

Draft Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme
Review of Submissions
Local Area Key Issues Paper No.12: Cane lands

Key Issue:	Future use of Maroochy River Plain Cane lands
No. of submissions:	217
Major issues raised:	Separate planning processes for all or part of the Maroochy River Plain Cane lands Cane land be made available for urban development No urban development of Cane lands west of Coolum

1.0 INTRODUCTION

217 submissions raise issues relating to the Cane lands on the Maroochy River Plains. The majority of these submissions expressed concern about the application and accuracy of overlays, particularly in relation to riparian protection areas along waterways and cane drains.

The future use and development of the Cane lands, particularly those situated on the Maroochy River Flood Plain, has been a difficult and contentious issue since the closure of the Moreton Central Sugar Mill in 2003.

In summary, submissions raised the following issues:-

- Landowners seeking Council's commitment to an unrestricted master planning exercise for the whole of the Cane lands area with a view to the outcomes of this exercise being used to inform the SEQ Regional Plan Review;
- A proposal for urban development over an area of land immediately to the north and west of the Sunshine Coast Airport (in the vicinity of Finland Road) and offer to surrender their land to Council for the purpose of master planning and facilitating an integrated development outcome;
- the individual submissions from land owners and development interests either:-
 - identify particular lots or areas of land that should be made available for urban development (i.e. at Coolum or Verrierdale);or
 - raise concerns about the application and accuracy of particular overlays (the majority of individual submissions); and
- other submissions and form letters strongly oppose urban development on cane land to the west of Coolum.

This Local Area Key Issues Paper addresses requests:-

- for a master planning process over all or part of the Cane lands; and
- to change the zoning of certain areas of cane land to allow for urban and rural residential development.

Other issues raised in these submissions are dealt with in the relevant local plan area submissions table or the following Region Wide Key Issues Papers:-

- *Region Wide Key Issues Paper No.4: Use and subdivision of rural land;*
- *Region Wide Key Issues Paper No.6: Application and accuracy of overlays; and*

- *Region Wide Key Issues Paper No.7: Dwelling houses.*

2.0 EXISTING PLANNING SCHEME PROVISIONS

The Cane lands are included in the Sustainable cane lands precinct in Maroochy Plan 2000. The general intent of the Sustainable Cane Lands Precinct is to recognise those areas that are predominantly used for sugar cane growing or identified as being potentially suitable for commercial sugar cane growing.

The Sustainable cane lands precinct allows for a range of rural uses as well as limited other uses to establish in the precinct.

Maroochy Plan 2000 specifies a minimum lot size of 100 hectares for land within the Sustainable cane lands precinct in accordance with the requirements of the SEQ Regional Plan for the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area.

3.0 DRAFT SUNSHINE COAST PLANNING SCHEME

The draft Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme proposes a standardised and simplified approach to the management of rural uses and rural enterprise compared with the current planning schemes. This involves inclusion of all rural land (including the Cane lands) within a single Rural zone and identification of a single set of definitions for rural activities.

The Rural zone is intended to provide for a wide range of rural activities and a limited range of non-rural activities which complement, value add or provide a service to rural areas. Activities in the rural areas are intended to maintain and enhance the character, visual amenity and rural production capabilities of the area.

It is not suggested that all land within the Rural zone, is good quality agricultural land and it is acknowledged that some land will never be suitable or used for rural production. However, this land still has other values in terms of its contribution to landscape and ecosystem services.

Apart from inclusion in the Rural zone, a notable feature of the draft planning scheme in respect to the Cane lands is the extensive area identified as being subject to the flood inundation area element on the applicable flood hazard overlay maps.

The presence of this overlay element recognises the susceptibility of the Cane lands (and particularly the Maroochy River Plain Cane lands) to frequent inundation caused by overflows from the Maroochy River during high rainfall events.

4.0 PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS INTO CANE LAND FUTURES

There have been a number of investigations, discussion papers and planning projects undertaken in respect to the Maroochy River Plain Cane lands.

These include:-

- Vision and Action Plan – Towards a rural future for the Cane lands in Maroochy Shire (Maroochy Shire Council 2003);
- Achieving Sustainable Lands Use on the Sunshine Coast Former Cane lands: Scoping solutions beyond land use planning (CSIRO, 2008); and
- Cane lands Discussion Paper (Sunshine Coast Regional Council, 2009).

5.0 SUBMISSIONS IN MORE DETAIL

5.1 Landowners Group

A number of landowners contend that growing sugar cane is unlikely to be sustainable again and Council has not recognised the economic potential of the Maroochy River Plains by investigating all alternate land uses including those that would not currently be supported by the SEQ Regional Plan.

The landowners submission requests that Council actively and without restriction plan for an improved future for the Maroochy River Plains and do so within a timeframe which can influence the review of the SEQ Regional Plan.

A separate planning process be undertaken for the Maroochy River Plains

The submission requests that Council undertake a separate land use master planning exercise that gives guidance to the future potential outcomes for the Cane lands. The submission contends that this process can occur separately from the current planning scheme process with a future amendment to the planning scheme used to reflect the outcomes of the new master plan.

The submission requests that the master plan should not be limited in the range of land uses it can consider including urban and rural residential uses. Reference is made to council's decision of December 2010 which imposed an exclusion of consideration to expansion of the Urban Footprint and thereby urban development.

Urban development and rural residential subdivision be entertained

The submission acknowledges that the preferred council and community outcomes include protection and rehabilitation of riparian lands, land management for weed control and maintenance of drains.

The submission contends that to provide funding for these community outcomes, proposals for 'up-valuing' land through bonus and transferable development rights are necessary.

Council to seek changes to next SEQ Regional Plan

The submission requests that if the preferred land uses outcomes of the master plan require changes to the SEQ Regional Plan to be implemented then council should seek that from the State government and then amend the Planning Scheme.

Allowable uses in the Rural zone

The submission identifies specific changes to the range of consistent and inconsistent uses for the Rural zone. These issues are dealt within the Region Wide Key Issues Paper No.4 Use and subdivision of rural land.

Other changes to planning scheme provisions

The submission identifies specific changes to provisions in the draft planning scheme related to:-

- filling in flood areas for buildings and access;
- flood free access provided to premises; and
- cane drains being identified as natural waterways.

5.2 Finland Road submission

A submission was received relating to a number of parcels of land to the north of the airport and west of the Sunshine Motorway.

The submission seeks a degree of certainty for future use of the land in the Finland Road area and requests that this area be annexed to the airport precinct as an 'Airport Employment Node'.

The submission contends the subject land has no rural viability or environmental values and questions the extent of flooding across the area.

The submission raises a number of concerns about council processes and the way this land and surrounding land has been viewed and treated by council up to this point in time.

The submission suggests that a lack of planning by the former Caloundra and Maroochy Councils has resulted in an inadequate supply of industrial land to meet the future needs of the region.

The submission suggests there are significant benefits to Council (including in terms of funding for the expansion of the Sunshine Coast Airport) and the landowners if this land is zoned for airport related industry.

The submission indicates that the landowners are prepared to cede their land to Council for master planning and development purposes on the proviso they are paid by the eventual corporate airport partners.

The submission includes a concept plan for an Airport Employment Node and details of how the proposal could work.

5.3 Individual land owner/developer submissions

A small number of submissions from individual land owners/developers advocate for amendments to the draft planning scheme and/or SEQ Regional Plan to allow urban or rural residential development on areas of cane land currently included in the Rural zone.

Whilst these submissions deal with a range of sites, two areas of particular note (because of their size and location) are:-

- an area at Coolum, south of the Yandina-Coolum Road and west of the Sunshine Motorway (approximately 510 hectares in area); and
- an area at Verrierdale, west of Peregian Springs/Coolum Ridges (approximately 750 hectares in area).

These submissions provide a range of reasons why urban development should be supported in these areas. Principal among these is that the current pattern of settlement for the Sunshine Coast is skewed toward the southern part of the region (between Caloundra and Maroochydore) and that this should be addressed by releasing more urban/rural residential land in locations north of the Maroochy River.

Most submissions from individual land owners relate specifically to the issue of overlays.

5.4 Community group and form letter submissions

A submission was received from a community group indicating strong opposition to urban development on the cane lands to the west of Coolum. In addition, a large number of form letters were received in a similar format to the community group submission and also opposing any urban development on the cane lands to the west of Coolum.

6.0 CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES

6.1 Development of the Cane lands generally and an integrated master planning process

Issue:-

A number of submissions propose that Council commence a master planning process for part or all of the Maroochy River Plain Cane lands.

These submissions contend that such a master planning process should include consideration of future urban growth scenarios and be used to inform the review of the SEQ Regional Plan.

A submission distinguishes land in the Finland Road area (west of the Sunshine Coast Airport) from other cane land in the Maroochy River Plains on the basis that the land has specific locational attributes that make it well suited for development as an airport related industry and enterprise precinct.

Response:-

As described earlier, the future use and development of the Cane lands has been a difficult and contentious issue since the closure of the Moreton Central Sugar Mill in 2003.

With no broad scale economically viable agricultural land use options available since the closure of the Mill, it has been difficult to identify potential alternative uses for the Cane lands that successfully balance the needs of the general community (for the ongoing delivery of ecosystem and landscape protection services) with the needs of affected land owners (for a certain and economically sustainable future).

Regardless of the provisions of the SEQ Regional Plan, the various biophysical attributes of the Cane lands, most particularly a propensity for flooding, make this area highly constrained with limited suitability for large scale urban development, rural residential subdivision and many other urban uses and built infrastructure.

There have been a number of recent investigations, discussion papers and planning projects that have sought to identify potential land use options and define what a sustainable future for the Cane lands might entail having regard to the constraints identified above.

In December 2010, Council resolved to prepare a master plan for the Cane lands area but this did not proceed for a number of reasons.

Some landowners were not supportive of this master planning process because Council excluded consideration of changes to the Urban Footprint and thereby the consideration of future options for urban development.

As it has now been more than 10 years since the closure of the Moreton Central Mill (and 4 years since the completion of the most recent Discussion Paper) it may be timely to once again consider the preparation of a comprehensive master plan for the Cane lands.

Issues about the future use of the Cane lands remain unresolved and many rural land owners continue to face uncertainty about the best way to manage their land.

Any changes to the Urban Footprint and other land use categories need to be considered in a regional context having regard to the preferred future pattern of settlement and infrastructure planning for the Sunshine Coast as a whole.

Whilst the potential for urban development over part of the Cane lands should not be ruled out where there is an overwhelming case to support such a land use outcome, neither should it be considered a desirable or likely outcome for more than a small fraction of the Cane lands.

Flooding, a high water table and the impacts of incremental or large scale filling on catchment characteristics represent significant constraints.

Given the complexity of issues involved, any master planning process should not be rushed. It is not considered practicable to satisfactorily complete such a project within a timeframe that can inform the current review of the SEQ Regional Plan.

The SEQ Regional Plan review process has already commenced and it is anticipated that a draft version of the updated Regional Plan will be publicly notified in the first half of 2014. Adequate time should be taken to scope, plan, consult and develop any master plan for the Cane lands.

Council's population assessment has demonstrated there is sufficient capacity in the existing zoned land to accommodate the SEQ Regional Plan population estimates for the Sunshine Coast to 2031.

The general community should be a major stakeholder in any type of master planning exercise. The level of interest in planning for the Cane lands is demonstrated by the large number of submissions that have raised concerns about the development of the Cane lands to the west of Coolumb.

The zoning categories of the planning scheme and the regional land use categories in the SEQ Regional Plan should remain unchanged until such time as the master planning process described above has been completed.

Whilst any master planning process should consider all parts of the Cane lands it is considered appropriate that the southern area (around Finland Road) be an early focus for investigation. The proximity and accessibility of this land to the Sunshine Coast Airport and the Maroochydore Principal Regional Activity Centre dictates that this is a key area of interest. It is therefore intended to identify the Finland Road area in the Strategic framework as a further investigation area for industry and community uses that support and are compatible with the further development of the Sunshine Coast Airport.

6.2 Zoning changes

Issue:-

A number of submissions contend that particular sites or areas of cane land should be included in either the Rural residential zone or one of the urban zones in the final planning scheme.

These submissions tend to rely upon one or more of the following grounds to justify a change in zoning:-

- the absence of a sufficient supply of urban land north of the Maroochy River;
- the proximity of the subject site/area to existing developed areas;
- the general suitability of the subject site/area for urban development; and
- the limited suitability of the subject site/area for rural production.

In a number of cases these submissions are supported by development concepts, infrastructure network plans and technical assessments of need.

Response:-

The preferred pattern of settlement for the Sunshine Coast reflects previous growth management projects and strategic assessments of need, land suitability and the capacity to efficiently deliver infrastructure and services to particular areas.

This growth management strategy provides for the majority of future urban growth to be accommodated in the coastal urban area between Maroochydore and Caloundra South.

Under this growth management strategy, parts of the region including areas north of the Maroochy River and west of the Bruce Highway are anticipated to accommodate a comparatively smaller share of future regional growth. Where growth does occur in these areas, it is generally focussed on the larger centres (e.g. Nambour) or associated with the priority investment areas (e.g. the Sunshine Coast Airport).

This approach reflects an intent to achieve a progressive shift towards a more consolidated and diverse urban fabric characterised by mixed use activity centres and connected and vibrant communities. Such an approach reduces the incidence of multiple growth fronts and the cost to provide infrastructure.

Council's population assessment has confirmed that there is sufficient land allocated within the local growth management boundaries of the draft planning scheme to accommodate projected population growth to at least 2031. Slower growth rates since 2008 indicate that this land supply will likely last to beyond this date.

It is not the case that all communities have been allocated sufficient land to accommodate previous estimates of trend population growth into the future. Rather, growth is balanced across the region having regard to the strategic planning key concepts and more detailed considerations described above.

See also Section 6.1 (above).

7.0 DIRECTION

That:

- (a) Council initiate a master planning process for the Maroochy River Plain Cane lands to identify:**
 - (i) the preferred land use and management outcomes for the Cane lands; and**
 - (ii) the regulatory mechanisms and other approaches necessary to achieve these outcomes;**
- (b) the outcomes of the master planning process inform a future planning scheme amendment or review of the planning scheme and amendments to the SEQ Regional Plan (where required); and**
- (c) Part 3 (Strategic framework) be amended to recognise the Finland Road area as a further investigation area for industry and community uses that support and are compatible with the further development of the Sunshine Coast Airport.**