

PIVOTAL MOMENTS

MISSION BEACH'S STRUGGLE FOR AN AQUATIC CENTRE

ABBRIDGED VERSION OF 'A POOL TO BE COOL'
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED UNDER THE SURFACE?

BY KEN GRAY

Published by
Mission Beach Historical Society
Document AB06 Version 1.1.
Website: mbhs.com.au



This publication is copyright © Mission Beach Community Association, 2022.
First published 2022.
Author: Ken Gray. *Editor:* Margaret Remilton.

Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this work may be stored, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission. Inquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

A record of this title is held at the National Library of Australia (Ebook) and the State Library of Queensland (Print and Ebook).

This article is an abbreviated version of the book, *A Pool to be Cool*, H006 which is also able to be accessed in the Mission Beach Historical Society catalogue on the webpage.

The text and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and of people interviewed by the author, and do not reflect the views of the Mission Beach Historical Society or its members.

Mission Beach Historical Society's logo designed by Leonard Andy, copyright © Leonard Andy. The design depicts a Djiru shield with a cassowary which is the endangered, iconic flightless bird living in the north Queensland rainforests.

The histories published by Mission Beach Historical Society are as accurate as we are able to make them. Few accounts of history are 100% correct and there are going to be more errors when we recall events of many years ago. We always welcome suggested edits and additions or deletions and where possible we will edit where we find we are in error. However, the oral histories we record are the words of the people we interview and we can only alter those with the authorisation of the people we interviewed.

MAUREEN NORRIS | STARTUP

This story is about how Mission Beach won its Aquatic Centre after a struggle lasting almost 20 years. The full story is recorded in a book by the same author held in Mission Beach Historical Society's collections. It's called *A Pool to be Cool* (H006.) In that book, the many people who were involved in the community's advocacy campaign are recognized. Their important stories are told.

This is a summary of what happened and includes the start-up of the organization and opening of the pool in 2018 and eleven of the most pivotal moments and political tiffs on the journey.

Nothing would have happened had it not been for Maureen Norris who called a public meeting in early 2001 to see if residents agreed that it was time for Mission Beach to fight for a swimming pool. Maureen, who was assisted by her friend, Diane Jago, found many like-minded residents and soon had an active and motivated group beavering away on the project. She was joined by Coralie Kemp and Paul Roxby at that first meeting and both put their hands up to be office bearers. Maureen became President, Coralie Treasurer, Lisa Arnold Secretary and Paul Vice-President.

By May 2001, Maureen had incorporated the association (Mission Beach Aquatic & Recreation Club Inc. or MBARC Inc.), so the fundraising could be started in earnest. Councils were soon engaged to test the waters.

The primary goal of the group was to win funding to enable Councils to construct an Aquatic Centre that fitted most reasonable, expressed needs of residents. No one at the startup meeting could have envisaged that it would take over 14 years to win the funding and a further three to open the facility. And no one at the start envisaged the beautiful and highly functional facility that was finally built.

The first meeting was not only the start of the campaign, it also, by some odd quirk of fate, brought together three incredibly talented people. The 'three amigos,' Paul, Coralie and Maureen; each had different skills and experience. Together they were a real force. They met monthly with members, attended every meeting and developed a deep and enduring bond. They had immense fun and quickly attracted a wide spectrum of people to help raise the funds needed to run the organization. Their energy and enthusiasm ensured that MBARC would survive the long battle to come.

They were joined by Ken Gray in 2003 when he agreed to do the Feasibility Study needed for any fund applications. After years of Snakes and Ladders and disappointments, Paul left Mission Beach in 2008 and was soon followed by Maureen in 2009 then Coralie in 2010. The three amigos bid Ken adieu and trusted that he would volunteer to be President and keep the ball rolling.

When they left the district, they did not leave us entirely. They encouraged the group thereafter and Paul came back for a few events to help out and continued to badger politicians in Council from his NSW home. Because of their enormous efforts over many years, the community was widely supportive and Ken would have no difficulty recruiting an energetic new team and find a way to win the funding.

ESSENTIAL STUDIES

By 2003, much progress had been made, yet the two Councils were unmoved by MBARC's overtures. An age-old problem confronted the town and the club. It was split down the middle, with the southern part in Cardwell Shire and the northern villages in Johnstone Shire. That enabled the councils to stall and claim that the town was not big enough to have a pool even though Tully and Cardwell were already by then smaller towns than Mission Beach.

Councils adopted an evasive strategy. When Maureen first asked them to build a pool, they said that Mission Beach must conduct a Needs Analysis to show that most people wanted it. Other towns in the Shires had never been asked to do that. The usual practice was that Councils would conduct such studies at their own cost. Oddly enough, only Mission Beach was being asked to fund or conduct its own studies. For other projects, such as the Innisfail Library and the Innisfail Wharf or the Tully Multi-Purpose Centre or the Tully Stadium, Council did the necessary pre-construction studies to facilitate the projects without asking those towns to fund the preliminary work or to make the case for funding.

When MBARC returned to the Councils with their Needs Analysis completed, the case was compellingly proven, yet the Councils merely asked for more studies. They now insisted on a Feasibility Study and while MBARC had some funds by then, they did not have anything near the \$60,000 needed for a Feasibility Study. The way forward looked to be nearly impossible.

The Mayor of Johnstone Shire had seen community-study work done by Ken Gray who led the Johnstone River Flood Modelling project for the Innisfail community and had also managed the Mission Beach Sewerage Study which involved two years of community engagement. The Mayor suggested that MBARC ask Ken to conduct the Feasibility Study at an affordable price. After a chat with the three amigos, Ken was so impressed with their work and energy that he agreed to do the study at no cost. Little did he know, he was now caught in the web of these three crafty operators and would remain heavily involved in this campaign for the next 18 years.

Fortuitously, this led to Ken producing 18 studies and leading a team to create a lively community video. The diverse studies created by MBARC were worth more than \$120,000 and included many community surveys on priority needs and site preferences. The studies provided the essential data and case studies that created the standout funding applications. A desktop study of Queensland's towns, for example, showed that of 29 towns with populations of 1,000 to 2,000 residents only one was without a pool: Mission Beach. This data was mapped to visually demonstrate the huge inequity. Mission Beach had a population of more than 3,000 at that time.

Other crucial studies on topics such as Marine Stinger Health Impacts, Regional Tourism Impacts, and Sports Participation and Health Impacts, generated vital data to make the Mission Beach case truly compelling.

MAYOR BILL SHANNON

The election of Bill Shannon as Mayor in 2008 was another pivotal moment and his re-election in 2012 was equally important.

Every four years, there was a Council election and, with the changing of the guard, we faced new Councillors and had to sell the proposal all over again. The two Councillors that always mattered most were our local Division Councillor and the Mayor. Without their support it would be very difficult to win the case. Sometimes we did not even have the local Councillor's support, but Bill's solid backing proved to be vital in overcoming that.

Each time, we spoke to the candidates pre-election and obtained promises to build the pool, but after they were elected they invariably changed their minds. These classic political backflips happened in both Councils after the 2004 elections with the new Tully Mayor deciding soon after the election that the Tully MPC (which was not mentioned before the election) was ahead of the Mission Beach pool in the asset building queue. Same at Innisfail with the Mayor saying they could not afford the pool. Both said they supported the project pre-election and both shamelessly reneged.

However, in 2008, two events boosted our chances of success. First was that the two Councils were merged to become the Cassowary Coast Regional Council so Mission Beach was no longer split. We hoped that would make a big difference, but it did not do so for some time because of the dire financial position of the new entity. The second and most profound change was the election of Bill Shannon as Mayor. Here was a man of integrity. He made no promises pre-election because he had done his homework and knew that the two Councils had been run poorly in the past and it would take a considerable time to repair the finances. We met all the new Councillors soon after the election and were told we must wait a few years to progress the pool, and we understood and accepted that clear message.

Bill Shannon nonetheless was fully onside with the project and said he would progress it when the time was right. He set about repairing the region's badly degraded infrastructure and attracted over \$100 million in government funds to renew the dilapidated sewer, water and road infrastructure. Few residents ever understood the enormity of what he did to make the Council viable in his two terms as Mayor. He received little recognition or thanks for fixing our finances.

Importantly, we knew where we stood with Bill Shannon even if it meant waiting a while to get started. We, as a group, had little to do with the good fortune of Bill's election and his re-election, yet we were greatly buoyed by these events at the time. In his second term, he saw the project through to completion as he later said he would.

By 2016, when Bill chose not to stand for re-election, the funding was won and the project's future was assured; well, almost assured. Hidden forces remained and worked against MBARC Inc. to thwart the achievement of its goals.

CORALIE KEMP | FACEBOOK POWER

Making our case and keeping the community informed and involved was always a challenge. There was not a newspaper in the region that reached a high portion of residents. The *Tully Times* had more readers than the *Innisfail Advocate* yet few people in Mission Beach bought either of these papers. We needed a way to communicate with and influence a wider spectrum of people and a way to make Council and Councillors sit up and listen. Carping to newspapers was not an effective solution.

Coralie Kemp came to the rescue once again. Coralie was the finance guru within MBARC. There were always rumours that the community funds donated to the pool group had been taken by some fraudulent act; the rumours persisted, even in 2021. Yet Coralie never lost a cent and always had the books independently audited. Ken inherited these accounts in 2010 when Coralie left town. He found her records were impeccable and the funds secure and Rose Cooper became Treasurer to continue Coralie's good work.

In late 2009, Coralie put her creative hat on. She was a popular party girl and an extraordinary fundraiser as well so there were more strings to her bow than finance. She setup our Facebook page and had it working well before she made Ken the Facebook Administrator in 2010.

The Facebook page was a boomer. About half the town's residents were following the page, so we now had a no-cost way to communicate, update people and make the case. Further, Council were tuned into Facebook and knew its power in the region so it was harder for them to ignore MBARC. From that point forward, we had a much stronger and more effective voice and Facebook became a useful tool in our quest for funding. Ken had no idea how to use Facebook initially but Desley Todd and Pete Faulkner showed the old coot the ropes. The number of followers soon ramped up with over 3,400 at the peak.

The critical period for Facebook was when funding became a real possibility from 2011 to when we finally won the jackpot in December 2015. During that period Ken created 85% of the pool page posts and Coralie most the others. After 2016, Ken appointed Paul as an Editor and he contributed more regular posts thereafter and he was active for the entire period in terms of post comments.

In late 2015, following the two big funding wins, the pool page posts reached more than 30,000 people in one week, so we were certainly being noticed. Thanks to Coralie.



Coralie Kemp



Maureen Norris (Scott)



Margaret Darveniza

COUNCIL'S FIRST 'YES'

Things started going our way a little in mid-2010. Once again, Bill Shannon's fingerprints were written all over this moment.

Despite knowing they would have to wait a while for Council to apply for funding, Paul (from afar) and Ken were still quietly nagging the Mayor and looking for an opportunity to start. An opening came when the Federal Government announced their *Federal Stimulus Package*. That looked very interesting, and Council decided soon after that they would evaluate three proposals and choose one to apply for. The three candidates were a new Innisfail Library, a new Grandstand for Tully and the first ever pool for Mission Beach. It was two asset replacement projects against one first build.

If justice prevailed, then the inequity would end now and Council would choose Mission Beach. Unsurprisingly, the three Innisfail Councillors banded together and voted for the library. Bill agreed to give them the fourth deciding vote, if they agreed to a motion to declare that Council would apply for funding for the pool when the next round of State Sports and Recreation Funding reappeared. The Councillors agreed quickly, and now we had a small ray of hope for the future.

Unfortunately, this fund went into a long hibernation. It was a pyrrhic victory yet did set a precedent and, more importantly, the motion included a commitment for Council to set aside a reserve in the budgets, so that when funds were opened up, CCRC (Cassowary Coast Regional Council) had the wherewithal to secure the money and build the pool.

That was progress. However, we soon learned that one 'YES' from Council would not be enough. We were made to plead our case every time a fund became available. We had to front up to Council and win a majority in Council meetings every time we found a suitable fund to apply for.

They never made it easy for Mission Beach to obtain basic community infrastructure that every other Queensland town of 1,000 residents or more already enjoyed. In one of the many battles to win a Council vote after this, one of the Innisfail Councillors wrote and made headlines in a local newspaper by saying that this infrastructure was a *luxury item* (and Innisfail needed the money more.)

Emotions in Mission Beach were boiling over by 2012. After a Cardwell resident wrote to the press about the need for sails for their pool, Ed Lang of Wongaling Beach made a succinct reply:

While I sympathise with the residents of Cardwell that their pool shade covers are missing, spare a thought for the residents of Mission Beach – their whole pool is missing.

In 2014, things were heating up in Council as well and a newspaper reported on one of the many vigorous Council debates about how the project would be funded:

Cr Mark Nolan questioned the wisdom of Council including a \$1.6M loan towards the Mission Beach pool in the 2015-16 budget. I understand the pool is precious to you (directed to Mayor Bill Shannon) but it is not precious to me. A vote was taken on Cr Nolan's amendment with Cr's Farinelli and Rule voting with Cr Nolan, and Crs Shannon, Macdonald and Raleigh voting against and Cr Shannon using his Mayoral casting vote to break the deadlock.

THE UPRISING

In December 2009, there was a glimmer of hope. Council appointed an architect to do the 4th concept design. Unfortunately, the Director in charge of the project ignored the extensive MBARC research on community preferences saying it was out of date. She refused to redo the surveys to understand what the new priorities were (if they had indeed changed), and said she knew what was best for the town and that residents know nothing about such facilities. Not a grand start. This dreadful old fashioned approach continued for the three years she was with Council.

The architect had never designed a pool with a lagoon, so we had the blind leading the blind. Community frustration quickly grew. To add insult to injury, the Director ignored the earlier concept drawn for Councils by a specialist Brisbane pool architect in consultation with Councillors and residents. The Director felt the constant heat from Ken and promised to convene a Community Reference Group (CRG) to listen to the views of local organizations. However, her strategy was always to dilute the influence of MBARC Inc., the community's only pool advocacy group.

In August 2010, Ken had his fourth face-to-face meeting with the Director and her close friend, the Division 3 Councillor, who backed her every move. Ken went over the Director's head to the CEO but was again stonewalled. In November, after further fruitless debates, Ken was summoned to a meeting at Innisfail where the CEO and Director pleaded with him to moderate his strident comments regarding the design and lack of community consultation. The promise was hollow: *Trust us – it will be alright, we know what we are doing*, was the message. Ken refused the blank cheque and relations were at a low ebb when he suggested that the Director be trained in community engagement. Tempers frayed.

To neutralize the influence of MBARC, Council called a meeting in Tully inviting as many Mission Beach organizations as possible to debate the pool plans. Most of the people invited had little or no knowledge of, or interest in the plans or the community needs. By this time Ken was armed with his hot-off-the press 2010 community survey report which achieved a massive 20% resident participation. To obtain a statistically reliable result a sample size of only 10% of the population is required for these studies, so these results were watertight. The poll revealed **exactly the same facility** preference priorities as in previous community studies that the Director had canned. The Council's plan to pour a bucket of water on MBARC failed abysmally; MBARC's hand was greatly strengthened.

However, Council remained unmoved, and with no signs of progress, MBARC decided to go public as Ken had promised they would. At a meeting run by Ken and Pete Faulkner, Paul Roxby arrived on the day to support the team. Over 300 attended the meeting and roared their approval at the speakers and resoundingly endorsed the demands for redesign after community consultation. The Mayor ended the meeting with a promise to form a Community Reference Group (CRG) and draw up a new design after proper consultation. Council endorsed that vow in a motion early in 2011 and the CRG was formed. That looked promising, but a leopard does not change its spots and the CRG was ignored. The design was better yet still inept. However, strong advocacy was gradually working and MBARC were rock solid in their determination to achieve a design that was fully fit for purpose. Despite this, it would not be for another two years, when the Director was replaced, that the pool design would anywhere near meet resident expectations.

MARGARET DARVENIZA | ENGAGEMENT

There are some moments that are bigger than most. The appointment of Margaret Darveniza as the CCRC Director was a giant leap forward. Ken had been in a constant state of war with the previous Director who doggedly refused to engage with the community or even refer to valid community research. When Margaret arrived all that changed instantly. MBARC now had a voice and resident priorities were understood and seen as valid. At last, Council and the community were a team

Bill Shannon was always open to the views of the community but was a big-picture man. Early on, he cited the Kuranda pool as an example of what Mission Beach needed yet that was a disaster, a mere hole in the ground without shade sails and nothing like the facility that Mission Beach needed.

Margaret quickly understood and agreed to the primary elements of the facility: the lap pool, a heated indoor pool and a modern leisure lagoon or billabong. Next most important was shade. While a CRG was appointed after the Uprising in 2010, it had never functioned well. Indeed, while Margaret used it meaningfully, most of the important changes to the design were evolved outside that forum.

Margaret changed the architects and their new design was our 9th version. None of the previous architect's designs met the scrutiny of MBARC but this one was exceptionally well received and needed little tweaking to achieve community approval. The one time that the CRG functioned quite well was its last meeting where MBARC were seeking small late changes to the design. Ken was in Europe at the time and asked Paul Roxby and Shane Thorogood to go in his place and they engaged well with Margaret and achieved some change. The changes were worthwhile but the one we wanted most, shade for the billabong, was agreed to by Margaret but rejected by the new Councillors.

MBARC had no voice when the Kremastos Council was elected. Engagement dropped over a cliff and Margaret was marginalized and her contract was not renewed despite all of her success with so many projects including this one and the Innisfail Library. It would not be until the next Council was elected in 2020 that we gained the necessary shade for the billabong. In September 2021, three years after the opening, the billabong had some shade erected.

Margaret not only ensured that the town received the facility design that it sought, but she also worked in close partnership, using all of the MBARC research to advantage when writing the fund applications with Ken. Her ability to engage with MBARC and use its research and data in fund application options was a key to her amazing success.

Council originally planned to spend \$2.5M in ratepayer funds on a stage 1 pool project (just a lap pool and café). What Margaret delivered was the full Monty or almost exactly what the community ordered at a cost of only \$900,000 in ratepayer funds. That was achieved because of her active partnership with MBARC. Council won \$7M in State and Federal funds when everyone thought \$3.5M would be the best possible outcome.

Margaret's legacy is the fine Aquatic Centre the town now proudly owns and uses.

FIRST FAILED COUP

Throughout the campaign there were vigorous debates about which facilities we should build and where we should build it. Up to 10% of the population thought that it would be better to build on the beachfront and have a lagoon, as in Cairns. MBARC fully investigated that option and proposed building a combination pool at Rotary Park in 2005 after bringing in a Brisbane-based pool architect to engage the community on design and site options. Both Councils rejected that proposal outright.

We soon realized that there would never be Council support for a beachside lagoon or a 50 metre lap pool which a small portion of residents wanted. The optimum facility would be a 25 metre lap pool with a small leisure lagoon and a heated indoor pool. That suited the needs of most residents so was the fair and sensible solution. Ken was a contractor for Cairns Regional Council at the time and knew the costs of building and maintaining a beachfront lagoon. By 2018, the build cost would have been \$50M and even a mini-lagoon would cost \$30M and the running costs would be almost \$2M a year. A small lagoon was proposed for Port Douglas, which had a tourist economy six times the size of Mission Beach and that proposal fell well short of achieving funding approval. We were no chance of a beachside lagoon here with such a small population and economy.

However, the lagoon idea kept raising its head. The first strong push for the concept came in late 2009 when Bob Katter was brought in by a tourism and business lobby group pushing for a lagoon at the CCRC camping ground site in Mission Beach. In 2013, the Division 3 Councillor invited State bureaucrats to examine beachside sites for a lagoon and the lobby was renewed. Shortly after that, this informal lobby group, with no declared leaders, ran a campaign and a petition for an extended period. However, they were only able to garner signatures from 7% of Mission Beach residents.

Undeterred, the Councillor, who was strongly supporting tourism in town, took it to Council in January 2015 and laid everything on the line saying that if he lost the vote that would be the last time he would oppose the MARCS Park community pool proposal. In the run up to the Council vote, Ken unleashed the voice of the vibrant 29-member MBARC Committee that was gradually built up over five years to improve community inclusion. This team responded vigorously to the call: to arms: *Enough is Enough!* Councillors received a tsunami of emails, letters and phone calls rejecting the Council motion. The motion was defeated soundly, 5-2. Once again MBARC won the vote as they would have to do twice more in 2015 before the campaign was finally won and the funding secured.

Over the years, Ken completed five community survey reports, analysing resident opinions on their preferred sites and facilities. There was another one done in 2001 by a Cairns consultant. The 2010 study was the clincher with such a large sample strongly in favour of the site and the facilities mix we advocated. The picture was essentially the same in all of the polls and almost 2,000 residents had participated in the surveys between 2001 and 2013.

The community had spoken loudly once again and the first coup was stopped dead in its tracks simply because it was promoting a concept that was not at all widely supported in the community.

MAXINE MARSH | VIDEO MAGIC

Maxine Marsh, a long standing member of the MBARC Committee, created another pivotal moment in 2015 when we decided to produce a video to show politicians and funding panels how desperately the community wanted and needed a pool. We had to produce it quickly and cheaply but most of all we needed it to stand out and have an instant and memorable impact on those we sent the video to.

Maxine suggested that her family of video gurus would do the movie clip at no significant cost to MBARC. They did so and the result was a resounding success; far exceeding all expectations.

In 2014, Council had applied for funding from Sports and Recreation (S&R) QLD. The bid was unsuccessful. Afterwards, Ken met with State S&R Advisors from Cairns (Karen Reimann and Erika Gee-Got) at MARCS Park to learn from the failed bid. After going through the case, showing them the site and demonstrating how keen the community were, Karen and Erika made suggestions. They explained why we missed out, what factors were key to winning State funds and provided government contacts to help us with the next bid.

They found the funding case for the pool was surprisingly strong, especially when they saw the evidence explained in person. We looked at the barriers that the project faced. The main problem was that we had made the case repeatedly to local, State and Federal politicians and bureaucrats then, when we had them on side, along came another election. We faced new people and had to start right back at the beginning. Karen suggested a community video to tell the story quickly to all new players.

Ken obtained quotes for a short video. \$7,000 would consume a big chunk of MBARC's hard-won community funds and the aim was to retain most of these funds for construction. Maxine Marsh suggested that her family of professional video makers may do the video. Peter Marsh agreed to make the video with Gabi Plumm as narrator and Robert Marsh editor.

A draft screen script was written by Ken who listed some video titles and the Committee met and decided on cast members and the video title, *A Pool to be Cool*. That name was used right back at the start of the campaign and resonated widely. Ken recruited the cast and briefed each on what their message would ideally be ... leaving plenty of scope for personality and *ad lib*.

A wonderful cast volunteered and delivered. The stars were Leandra Willis, Tanya Holliday, Georgia Hayley, Jane Berge, Bill Shannon, Pete Faulkner, Jo and Rory Senior, Dave Nissen, Dyana Brown and the fabulous jumping kids on the beach.

The movie was dedicated to Jarred Crook with the kind approval of his mum, Amy.

This funky little video clip was produced quickly and was not meant to be a polished Oscar-winning production, rather a genuine expression of the community needs and their emotions relating to the pool project.

Its impacts exceeded our wildest dreams. Those in positions to influence or making decisions on funds universally loved it and quickly understood the community message and quickly saw and understood the depth of the inequity.

NOELINE IKIN | INFLUENCE

As we neared the inevitable D-Day when we could lodge an application with a significant fund we desperately needed someone on our side with significant influence in Canberra.

Mission Beach had never been in a marginal Federal seat position but in 2015 an election was looming and a candidate who could beat the incumbent member, Bob Katter, was looming in the wings. Noeline Ikin, LNP candidate for Kennedy was primed and ready and the bookies had her as a firming favourite. The political world now saw this seat as marginal due to her efforts in the previous election where she led by 11% in the primary vote. She had worked hard since and this would be close. That had great implications for Mission Beach for now all eyes were on Kennedy.

Ken had courted the Katter Party earlier without success. Bob Katter had attended meetings of MBARC in the early days and was close to Maureen and Paul, but he was swayed by the small splinter group in Mission Beach by this time so supported their push for a lagoon on the foreshore rather than a community pool at MARCS Park.

If Noeline could be convinced of the mainstream community view, we would take an enormous step forward in our funding campaign.

A simple phone call was all that was required. Ken called Noeline and soon discovered what an incredibly engaging and effective candidate she was. In no time, she was in Mission Beach weaving her magic and listening to the people. Ken organized for her to address the monthly Mission Beach Community Association meeting where she spoke briefly and sought feedback from the audience.

Noeline instantly saw the inequity of a town with no pool. She engaged actively with many people in the two days she was here and left after promising to persuade her party and influential people in Canberra that the Mission Beach pool must be a priority.

Noeline opened the gates for Mission Beach in Canberra. She raised political interest in Mission Beach exponentially. We could not thank Noeline again as she, sadly, died soon after our funding news came through. The town will never forget her vital interventions.



Noeline Ikin



Maureen, Paul, Coralie and Ken celebrate their success.

WINNING FUNDS

This was THE pivotal moment. It was our primary reason for being. Without funds we could do nothing. We saw many rounds of Regional Development funding come and go and our constant pleas to apply for these funds were denied on the grounds that we could not make a case for impacting the regional economy. Yet we had such a compelling story ready to roll to make that case.

The only fund the Councillors would allow us to go for was State Sports and Recreation. That maxed out at \$1.5M, so if we did win anything there it would only be for Stage 1. That was a dangerous strategy, for everyone knew that gaining funds to complete the project could take another 20 years.

Sports and Recreation Funding eventually resurfaced in 2014, and by that time every Council in the State had projects shovel-ready. Bigger towns were ahead of us in the queue with more votes at stake. Council applied, yet as expected, the application failed. That was lucky in retrospect.

The stars aligned in 2015, when the Federal Government announced its *National Stronger Regions Fund* (NSRF). We could apply for \$3.5M for the project, 50% of the estimated cost. We finally had an opportunity to apply for the funds to complete the whole project without staging. Soon after, the *Queensland Building our Regions Fund* opened with similar criteria. In almost all cases when Council's apply for funds, governments provide a maximum of 50% of the total funding, so no one rated us any chance of winning both. Council voted to apply for both in the hope of winning one.

Our first funding application draft was written by Ken Gray in 2010. This was sitting on the shelf, ever-ready. The longer we were kept waiting, the more research Ken did to make it bullet proof.

Margaret Darveniza and Melanie Fazackerley of CCRC wrote the 2015 cases; working all hours phones and emails were running hot between Margaret and Ken who provided data, edits and case studies, while Margaret honed the words. It was a mammoth effort.

Applications for these funds are highly competitive. Everyone says the decision process is rigorous and cannot be influenced; yet applicants always lobby. Ken contacted everyone possible to make the case. To lift the impact and stand out from others, he sent the community video and followed-up afterwards. The politicians and their administrators appreciated such a candid, fun response from enthusiastic residents. The video was raw and emotional, so it hit the spot and made it very clear that the community was highly engaged and fully behind *A Pool to be Cool*.

Noeline Ikin and Bill Shannon worked hard to demonstrate the value of the project. Noeline had a high profile at the time in Canberra and Bill was one of few Mayors who were in their second term of office in Queensland, so was well known and respected in all political circles.

A small yet useful element of our application was being able to offer a community financial contribution. We needed a reasonable sum of cash to signal community intent and Ken, as President of MBARC committed \$40,000 from MBARC if the applications were successful. We had that money thanks to Paul, Maureen, Coralie and their many helpers at the beginning of the campaign. The money was used to maximum advantage now to show the town's commitment to the project.

The rest is history. We surprised everyone and won both funds: \$7M in all.

SECOND FAILED COUP

In March 2016, there was another Council election and, as ever, MBARC engaged with all the candidates to determine their position on the project. We had secured the funds by then so most assumed we were home free and not much could go wrong from here. However, better safe than sorry, so we held a public meeting and all candidates promised that, if elected, they would not put a spoke in the works and would support the proposal as agreed with the two funding bodies. That is, they would not attempt to alter the site location or design.

It would be near impossible to change that, as both funding agreements specified that the funds were only able to be used for the agreed project, which specified both the design and location.

A day after our Division 3 Councillor was elected, he did a U-turn and pushed for a lagoon at the Mission Beach camping ground just north of the shopping centre. This was the most brazen and bazaar of all the political backflips we had seen in the entire campaign. Would our intrepid team still have the energy to lift itself once more and see this late coup off?

The Division 3 Councillor became the Deputy Mayor and the leader of Council's Infrastructure Committee, so he was confident he could find a way to steal the \$7M funds MBARC had spent 15 years capturing and use it the way he preferred. Council immediately wrote to the two funding panels and asked for a delay to the project to enable them to explore options. This occurred three times and delayed the start of construction by more than a year. That added about \$2M to the cost of the project as we missed the ideal time for letting contracts when little work was available for such projects.

On the same day that we had won funding, Central Highlands Regional Council won funding for a larger Aquatic Centre in Blackpool; a \$15M project. By March 2017, that pool was built and open while the Mission Beach project was still in limbo due to this Councillor's fierce determination to derail it.

However, on the fourth occasion that Council wrote to seek an extension, the *Enough is Enough* campaign was quickly rekindled. After lobbying so hard for the funding, Ken knew the people pulling the purse strings and called several of them to reveal what was happening to the long-suffering residents of Mission Beach. The next day, Council received extension refusals from both funding panels and the second coup was all over. It would be an understatement to say Ken was unpopular with the new Council, yet he had merely done what had to be done by someone to protect our hard-earned funds and ensure they were used for what the community had asked.

The path for realising our dream was cleared. We would build a fabulous community Aquatic Centre for families, residents and visitors who would come from all over the Cassowary Coast Region. The project was now able to happen almost exactly as planned with a few delays on the journey.

Justice was served at the next Council election.

PAUL ROXBY | POOL OPENING

This story is not about who did most to win the pool, for there is no such person. There were six people who perhaps did most of the hard yakka or had the most impact on the outcome. From Council were Director and project leader Margaret Darveniza and Mayor Bill Shannon. From the community there were Maureen Norris (Scott), Coralie Kemp, Paul Roxby and Ken Gray.

You could make a case for any one of these as being the person who did most or was the leader or had the most impact. It hardly matters, for the project would not have happened without the efforts of all six and many more. Without doubt, Paul Roxby and Ken Gray spent most time on the project because they were President of the advocacy group for the longest terms; each served nine years at the helm.

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the incredible efforts of Paul Roxby who had been with the project for the duration. Even during the eight years when he was in NSW, from 2009 to 2017, Paul kept plugging away on the phone, on email and Facebook doing everything he possibly could to support Ken and the Committee as they fought on locally to reach the ultimate goal to win the funds.

During the time when the fight for funding was full throttle (2011 to 2015), Ken had two main mentors and supporters he could turn to when battling with Council and others. They were Paul and Pete Faulkner. They were always there to help pick up the pieces and help in any way they could.

In December 2015, when the first of two \$3.5M amounts were won, there were loud cries of celebration and outright community relief. When the second win was announced, the common expressions were of utter delight and disbelief. How did we do it?

By mid-2017, the second coup had been seen off effectively and the project was in no further danger. Construction had started and was advancing as planned. Concrete was being poured. All MBARC needed was to claw back the shade sails for the billabong pool. Without shade that pool would be badly compromised, but the new Council had ruthlessly quashed that option.

Ken was regarded as the enemy by everyone at the new Council after fighting them off to save the funding. That spat would not be forgotten. Paul returned to live in Bingil Bay in mid-2017 and Ken asked the MBARC Committee to change their President mid-year and appoint Paul. That was agreed and Paul did all he could to secure the best outcomes for the project. This Council proved to be the most averse ever to community engagement, so we made no progress with the shade sails. Paul asked Ken to be President again in 2019 after his frustrating battle with Council bore no fruit.

The Aquatic Centre was built successfully and opened joyously on 18 September 2018. It was an appropriate end point when Paul spoke for MBARC at the opening ceremony.

In December 2016, when Ken handed all the MBARC funds to Council, he withdrew the organization from Incorporation to avoid corporate costs. That was virtually the end point for MBARC, but we kept it open until late 2021 to ensure that the billabong sails were erected. Ken closed the pool Facebook page soon after and an era of fierce community advocacy was ended without fanfare.