



When Kirra was king of the surf breaks

by Matthew Killoran

AS 1500 surfers yesterday gathered at Kirra Point to protest against the loss of the surf break, the scene was reminiscent of the days when the beach was at the height of its popularity.

The drowning of a young man on what was then an unpatrolled beach sparked a public meeting on January 7, 1916, which led to creation of Kirra Surf Life Saving Club.

As the popularity of the surfing spot grew, so too did the infrastructure and in the 1920s a club house was joined by a bathing house and changing rooms to accommodate the hundreds of people flocking to the beach.

In the 1950s, the sand stretched out a similar distance to today, but the water was deeper and made for great waves.

Kirra Surf Life Saving Club president Tony Wadeson said it was one of the most popular beaches on the Coast in the 1950s, with at least 1000 people laying out their towels on the weekends.

“With a southeasterly blowing there was really good surf,” he said.

He said in 1961 a rock groyne built at the Tweed River was the beginning of the

end for the beach’s popularity.

“It stopped the sand coming around and all of a sudden we had nothing, the beach disappeared,” he said,

but the surf was unaffected and in 1962 the Kirra Surfriders was formed, reflecting the spot’s growing reputation as a surf break.

In 1972, another groyne was built at Kirra Point to fight the erosion which had taken away most of the beach, but Mr Wadeson said it did little to improve the situation.

The erosion was at its height in 1974 when a cyclone caused king tides that took away the beach and half of the surf club.

Mr Wadeson said while it took three years for the club to be rebuilt, the club persevered.

The beach may have disappeared, but the surfing conditions were prime.

In 1975, the Queensland surfing titles were held at Kirra and continued good swell led to professional contests at Kirra Point.

By the 1980s there was little or no beach with waves breaking right onto the rocks.

When the Tweed sand bypass project began in 2001, the beach kept on filling in and the surf break began to disappear.