

Crackdown on beach vandals

By Lea Blakesley

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DOUGLAS Shire Council will attempt to develop more effective management for the Wangetti beach and foreshore area following complaints about degradation to World Heritage values.

Some residents and the Wet Tropics Management Authority have written to the council expressing concern about the lack of management measures for the Wangetti Beach recreational reserve which falls within the Wet Tropics World Heritage area.

Two car parks are provided at the northern and southern edge of the beach which is about 4.5km long.

Long-time resident Christine Fry said she was concerned at the rampant destruction that was occurring by inconsiderate campers and four-wheel-drive users who were spoiling the beach for everyone.

She listed chainsaws being used to cut down trees for firewood, four-wheel-drive vehicles driving on the foreshore and surrounding dunes and remnants from people's toilets as examples of the "indiscriminate abuse".

"At the very least, I believe that environmentally insensitive behaviour on the beach should be monitored and corrected," Ms Fry said in a letter to the council.

She suggested more signs and rock barricades to prevent four-wheel-drives entering the beach as measures to improve the situation.

WTMA area conservation manager John Lane said Ms Fry's recommendations warranted serious consideration by the council.

"Vehicular access off the designated car parking area is prohibited under the Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998 and would also be in contravention of council by-laws," he said.

"Effective control of this threatening process would do much to prevent further degradation of the values of the reserve."

Mr Lane said other measures such as signs and interpretive material about the natural values of the area would help educate users and lead to less destructive practices.

In a report to the council, environmental officer Mick Jeffrey said a management vision for the area could include the option of having regulated camping areas in the foreshore area with rocks or fences used to designate the appropriate areas.

"The remainder of the area would need to be patrolled regularly, especially on weekends and during the dry season," he said.

"A local resident has said that regular enforcement would quickly send a message to the Cairns residents and illegal campers that Wangetti beach is no longer a 'free for all'."