

Judge Report

CLEAN BEACHES 2013

Huskisson Beach, New South Wales



Keep Australia Beautiful National Association

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“In all of the five finalists, it was obvious that a special spirit emerges where a community has a strong and enduring connection to its local environment”.

Introduction

Overall

Huskisson Beach is characterised by its natural beauty, white sands, and sense of civic pride. Significant work is underway to manage litter, to promote the area’s cultural heritage, and to manage and protect its foreshore, dune and biodiversity. As Australia’s first mainland plastic bag free town, Huskisson’s community has signalled its commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. Further action engage the community’s young people, to improve visitor access to recycling facilities, and to promote innovative water efficiency and renewable energy solutions, will ensure Huskisson is a beautiful community for a long time to come.

Date judged

12 September 2013

Population

800

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Community Action & Partnerships

Huskisson Beach is part of a wider council area managed by the Shoalhaven City Council. As a result, the most significant project demonstrating community action and partnership – the Woolly Way cycle path – is a shared project that links Huskisson to other communities along the foreshore, in particular Woollamia. The Shoalhaven City Council have taken on equal partnership in this project, after it was initially instigated by the community, and the cycle way along the foreshore was completed in October 2013.

The area has a number of active community groups, including the Huskisson Woollamia Community Voice and Vincentia Ratepayers and Residents, which work to ensure the Shoalhaven City Councillors are aware of issues of importance to the community, for example an asbestos removal project currently underway, and to provide a forum for discussion of issues and events within the community. Huskisson's average age is over 50, and the composition of the community group members reflects this demographic.

Of particular relevance to the beach and dune system is the small subcommittee of the Huskisson Woollamia Community Voice formed in 2012 to enable Council and the community to work together to develop a plan for the future of Public Reserves in the vicinity Huskisson Beach. Shoalhaven City Council is providing funding for the operation of the committee and the development of the plan, which will cover aspects of dune management such as weed removal, replanting projects and long-term management of the site.

Other projects currently underway, in particular with the support of the local council, are:

- Establishment and maintenance of historical and cultural interpretive signs are throughout Huskisson and Vincentia, a collaboration with the Lady Denman Heritage Museum - part of a longer term vision of interpretive signs, incorporating street art.
- Planning and building of new facilities at Huskisson Beach Reserve, which will be signposted and have access for the elderly and disabled, including:
 - extensive landscaping, using native plants where appropriate,
 - long-term dune rehabilitation and stabilisation, including removing weeds and making suitable local plantings in partnership with school groups and volunteers
 - New childrens 'spider' playground, plus a junior playground now built.

It is also notable that Jervis Bay Marine Park has established an office in Huskisson, signaling the importance of the base for management of the Marine Park more broadly. While Huskisson does not have a visitor's centre, the Marine Park office provides:

- signage, brochures and other informational and educational materials
- guided educational walks exploring the marine environment, e.g. 'Rocky Shores' at Huskisson Beach/Tapalla Pt rock platform.

Dame Phyllis Frost Litter Prevention

Huskisson is a small community that experiences significant pressures as a result of tourism during holiday periods, in particular management of litter both on the foreshore and from short-term holiday-makers who may leave bags of rubbish in public areas as they leave town. While bins, and cigarette receptacles, are provided in the public areas along the foreshore, in high-traffic times, these appeared to be inadequate.

In response to this, in 2011 community representatives alerted the Shoalhaven City Council, requesting additional resources for civic cleaning, for example more frequent emptying of bins in public places in peak periods of tourism visitation. The community reported that, following the Council's increase in resourcing for litter control from Christmas 2011 onwards, the town and foreshore are generally free of litter, even during busy times.

During the site visit, it was clear that strong a culture of civic pride exists in Huskisson, as a result not only of the natural beauty of the coastline, but also as a result of the continuous efforts of local residents who clear any litter as they go about their daily activities.

Also:

- Moona Creek Reserve on Huskisson Beach has been the base for over 10 years for Clean Up Australia Day activities, attracting 20 or 30 volunteers, including family groups with school age children, and representatives from local clubs. No statistics were available for the amount of rubbish removed from Huskisson Beach.
- Huskisson was Australia's first mainland Plastic Bag Free town. Boxes, and fabric and paper bags, are now widely used, and the town remains committed to being Plastic Bag free.

Resource Recovery & Waste Management

Residents in Huskisson are provided with yellow-lidded bins for co-mingled recycling, and red-lidded landfill bins. However, at the time of the site inspection, there were few opportunities for visitors to the Huskisson foreshore to actively recycle waste. Generally, bins did not provide for the division of waste into recyclable and non-recyclable waste. However, in November 2011, the Shoalhaven City Council ran a recycling trial in the Huskisson precinct for 16 weeks over the busy summer period. During this time, recycling bins were located in the park, along the main street and at the wharf, with the bin colours mimicking the home recycling program – yellow-lidded co-mingled recycling, and red-lidded landfill bins. Bins contents were audited three times a week, and the results were:

- Total collected weight – landfill 577kg and recycling 1,097kg
- Average % full – landfill 27% and recycling 18%
- Best result with the rosette style lid with 10% contamination

The trial demonstrated that further action to improve visitor access to recycling facilities along the foreshore, may reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

The Huskisson Waste Depot, around 8km from the town centre and beach and run by the Shoalhaven City Council, includes a recycling centre and Council Waste Service encourage recycling with the free drop off of recyclables such as paper and cardboard, glass containers, aluminium and steel cans, plastic containers, expanded polystyrene foam, fluorescent globes and tubes, household and car batteries, electronic waste, motor oil and scrap steel. Residents are also able to drop of reusable items such as furniture, bicycles, and building materials as part of a 'buy-back' centre.

Environmental Protection & Innovation

Jervis Bay Marine Park has established an office in Huskisson, signaling the importance of the base for management of the Marine Park more broadly, and the importance of the Jervis Bay marine environment to state and national marine conservation programs.

Huskisson's residents make an important contribution to caring for the foreshore, including through dune care and wetland management. For example, Huskisson ('Boofs') Bushcare group, a core team of around five local volunteers, manages remnant wetland of high conservation value, including through site management and education. A management plan for the Huskisson wetland is currently under consideration.

The Shoalhaven City Council is currently in the process of preparing a Coastal Zone Management Plan, which denotes nearby Collingwood Beach as at risk of impacts from climate change, for which a special Plan of Management will be prepared. During the development of the Coastal Zone Management Plan, Huskisson's foreshore was deemed to be at lower risk.

Water Conservation

Shoalhaven City Council is investing in ensuring water flow restrictors in tourist parks and leisure centres within the Council area, including in Huskisson, and ensuring rain water tanks provide all water required by the Huskisson Waste Depot. Shoalhaven City Council also operations a Reclaimed water Management Scheme (REMS) which is one of the largest water recycling schemes undertaken by an Australian regional water authority. Fourteen dairy farms, a golf course and several sporting grounds (including Huskisson's soccer fields and caravan park) are irrigated with water reclaimed from the scheme, and its construction meant that previous discharge of treated effluent to Jervis Bay Marine Park.

Huskisson's public area includes a water fountain designed to allow re-filling of bottles, and newer toilet and shower facilities include water efficient designs such as dual flush toilets and timed taps and showers. More could be done to promote the need to conserve water, and to ensure residents and visitors are aware of facilities such as the re-filler.

Vincentia High School also runs a Beachwatch Water Sampling Program, with the support of the local Council. This program, which aims to collect data more frequently after rain events helps students learn about sampling techniques and develop an understanding of the impact of suburban run-off on the health of local beaches. Data collected through the program was not available.

Energy Innovation

Use of energy around the beach and along the foreshore, for example for lighting of public areas and powering of electric barbeques was minimal, however use of renewable energy along the beachfront, or as a priority within the local community, could be more visible. Further investigations revealed significant efforts to embed energy efficiency and renewable energy programs in Council-managed caravan parks, such as use of energy audits, gas hot water systems, low wattage lighting and solar hot water heating. Shoalhaven City Council is also actively using land-fill gas to generate electricity, generating around 65,660 MWHrs of electricity since 2000, and avoiding emission of around 358,500 tonnes of greenhouse gasses.

Heritage & Culture

Historical and cultural interpretive signs exist throughout Huskisson and Vincentia, provided through a collaboration between the Lady Denman Heritage Museum, the Shoalhaven City Council and the local community. The signage is part of a longer term vision of interpretive signs, incorporating street art.

European and Aboriginal heritage are both noted in the interpretive signposting program, and in the educational programs by Jervis Bay Marine Park. The Wreck Bay aboriginal community is nearby in Booderee National Park in the ACT Territory, and poems by a local Indigenous community member was provided as part of the background material for the submission, for example:

Excerpt from *Clean Up Australia Day 2011* by Paul Patton:

*“Today there is a party going on at Moona Creek Reserve
People have come to keep their town clean and our planet to preserve.
No one knows why they come, but I believe it’s from out of the goodness of their hearts,
Even the children come with their parents so that they too may play a part...”*

Young Legends

Huskisson hosts a Triathlon Festival annually in February which attracts over 8,000 entries each year. While all age groups are involved, the community reports a prominent involvement of juniors, in particular highlighting that the Vincentia High School has now the largest contingent of junior school triathletes training in Australia. During the site visit, school-aged children were participating in triathlon training along the foreshore and beachfront.

Vincentia High School students also participate in water quality testing and dune care programs as part of their school curriculum, and litter clean-up activities as part of initiatives in the wider community.