



## Heyday became mayday at Kirra

KIRRA retailer Graham Nicholls reckons he has seen Kirra Beach go from heyday to mayday.

Mr Nicholls can recall the halcyon days of Kirra when its ruler-edge waves would barrel into the bay with ridiculous regularity.

In recent years, though, he has watched the beach eating its way into the ocean, growing into a vast expanse which locals joke, blackly, is more suited to camel racing than swimming.

For the business people of Kirra, it's not just about the loss of surf, but about their beach having lost its mojo, its intimacy.

Mr Nicholls, who owns Kirra's Australian Longboarder Surf Shop, reckons business has dropped by almost a third in the past year, as



Graham Nicholls remembers the day when barrels rolled in regularly

### **TOMORROW**

#### The effect of sand pumping on the Gold Coast tourism industry

to re-inject some life into the area.

However, as one businessman said: "They could leave the foreshore as it is, and just do something to bring back our beach and we would have a far more popular area than what we have now."

Cr Robbins says the council was also exploring tangible, technical solutions, such as changing the discharge areas for the dredged sand from the Tweed River, an extra sand-pumping outlet between North Kirra and

dropped by almost a third in the past year as beachgoers shun the forbidding stretch of sand and head, instead, to Currumbin or Bilinga.

"The sand is now wider than it's ever been," he said. "It just keeps building up and now the people who used to come just aren't coming, they're looking for somewhere else to stay . . . it's a three-day hike to get to the water, and mums and dads with kids and beach bags and prams just can't be bothered with that."

It's a similar story right along the Kirra strip. Cafe Fresh owner Nick Vasilaras bought his beachfront restaurant five years ago, and – unaware of local surfers' dire predictions of what the Tweed sand bypass system would eventually do to Kirra – ploughed money into refurbishments and a liquor licence.

"We've found more and more that people don't want to come to Kirra," said Mr Vasilaras. "I used to live upstairs from my shop and increasingly I began to think like the customers – if I wanted a swim I would get in the car and drive to Bilinga."

He estimated annual turnover was down about 25 per cent, and what was once a \$700-\$1000 a day takeaway trade, began dwindling about three years ago into virtually nothing today.

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President of the Kirra Business Group, John Rankin, has developed Elysee, a 24-unit, 13-level tower at Kirra, which he, too, believes has even suffered from the sand glut in the bay.

"If Kirra Point was breaking, I reckon we would have had two to three more sales in our building," he said. "A couple of guys who were looking here chose to buy at Duranbah where they can see

the surf and choose to surf where they want."

Business people who have invested money into livelihoods at Kirra are getting impatient, but acknowledge there's unlikely to be a short-term solution to reviving the surf break.

They're also furious at the lip service allegedly paid to them and the community by the sand bypass project.

Graham Nicholls argues

that authorities need to reconsider what is generating the real money on the southern Gold Coast.

"They've spent \$40 million (on the bypass system) for a few fishing trawlers to go out of the mouth, which is ridiculous. We could have 30,000 people down here across three weekends if we had the surf and the beach back," he said.

Local councillor Chris



Cafe Fresh owner Nick Vasilaras estimates that his taking are down about 25 per cent



Sand glut a turn-off, says John Rankin

Robbins says in the absence of a swift technical solution, the council is trying to ease the pain by providing economic and infrastructure solutions.

Things such as widening the walkway from Greenmount, encouraging property development and possibly co-locating a Surfing Hall of Fame at a new Billabong superstore in Kirra to attract more tourists, are all options

between North Kirra and Bilinga, and, perhaps most interestingly, the placement of a giant 'geotextile' sandbag at Kirra's big groyne to bring it back to its pre-1996 length (an extra 30m).

The bag would make for a smoother flow of sand around the point of the groyne and could, theoretically, revive some of Kirra's once-famous surf break.

Griffith University lecturer in coastal management Neil Lazarow said while it was unlikely to offer any long-term guarantees for improving surf quality, the mega sandbag was an easy and relatively cheap (less than \$250,000) option that could, if it failed, be removed.

"I'm not sure if it's a long-term solution but it's certainly worth experimenting," he said.

The geotextile bag idea however, appears to have stalled.

Cr Robbins said the council had applied to the Environmental Protection Agency for approval for alternative dumping sites for dredged sand, but was still waiting for approval.