

Tuross Head VRA Presentation to Eurobodalla Shire Council meeting 28th, July, 2009

Emergency Access to the Main Beach of Tuross

SYNOPSIS

The Tuross Head VRA are concerned that since closure of the Tuross River Mouth bar they have no immediate and ready access to the Tasman Sea should an emergency require them to launch a sea going rescue craft.

BACKGROUND

The Tuross River mouth has been closed for the last 45 weeks. With a history of long closures over the last decade the now “normal” status of the Tuross River mouth is Closed.

The Tuross VRA serve the community as a first response rescue squad providing a 24 hour callout emergency service to boat owners. Their headquarters are located adjacent to Tuross Lake and their boatshed gives ready access to launch.

Since the closure of Tuross River mouth the squad cannot gain access to any sea rescue from their boatshed. Under emergency timeframes any sea rescue now requires a boat to be launched, motored to the nearby boatramp, placed on a trailer and then driven to Potato Point for launching.

More recently a trial was conducted using inflatable rollers to roll the rescue craft across the Tuross River mouth. Neither of these operations provide an immediate response.

In order to provide that immediate emergency response to any vessel at sea in need the Rescue Squad requires launching ability at Main Beach gaining access to the beach via a path across the dunes.

Whilst a short term solution has been offered by Council in the way of allowing access to Coila Bar via a Council locked access track this alternate launch area is considered by the Squad as dangerous. Their years of training raise several alarms at any attempt to launch from Coila Bar and contestants to the George Bass Marathon can attest to its dangerous and unpredictable nature.

The Tuross VRA is seeking Councils permission to gain access to Main Beach via an existing dunal crossing which requires widening to provide the width required for a four wheel drive vehicle towing an inflatable rescue craft.



From carpark towards beach



From the beach towards the carpark



The Photos above show the location of the existing dune access track. As can be seen the existing track is constructed of wooden slats constraining pedestrians between two fences. The track has recently been refurbished by Green Corps.

The adjacent “track” ploughed into the dune is a remnant of the track left through the revegetated area by Council following their last exercise in opening the Tuross River Mouth in February 2008.

ISSUES

The VRA would like to have the existing track widened enough to accommodate a four-wheel drive and a towed rescue craft. A widening of the existing track of approximately two metres is sought. Access over the storm water drain would be via two adequate pipes already placed and used by Council in February 2008.

The VRA have been informed that to provide such a track would cost \$30,000.

Council, through the Emergency Management Committee sought a grant to construct this access.

It is not understood by the VRA nor the Tuross community how the moving of a fence two metres and the provision of a gravel base and the installation of approx 75 metres of Holly Belt or recycled conveyor belt could cost \$30,000.

Environmental

As can be seen from the above photos the proposed access places no environmental risk as it is hoped that the existing dune fencing on the northern side of the access can be moved across a metre towards the gash made by the Councils earthmoving equipment in February 2008.

It is intended to then infill the existing slatted boardwalk with local “donated” gravel and then affix the belting to the top of this.

Holley matting has been used across Australia as beach access material and is considered environmentally safe and chemically stable whilst also being fully recyclable.

All measures will be made to ensure no siltation from any works run into the adjacent stormwater channel.

Asset

Council already owns the dune access fencing, boardwalk and adjacent foot bridge. The maintenance required to periodically maintain the boardwalk and restrain the fencing is already met in Councils recurring maintenance budget. Green Corp have traditionally provided the labour for the task.

The proposed access track will place less demand on maintenance as the boardwalk will be far easier to maintain requiring a periodic broom to curtail inundation as expected in any dune crossing and as already done in Broulee on the North Broulee beach accesses.

Community Consultation

Through the VRA , The Tuross Lakes Preservation Group and the Tuross Head Progress Association and Councils Access Committee Council has been approached requesting that this dunal access be provided. If further community consultaion is

required to gain community approval of the proposed works this can be organised on request and undertaken immediately with total transparency via accredited on-line survey tools as used by Eurobodalla Shire Council with the support of signatures to petitions ensuring those without internet access can also respond.

Social Impact

The Tuross Community requires this access. It is vital that the Rescue Squad has the ability to enact an immediate emergency response. The nature of the squad is aquatic therefore an immediate emergency response to any mishap in the Tasman Sea is crucial.

The Rescue Squad is well trained and well equipped. Their credibility as a rescue service has been brought under question by their police and ambulance peers due to their not being able to gain access to the sea. Should their solid and deserved reputation be brought into question it may compromise further funding and support and may undermine the sense of security held by the isolated residents of Tuross Head who are at best 25 minutes away from any ambulance callout whilst Rescue Squad members can attend within 10.

Any limitation on the squad's abilities may see a domino effect beyond the control of the Squad and Council.

In conjunction with providing rescue craft access to the Main Beach allowing a boat to then be put in anywhere along its two kilometre length (when the mouth is closed) direct disabled access will be reinstated to allow disabled patrons to enjoy the Main Beach with their families. Presently a disabled person using the community disabled wheelchair located at the adjacent caravan park needs to traverse a distance of 900 metres to be within the swimming area of the main beach.

Financial

It is not understood how a figure of \$30,000 was arrived at in earlier "quotes" for proposed works. It can only be surmised that the figure was calculated for an construction that would provide Council with ready access to the beach for substantial equipment in the order of thirty tonnes requiring high load culverts and material capable of taking tracks.

Local discussions for the modified access the VRA proposes have gravel being promised at \$200 per load, a local front end loader available at cost of fuel and possible acquisition of recycled conveyor belt at cost of transport and labour provided free by VRA and community volunteers.

A possible \$3000 could be available from the Access Committee as discussed in a recent meeting of that Committee should it be deemed that the VRA proposal would provide direct disabled access to Main Beach.

CONCLUSION

The Tuross VRA urgently requires access to the Main Beach in order to provide an emergency response service. The Rescue Squad is seeking approval from Council to improve the existing access so that it might accommodate a wider vehicle and boat. There appears to be no environmental concerns and the community are in favour of the proposal.

The VRA and Tuross Head Community appeal to Council to provide funding, if able, to carry out this project. If funding is not available the VRA request that Council look to any possible grants and make application on the communities behalf.

The community cannot however wait for Council to raise the finances it requires to construct an access capable of accommodating massive machinery used in the opening of the Tuross River mouth. A figure in the order of \$30,000 has been quoted.

If Council cannot provide the support required for the modified VRA proposal the VRA requests of them an alternate solution that will offer immediacy in response with minimal risk to VRA volunteers.