marine environment.
- “The negative impacts of coastal development on our marine environment are permanent. Habitat destroyed by coastal development never comes back and marine species die. It is as simple as that,” says Bob Irwin.
- “The seagrass meadows of the Southern Sandy Strait/Tin Can Inlet must be protected if our marine life, including dugong and turtles, are to have any chance of survival in the long term,” says Carole Gillies. “Now is the time to take a stand against inappropriate development proposed for a precious marine wilderness that is a refuge for the endangered dugong, marine turtles and many other species,” she says.
- “It is important to remember that there is a much more insidious threat to our precious marine life which is being left largely unchecked along the Queensland coast,” says Carole Gillies. Coastal development is listed as a threatening process in nearly all of the critically endangered marine species, including dugong, marine turtles and coastal dolphins such as the Indo Pacific humpback. “We know it is impacting and yet we keep approving developments and our wildlife is paying the ultimate price,” she says.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- There are now many Government reports and policy documents which recognise that Australia’s biodiversity is declining. The Australian Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and

the draft Queensland biodiversity strategy both recognise the important role Australia has in preserving species and that urgent action is required if we are to reverse the trend. Unfortunately these policies are only slowly taking hold, with the Queensland biodiversity strategy, coastal plan and other reviews all remaining in draft form. "We believe that the 'business as usual' approach while these critical environmental policy documents are worked through is unacceptable," says Claire Crocker, a former practising solicitor and volunteer who has supported the campaign since its inception. "At the very least, an embargo on developments in areas recognised for their high biodiversity is required immediately to allow the new policy direction to take hold," she adds. Protection at the ecosystem level is now widely recognised as the only way forward. An embargo will give short term protection while proper assessment at the ecosystem level can take place.

- "We are asking Minister Tony Burke to demonstrate leadership in this issue and take immediate action to reject the current marina proposals, assess the region as part of the Australian Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and provide appropriate long term protection. The precautionary principle must apply here. It is too late once the damage is done," says Claire Crocker. A second marina development has now also been proposed. Long-term protection is urgently required for this area.
- Bob Irwin is calling people everywhere to 'Click and Save' Tin Can Bay. "Australians want a future that includes and cherishes the natural beauty and diversity of wildlife that we are known for worldwide," says Bob Irwin. "I am now asking our politicians to recognise this and take immediate action. I'm calling on all Australians to make a real difference to endangered marine wildlife by sending a direct message to Minister Tony Burke," he says. "No more talking while our wildlife disappears." People can help to secure this haven for these endangered marine species by sending their vote (in just 3 seconds) at www.marina.tincanbaydolphins.com.au.

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOS ATTACHED:

1. Bob Irwin standing in mangroves, Southern Sandy Straits (please credit photographer, Carolyn Johns)
2. Dugong (please leave the Fathom trademark on the image or include FATHOM™ as credit for the photo)

AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

- Carole Gillies, President, Southern Sandy Straits Marine Environment Group.
- Claire Crocker, campaign volunteer, and former practising solicitor
- Bob Irwin, renowned wildlife conservationist

To arrange an interview, contact Cathie Agg: 0425 720 763