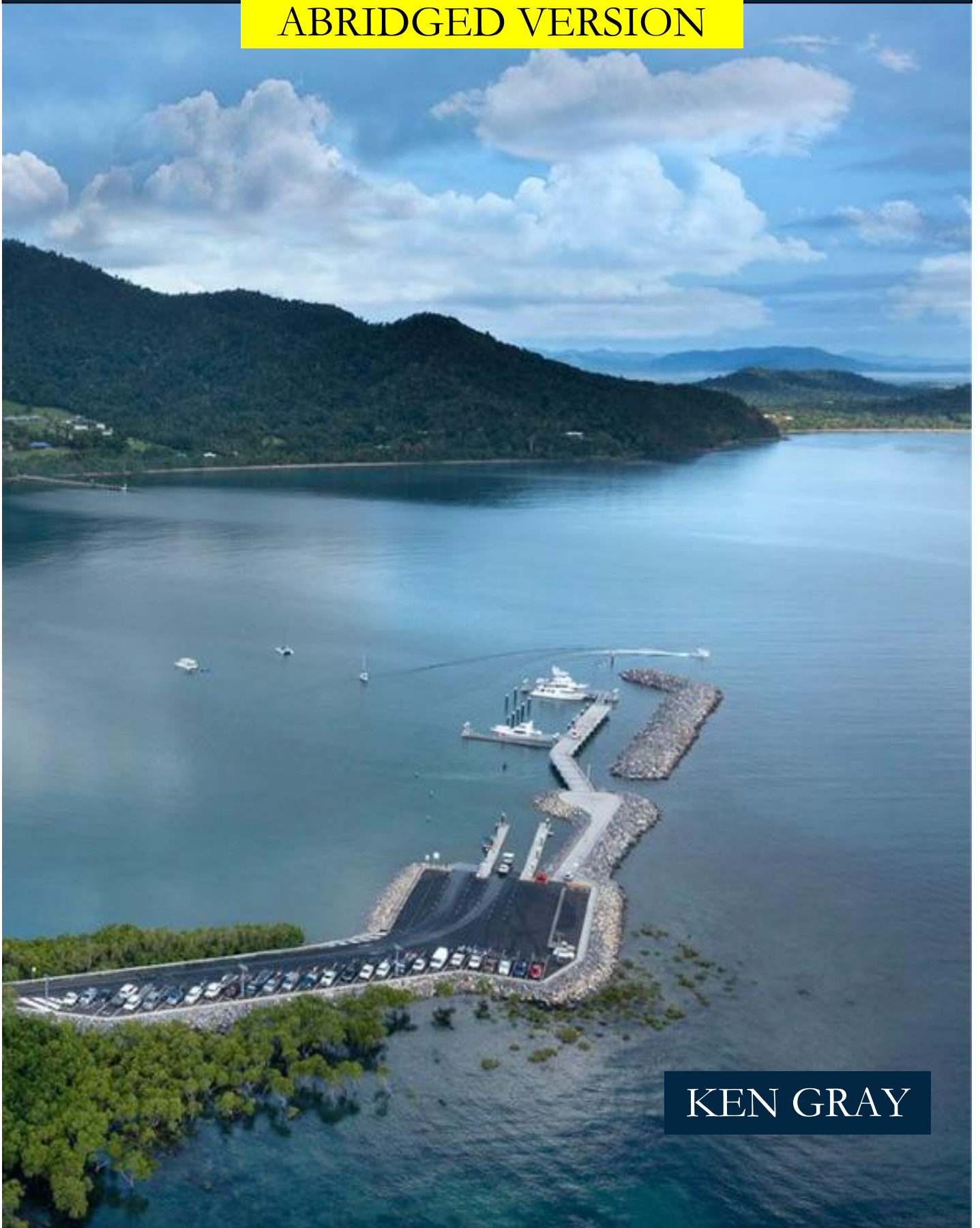


# BOATING BATTLES

MISSION BEACH BOATING INFRASTRUCTURE HISTORY

ABRIDGED VERSION



KEN GRAY

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Cover

A part of an image created by Susan Kelly of *Natural Images* in her drone series. Copyright Susan Kelly.

This is an abridged version of the history of Mission Beach boating facilities. The full story covers all district boating facilities and this version is only about the facilities completed in 2020.

Mission Beach residents have always been galvanised when the issue of boating facilities comes up.

In 2010, debates were quite heated about who could use the Clump Point boat ramp (recreational or commercial or both) and the idea of a marina was still being floated. John Hughes, owner and editor of the *Tully Times*, was astounded at the reactions to his extensive coverage of the issue and declared in his August 19 issue in 2010 that news of the Clump Point boating facilities had created the greatest response he had ever experienced in the newspaper which started in 1963.

Unsurprisingly, the town's needs for boating infrastructure changed dramatically in 137 years.

In the first 45 years, when the Cuttens were at Bingil Bay (1885 – 1930), boats were mainly used to transport fruit from the district to southern markets. They were also used to bring supplies to farmers and bring new settlers to the region. The demand for facilities to launch recreational boats was minimal early on.

The number of recreational fishing boats started to grow quickly and by the 1980s that became the greatest need for boating facilities in the district – safe boat ramps with enough capacity to handle the growing number of recreational boats.

## EARLY BATTLES

Rotha and Alan Jago made this story possible. Alan was a leader the advocates for a safe boating facility. He created more documents to make the case than anyone else and kept excellent records. Rotha, after Alan died in November 2017, presented a mass of documents to the Historical Society hoping that one day someone might use them to create a story.

We were delighted to do so.

When Cyclone Larry plundered the district in 2006, it damaged much of the infrastructure and the jetty was unable to be used for some time. Commercial boat owners increasingly used the ramp area with its rock wall shelter. This created much conflict when people had to wait to use the ramp safely.

In January 2009, locals raised more than \$22,000 in donations and attracted some government funding to upgrade the boat ramp facilities. A pontoon was added and this enhanced the facility making it safer for recreational boaties to climb on and off their vessels. But it was still too small.



A pontoon makes the boat ramp safer for users in 2009. *Tully Times* 08 January 2009. Image courtesy Tully Library archives.

In June 2010, disputes between commercial and recreational boat owners over rights to use the facility escalated. Battle lines were drawn when the Mission Beach Boat Owners Association was formed to represent recreational boat owners and Commercial Boat Operators Mission Beach (CBOMB) was also formed. On 12 December 2010, the Cassowary Coast Regional Council determined that commercial boat owners could not use the Clump Point boat ramp facility.

Things were heating up.

## 2011 - 2020

Over the years, many experts examined the situation and options, and the solution proposed was always to create a long breakwater at Clump Point's tip. Yet that obvious answer was repeatedly rejected by Queensland governments and Council always conveniently regarded it as a State responsibility despite recently building the Innisfail commercial wharf.

A turning point was created by an intervention of nature – Category 5 Cyclone Yasi of February 2011. Both the Clump Point and the Dunk Island jetties were severely damaged and needed to be replaced. The facilities at the Clump Point boat ramp also needed significant repairs.

Mission Beach had been devastated by three severe tropical cyclones within 25 years and had suffered through the Global Financial Crisis which flattened its tourist economy. The time was ripe for change.

Soon after Cyclone Yasi, the Council applied for National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) funds to replace the two jetties. In 2011, the Mayor announced that the jetty project was launched. Splits in views about what should be done about the jetties emerged early with CBOMB proposing to use the \$5.5M NDRRA funds to build a jetty with a floating concrete breakwater to protect it from storms. CCRC was having none of that, knowing that would cost far more. They argued that they must rebuild the jetties urgently without radical redesigns.

Council announced in the *Tully Times*, 10 May 2012, that they had accepted design and construction proposals from King Concreting and Civil Plus Contractors, to rebuild the two jetties (Dunk Island and Clump Point).

The Federal Labour Government was about to face an election, and independent MP, Bob Katter, ever the opportunist, agreed to support their re-election if they delivered a few things in return for his electorate. Deputy PM, Wayne Swan, offered \$5.5M in July 2012 for a Queensland Government study on an *all-weather boating facility* at Mission Beach. Two weeks later, the Queensland LNP Government agreed to provide an additional \$10.8M to construct the facility when a plan was decided.

Locals could be forgiven for celebrating and saying to themselves that the battle was finally over - the town would have the safe boating facility it had so long coveted. However, the battle had hardly begun, and it would take eight and a half more years to bring the project to fruition.

The stars had finally aligned, and the timing of the request was perfect with the cyclone impacts and the looming election converging and creating this opportunity to gain funding, but barriers were immediately signalled. Disunity in a community will always damage the prospects of any development proposal, but Clump Point was a special place both culturally and environmentally so these issues had to be addressed properly.

In January 2013, Council announced that its jetty reconstruction project had begun the construction phase and that the Clump Point jetty would be 170 metres long and 5 metres wide while the Dunk

Island one was to be 115 metres long and 4 metres wide. That was an extension of 50 metres length on the old jetty at Dunk. Council would provide an extra \$300,000 to fund the project over-spend. By August 2013, the Clump Point jetty was completed.

The Queensland Government assigned the project to the Department of State Development often referred to as DSDIP at the time as it also covered Infrastructure and Planning. For brevity we will use the acronym, DSD in this history. DSD did not conduct a study of the needs of the community as the \$5.5M funding conditions provided by the Federal Government specified.

That was the main reason for the project stalling early and being delayed unnecessarily for more than eight years. They merely appointed consultants GHD to do a basic study using a couple of options provided by C4 and CCSBA without asking for any community input. This was money for jam! The objectives of the study were to ... *“discuss infrastructure options for providing safer boating facilities for the unloading and loading of passengers and goods at Boat Bay ...”*

They held a ‘workshop’ on 30 November 2012 and participants included four GHD employees, a GBRMPA employee (on phone), a consultant engineer (on phone), a Main Roads employee (DTMR) and three DSD employees. Not a single Mission Beach resident or boat owner was consulted and this was the foundation document for all DSD plans thereafter. This was a classic Claytons consultation: the consultation you do when you are not doing consultation. They released a report in February 2013 and hastily presented their concept to a limited group of stakeholders in March 2013. The ‘stakeholders’ included no recreational boat owners whatsoever and a small number of people with direct interests in boating operations.

The true and direct stakeholders (boat users) represented merely one-third of the participants and these people were given little or no briefing prior to being ambushed by DSD with their ill-conceived concept plans already decided. There was no opportunity whatsoever in the process for boat users to consider the options and provide meaningful feedback.

DSD Officers had swooped on Innisfail, presented a hastily prepared concept plan to a few people, and returned to Brisbane ready to finalize their tender. They then appointed consultants Aurecon to do their documentation and returned to Innisfail on 18 October 2013 to conduct a ‘workshop’ to *review the responses of multiple stakeholders*. The *stakeholders* they met with were (in order as in their report) *Aurecon, Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC), and the Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR)*.

Once again, DSD utterly excluded the voice of the community.

They reported with delight that they had decided on the preferred option by the conclusion of the first half of the workshop. Aurecon analysed 19 development options, none of which were seen to be of any value subsequently by boat users. As it unfolded, this rudimentary and rushed community engagement was a giant own goal by DSD.

The Aurecon concept plan was in two parts: changes to the Clump Point Jetty (soon to be renamed the Perry Harvey Jetty) and changes to the Clump Point Boat Ramp. They responded to the concerns that CCRC expressed about the need to separate commercial and recreational boat users because of the regular complaints about that in the past.

DSD leveraged disunity among Mission Beach residents and offered a take-it-or-leave-it stance from day one. However, the town quickly did what it should have done earlier and reached a consensus on what they wanted (and did not want.)



In December 2013, Mission Beach boat users responded in unison with a three-page letter from the *Mission Beach Marine Facilities Stake Holders Action Group*. It was signed by 10 boat users and copied to every politician possible including the Prime Minister and Premier.

The group stridently rejected the DSD proposal and underlined that they saw *the co-existence of Commercial and Recreational marine activities in the same area as critical to the most effective use of scarce taxpayers' dollars to achieve adequate, safe marine facilities in our area*. The campaign to reject Aurecon's designs had begun in earnest. The *Overtopping Breakwater* (OB) was a lightning rod and became the symbol of the community's disdain for the plan as it was quickly dubbed the *Sausage* or worse, the *Big Turd*.

By March 2014, the boating community was organized and speaking with one voice. Instead of having CCSBA and CBOMB at loggerheads with one another as had occurred, they looked to form one view. Had they been that well organized at the start, it is doubtful that DSD would have run roughshod over them and reached an impasse, but a determined rear guard action was now in motion.

They formed a group embracing the needs of all boat users, recreational and commercial. They called themselves Mission Beach Boating Association (MBBA) and drew up a concept plan at the Clump Point Boat Ramp site with a list of facility priorities. Then MBBA began to release information to the newspapers and actively engage with the community.

DSD were unmoved and the *Tully Times* headlines summarised their determination to move on without reaching consensus with the community when the plans were revealed.



The DSD ultimatum. The "sausage" breakwater at the end of the jetty, image *Tully Times* 02 April 2014, from Tully Library archives.

DSD campaigned heavily to convince the community that their plan was the best option and that MBBA were misinformed. However, when DSD conducted a poll of 1,700 residents, they refused to reveal the results, claiming that they were vindicated. They stated that more than 50% of residents supported their proposal but would not release the data.

MBBA knew that was a bluff as they had polled meetings, conducted petitions, and polled the community online and the results were always around 90% for the MBBA concept, 6% against it, and 4% undecided. Voting on the OB (Overtopping Breakwater at the jetty) was always near to 100% rejection. DSD ignored it all and ploughed on.

DSD set up a stall at Woolworths Supermarket in February 2012 to give residents a say then held two 'workshops' in April 2014. These were not listening sessions and merely endorsed the State's determination to do as they please, but the community widely and assertively rejected their plan.

Interest in the project was so great at that time that the *Tully Times* featured it on pages 1, 2 and 3 of their 03 April 2014 issue. MBBA released its own Concept 1B Plan (*Tully Times* 17 April 2014) that was drawn by Michael Johnson. MBBA held a meeting to air their views early in April 2014 and more than 100 people attended.

Despite the delays and dilemmas, when looking back on the documentation one can only admire the local advocates in MBBA and MBCA for their dedication, persistence and cunning. They tried every trick in the book and some that were not in any books. They faced relentless aggression and roadblocks from DSD who merely pushed ahead and did all they could to win the community to their view. Despite that, DSD made no headway on community opinion whatsoever.

In early 2014, DSD met two community groups in Mission Beach and tried again to convince them to accept their plan. They threatened the eviction of any participant who dared to voice an opposing view. Community outrage escalated.

The MBBA resistance campaign continued relentlessly for all of 2014. They tried to have a motion passed by Council to delay their approvals, but that was defeated by the Mayor. They had meetings with every influencer possible to no avail.

By March 2015 they succeeded in having LNP MP, Andrew Cripps reverse his support for the DSD Plan and back the MBBA Plan. In May 2015, Peter Heywood organized and ran a workshop under the auspices of MBCA with 24 participants representing different community organizations, and all bar one (an abstention) voted in favour of the MBBA concept plan presented at the workshop.

A strategy that started the cracks in the wall of DSD resistance was a campaign highlighting perceived flaws in the construction of the Perry Harvey Jetty. In October 2015, DSD promised that they would drop the dreaded OB option but then reneged. MBBA met with DSD once again but was told that if they did not roll over and accept the Aurecon design then the project could be abandoned. Then DSD relented a little and agreed to evaluate the MBBA plan. They quickly rejected it claiming it was over their budget despite MBBA providing a robust cost estimate.

MBBA battled on relentlessly, largely without joy until Minister Anthony Lynham called a meeting with boat owners and operators, Mayor Bill Shannon, and MP Andrew Cripps on 16 January 2016. Six community representatives from MBBA, MBCA, and CCSBA were each given 2 minutes to state their case. All six made the same case – the community was now 100% unified.

**This was the big turning point in the campaign. Anthony Lynham was the first in the State Government to listen to Mission Beach boaties.**

Another pivotal moment occurred in February 2016, when Michael Johnson, one of the leaders of MBBA and owner of Mager Constructions, submitted a comprehensive design and build proposal. To illustrate how the community were prepared to roll up their sleeves and contribute, the designers needed soundings to be taken of the water surrounding the existing boat ramp and breakwater. That was a cost MBBA could ill afford so Megan and Peter Heywood did the job themselves in a dingy using ropes and weights to measure the depths. Michael's new design included costings showing that

the MBBA concept, contrary to DSD assertions, fitted well within the project budget. This was highly credible and undoubtedly created visible cracks in the DSD's resolve.

In March 2016, in a teleconference arranged by Shane Knuth, Minister Lynham promised to produce a new plan based on MBBA's latest design. Bill Shannon and Alister Pike admitted at the meeting that they had been pushing for the redevelopment of the Perry Harvey Jetty. DSD maintained that the community was divided on the issues and to the extent that the boat users were at odds with their elected representatives in Council that was correct, but boat users were now solidly speaking as one.

Minister Lynham explained that after his January 2016 meeting with the boating community, he had decided to drop the OB (Overtopping Breakwater) and concentrate the project at the Clump Point Boat Ramp as in the MBBA proposals.

**In April 2016, the Minister pulled the plug on the DSD and agreed to allow proper community consultation.** At the time, DSD had a workshop planned, but they had already decided to go to tender before that occurred. The *Innisfail Advocate* headlines on 30 April 2016 said it all: *Tide Turns for Long Awaited Boat Ramp*.

MBBA informed members that they had won the battle against the development of the jetty and the OB was dead, but there was still much work to do. DSD was then asked by the Minister to conduct a review of the MBBA proposal. This was done with a group including Mager, Aecom, Aurecom, MBBA and DTMR (Main Roads). It was suggested that Council should contribute some funds to enhance the land-based facilities. Newly elected Mayor, John Kremastos, agreed to review that without committing.



The *Innisfail Advocate* breaks the big news of Minister Anthony Lynham's astute decisions to listen and respond to Mission Beach people.

A Community Reference Group was formed in May 2016 and there were four meetings with three boat users appointed to the group (Alan Jago, Peter Heywood, and Stephen Chilcott) plus two environmental advocates. The delegates could send an alternate person to a meeting if they were unavailable. Peter Heywood and Alan Jago each attended 3 of the 4 meetings while Stephen made it to one. The Overtopping Breakwater and Perry Harvey Jetty upgrades were off the table, and the focus was solely on where the community wanted it, at Clump Point Boat Ramp.



Main Roads advised that for a three-lane boat ramp facility there should ideally be 70 parks for cars and their trailers. The Reference Group functioned well under the guidance of an independent facilitator and by 27 February 2017, the community had a plan they could live with when DSD released their 152-page report. The most critical issue, the 140-metre added breakwater, was agreed upon. Some wanted an extra 50 metres added to the breakwater, but the budget would not cover that cost. Others say they have measured it and the final design, and the actual build length was 190 metres anyhow.

The plan was never going to meet all the requests from the community and in the end, only 44 parks for car-trailer units were built (including the 20 that CCRC built) but Council stated that it would look at building overflow parking in the future if demand was sufficient to warrant it. However, it is said that there is no land near the facility that can be used for further carparks for a number of reasons.

During the design phase of the project, much funding was wasted by people without boating experience asking for design changes and considerable funds were spent trying to meet their demands and find solutions that were utterly impractical. That caused the project to fall short on some vital components like essential pontoons and more car parking bays.

03 July 2018 was a huge day. All approvals for the project were in hand. Now the incredible team of volunteer activists could safely celebrate. By November 2020, the pain and stress of the long journey evaporated.

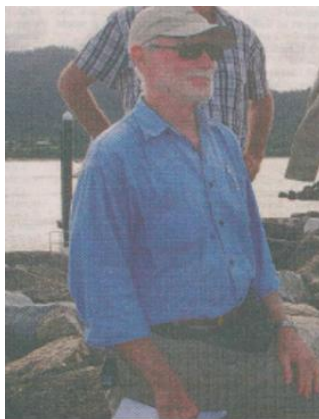
The town had a wonderful new asset they would surely be proud of.

## RECOGNITION

It is always difficult to know which of the many local volunteer advocates contributes most to the success of a project. From my experience with such campaigns, the lion's share of the work is not done by those who merely present the cases or appear in newspapers. More is done by those who conduct the research, document cases and organize events.

We analysed the documents written – letters, reports, meeting notes, presentations, newspaper articles and press releases, tenders, quotes etc. and MBBA was the primary organization that led the campaign. The four people who wrote the most and caused the major impacts were in order, **Alan Jago**, **Peter Heywood**, **Richard Giuliany** and **Michael Johnson**.

Other locals who contributed significantly were **Nancy Lowe**, **Danny Dade**, **Tony Lee**, **Annette** and **Peter Treseder** and **Glenn White**.



Alan Jago, Architect and Engineer, Mission Beach Boating Association. Dedicated to the cause.

If we chose one politician who had the most positive impact, it would be out of Bob Katter, Anthony Lynham and Mark Bailey. Looking at the documentation, I found **Anthony Lynham** to be the standout contributor among the politicians involved. He was the one who overcame the immense hubris and got it over the line by listening to the locals. Without his effective intervention in 2016, we would now have a DSD nightmare outcome, the ugly, dysfunctional sausage breakwater at the end of the jetty.

The Minister for Transport and Main Roads, **Mark Bailey** was also important in the chain of events since he was the one who had to deliver the finished facility. Mark had considerable foresight and knew that it would be folly to build something that was well below community expectations. He met with Peter Heywood towards the end of the project and added necessary funding (\$5M) to make the facility functional while others in government were arguing for cuts.

Over the long haul, **Bob Katter** did all he could to influence governments and was ably assisted by **Shane Knuth** in the late stages of the project. Shane set up some vital meetings with Minister Lynham to ensure the community was heard. Bob was the person who leveraged the initial \$5.5M funding from the Commonwealth and that was the fuse for it all.

Main Roads delivered the project well and once it was agreed to drop the jetty and overtopping breakwater concept and focus on the Clump Point breakwater site, boating people who were closely involved found project leaders and the Minister to be helpful and capable.

Some will wonder how well the Council (CCRC) performed on this project. There are varying views on that question, as always, but some suggest that CCRC missed a great opportunity to invest in a pivotal infrastructure project for the region's tourism hub. Bill Shannon always believed that the Perry Harvey Jetty was the best solution so did not support the thrust to build a commercial boating facility at the boat ramp. There were opportunities, after Bill retired in 2016, for the new Council to invest in the project, but they minimized their involvement and contributions.

Diversifying the economy is a proven lever for a region's success, so fostering tourism is a vital economic strategy. All new Councils promise that is what they will do yet very little is ever done and, on this occasion, the Council could have engaged properly and invested significantly in the project.

Council built 20 parking bays. That was merely 3% of the total project cost (about \$25M) which was minor compared with the 56% (\$1.6M) that they contributed to the Innisfail wharf in 2016. Some would argue that we needed a Council with greater vision and belief in tourism's ability to improve the region's overall economy. A \$5M investment could have been effectively made by CCRC without causing any financial stress. That would have enabled the addition of important facilities that were excluded due to budget constraints. For example, adding further parking and adding facilities that had to be eliminated from the ideal design such as pontoons.

The facility was an immediate and booming success. Many fine calm days we see cars with boat trailers parked in Porter Promenade almost a kilometre from the boat ramps.

It is very popular and well used and we should be ever thankful for the efforts of our dogged activists.