



The Bulletin

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Bureaucrats killing our attractions

KIRRA and Kakadu – they might appear to be worlds apart, but they share common ground. Apart from both starting with the letter ‘K’, the names are becoming synonymous with bureaucratic bloody-mindedness or indifference.

Both are – or were – places of great beauty and worth. Yet both have been treated shabbily and as a consequence, both the Gold Coast and the Northern Territory are the poorer for it, with their tourism industries paying the price.

If we may borrow a cliché, both are examples of killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

How ironic that the famous Kirra Point, a longtime mecca for surfers that drew people here in the tens of thousands over the years and as a result injected millions of dollars into the local economy, has been allowed to drown in millions of tonnes of sand.

And how ironic that Kakadu, according to a report in the *Weekend Australian*, has lost its crown as a tourism ‘must’ because of over-regulation resulting from a green bureaucratic mindset that has put ‘culture’ and ‘the environment’ first.

We have witnessed a similar mindset in Queensland government departments threatening the future of tourism in our wonderful Hinterland national parks.

Just as the dirt roads that once opened Kakadu up to the wide eyes of eco-tourists have been allowed to deteriorate – reportedly deliberately to keep outsiders away, many of the tracks that took nature-loving

tourists on magnificent walks through our Hinterland mountain rainforests have been allowed to run down to the point that they are closed for ‘safety’ reasons.

These situations stand in stark contrast to the alpine regions of New Zealand’s North Island, for example, where funds have been poured into ensuring walking tracks remain passable so that the environment around the Mt Ruapehu volcano is protected and remains pristine while still shared by all.

But Kirra is a different proposition. Everyone in the Gold Coast region, even government and council bureaucrats both sides of the border, recognises the value of tourism and the fact it has been built on our sun, surf and sand.

Everyone professes to recognise the fact surfing has made a huge contribution to that and continues to do so. Millions still flock here ‘for a beach holiday’ and, having watched our world champion surfers and lifesavers in action, a chance to experience what it is like to swim, body surf and maybe try their luck on a surfboard in our famous breakers. Yet Kirra, one of the greatest spots of all, has been allowed to die. Like Greenmount, its beach has turned into a wide expanse of desert-like sand.

Plenty has been written about the state of Kirra Point, the disappearance of Kirra reef and the need to act to restore this place to its former glory.

Visually, Kirra would be one more major drawcard for tourists.

Practically, it would solve a dilemma created by too much build-up of sand pumped on to southern Gold Coast beaches from the Tweed River sand bypass.

And it would go a long way to solving the surf rage caused by crowded conditions which threaten the Gold Coast’s surfing image – and consequently, our tourism industry.

The planned Australia Day paddle-out rally must not be ignored. Governments at all levels should be concerned.

Solutions can be found. It just takes common sense and political will to get the ball rolling.