

Marine Turtles and Urban Planning – we’re slowly getting there!

Marine Turtle devotees were thrilled recently to hear the Queensland Government’s planning department has acknowledged that urban development adjacent to beaches hosting nesting marine turtles is a serious issue.

The Hon. Cameron Dick, Minister for Planning, recently released the *Temporary Local Planning Instrument No. 1 of 2019 (Bargara Building Height and Sea Turtle Sensitive Area)*, and the *Sea Turtle Sensitive Area Code: A Model Code for Local Government*.

These instruments, made under the *Planning Act 2016*, were developed and issued in conjunction with an approval for a multistorey apartment building at Bargara, the ‘Esplanade Jewel’, after the Minister ‘called in’ the application (that is, took over the approval process from the local council) and approved it with quite stringent conditions. Although the *Temporary Local Planning Instrument* is not relevant to the Sunshine Coast, the *Model Code* is, because our beaches host nesting turtles.

CaNSCC was greatly encouraged by the release of the *Model Code* because it recognises endangered marine turtles are being further threatened by urban coastal development (particularly light pollution) and require specific consideration in planning matters. The *Model Code* has as its purpose, to avoid adverse impacts to sea turtle activity generated by artificial lighting by;

1. avoiding light directly visible from the beach or ocean, and
2. avoiding any ambient lighting increasing sky glow.

We see the *Model Code* as a first and necessary step in the right direction towards ecological sustainability and better protection of endangered species. However, when we looked more closely at the *Model Code* we were disappointed by the very basic nature of some requirements, and moreover, that councils are not obliged to adopt it.

But our hopes were raised again when we reviewed the conditions of consent for the ‘Esplanade Jewel’. The original concept had extensive glass walls facing east but the final approved building design split the initial single, intensive block into two and significantly reduced the amount of glass facing the beach. It also specified that glass was to be tinted and partially screened.

Furthermore, strict lighting requirements were specified in a *Lighting Concept Design Report* which ‘hardwired’ light minimisation into the construction, to minimise reliance on occupants ‘doing the right thing’. The conditions substantially upgraded the *Model Code* by stipulating wall-mounted external lights below balustrade height, no upward light, and amber wavelength external lights. Internal lighting was also to be recessed or shielded to minimise light spill.

Importantly, these conditions applied to a building about 2.65km south east of the major loggerhead turtle rookery at Mon Repos, but opposite a beach where loggerhead turtles are recorded nesting. The situation is therefore comparable to that occurring on Sunshine Coast beaches. We are hoping that our local Councils will incorporate the more stringent conditions in future approvals. Better still, not approve high rise near the Coast.

We have written to the Sunshine Coast Councils asking how they intend to respond to the *Model Code*. Watch this space!