

Judge Report

CLEAN BEACHES 2014

Fingal Head, New South Wales



Keep Australia Beautiful National Association

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Introduction

Community

Fingal Head, New South Wales

Population

600

Date judged

29 May 2014

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Overview

Fingal Head is a small, cohesive community with a population that has a diverse socio-economic range and includes an active Aboriginal community who are proactive in the protection of the environment and their heritage. What makes Fingal Head outstanding is the area's natural beauty coupled with the strong, clear vision the local community has developed for itself and the area's future, and the community's ongoing success in holding on to that vision in the face of pressures to embrace a different set of values and a different way of life.

As they note in their submission "The local community values the small village, undeveloped character of the area and are constantly involved in campaigns and projects to protect this unique character." Under significant pressures to mirror the approach to development that has been taken along other areas of the coastline, for example on the Gold Coast, Fingal Head's traditional owners and residents have worked together to create instead a small, subtle beautiful and environmentally-healthy community that values its deep connection to the area's environmental treasures and works together to care for each other and their local environment.

Most importantly, the Fingal Head community's efforts to educate and involve the area's young people in work to maintain and improve the local area is outstanding. The diversity of activities available to school children and importance accorded to empowering young people is outstanding.

Community Action & Partnerships

Recognises achievement in community and civic beautification, presentation, health, wellbeing and pride. Also recognises partnerships between government, business, industry and local community networks.

Fingal Head is a small, cohesive community of around 600 residents, and has a number of active groups who work together to ensure all development and use is sustainable and the environment is protected. These groups include The Fingal Head Community Association Inc. (FHCA), Fingal Head Coastcare Inc. (FHC), the Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council (TBLALC), Fingal Rovers Surf Life Saving Club, Fingal Board Riders, Fingal Van Owners Association and Fingal Head Public School. These groups are supported by local businesses; the Tweed River Entrance Sand Bypassing Company (TRESBC), the Sheoak Shack and the Fingal Trading Post. The Tweed Shire Council works closely with all these groups providing support, advice and funding as well as maintaining infrastructure including well maintained parks, nature strips, roads and paths.

The community participates in Clean Up Australia Days, Planet Ark Tree Days, community tree planting days, community nature walks, environmental education, weed identification programs, local Aboriginal educational tours and programs and NAIDOC week activities.

Fingal Head has had a long history of community action aimed to preserve this unique natural environment including the famous Ocean Blue Campaign in the 1960's which constituted the first ICAC investigation and was the first example of community action preventing inappropriate coastal development. In April 2011 the local community including Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council, Fingal Head Community Association, Fingal Head Coastcare, Fingal Head Van Owners Association, TRESBP Company and the local police conducted a successful media and on ground campaign to stop illegal four wheel driving on environmentally significant local Aboriginal land.

Dame Phyllis Frost Litter Prevention

Recognises achievement in community litter management and reduction initiatives including the undertaking of litter audits, and litter education programs.

Tweed Shire Council (TSC) run an effective litter collection and recycling program and provide recycling bins in public areas throughout the village. Community reports that the Council ensures public bins are collected regularly and more frequently during busy seasons, and conduct biannual community pickups for community household rubbish TSC supplies a three bin system to residents (ie red lid bin for household non recyclables, yellow bin lids for recyclables and green lid bins for garden waste) and a two bin system in Fingal Heads public areas and parks.

The local community and school has participated in Clean Up Australia Day every year for more than 16 years. In 2013 year the community removed four skips of rubbish dumped by visitors on the Aboriginal land surrounding the Fingal Head village and this year removed rubbish from the beaches, waterways and surrounds.

The Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council successfully completed in August 2013 a Protecting Our Place (POP) Grant to clean up and revegetate the Aboriginal Land on the Fingal Peninsula. This involved the local community both indigenous and non-indigenous, Fingal Head Coastcare, Fingal Head Community Association, the local primary school, Sofitel Staff, Tweed Entrance Sand Bypassing Company and many visitors. See Attachment 9 Photos POP partners. The TBLALC have applications in place for three more grants to continue this work. Other initiatives relevant to this category include:

- The local Fingal Head Public School has an active litter prevention education program;
- Many local community members collect rubbish on their daily walks. For example two elderly women have been collecting rubbish on the riverbank every week for 23 years and have organised the Council to collect the bags of rubbish weekly;
- TSC runs a program which involves the collection of fruit and vegetables from stores to be used to feed the homeless;
- As part of their litter and recycling education program, TSC has created and displays a model of the water cycle and possible pollution mounted on a trailer.

Resource Recovery & Waste Management

Recognises achievement in resource recovery and waste management including initiatives which conserve resources, recover and reuse materials and the appropriate disposal of non-recyclable materials.

The Tweed Shire Council operate an effective recycling program with different bins for different waste. The TSC's waste disposal and recycling plant separates organics, green materials, glass, paper, cardboard, aluminum, plastic, batteries, fluoro tubes and oil.

The TSC have a Sustainable Programs Unit with staff dedicated to undertaking recycling activities, and running various education programs to encourage disposal according to the avoid, reduce, reuse and recycle waste hierarchy. The TSC also provides worm farms to interested residents as a way of recycling kitchen waste and engaging households in active recycling initiatives.

Environmental Protection & Innovation

Recognises innovative principles and actions associated with developing sustainable communities. Also recognises protection of the natural environment focusing on the conservation of native flora and fauna.

Fingal Head has long, white sandy beaches bordered by dunes covered with Pandanus, Banksias, Spinifex and other dunal plants. Behind the dunes there are littoral rainforests, coastal woodlands, wetlands and heathland. The beach, dunes and surrounding forests, woodlands and wetlands have been maintained for over 28 years by Fingal Head Coastcare with the help and support of the local community TSC and other local organisations, groups and businesses. This re-created dune environment provides much needed habitat for many small animals and birds as the surrounding district becomes ever more urbanized. It also attracts many visitors due to its proximity to the Gold Coast and accessibility from Brisbane creating challenges for sustainable use and protection of the coastal environment.

Fingal Head Coastcare (FHC) and the local community have since 1985 been re-establishing the littoral rainforests, coastal woodlands, wetlands, heathland, dunal and headland vegetation, which were destroyed by sand mining in the 1950's and 1960's. Fingal Head Coastcare was a pioneer dunecare group and is the longest running dune care group in NSW.

Today, FHC has 166 financial members and has members working four days a week to maintain 42 hectares of regenerated native vegetation. Plants are propagated in their community nursery from seeds collected locally to ensure correct covenant. They work under the guidance of the Tweed Shire Council Natural Resource Management Unit and work closely with the Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council (TBLALC), the Fingal Head Community Association (FHC), Fingal Rover Surf Life Saving Club, local community, local schools and many other groups. As well as planting and rehabilitation, FHC are also heavily involved in ongoing weed management, damage minimisation and litter control.

The success of this program is indicated by the number of bird species recorded in these regenerated forests – the number of species has increased from 28 in 1960's to 239 species in 2014, these includes endangered, threatened, migratory and sea birds. The surrounding forests also contain a large number of endangered and threatened plant species and these are being propagated in the local Coastcare nursery. FHC and the local school are currently propagating the rare vine which is essential for the endangered Richmond Birdwing Butterfly.

On Fingal Head itself, FHC is re-establishing the endangered ecological community “Themeda Grassland on Sea Cliffs and Coastal Headlands”.

FHC is committed to environmental education working with community groups, local schools, guides, cubs and scouts; running holiday programs, community planting days and community walks. Many groups work with FHC to gain experience with plant propagation, bush regeneration and litter control. eg, Green Corp, TAFE, Adult Education, Work for The Dole, CDEP, Youth At Risk and Youths With Disabilities Programs. FHC has an ongoing environmental education program with Fingal Head Public School and have assisted many other schools, local guides, scouts and cubs, other children's groups, Queensland University of Technology.

Further work is planned to rehabilitate an old quarry site adjacent to the dunes, as well as including the construction of walkways on the headland to minimise erosion by pedestrian traffic; assisting the TBLALC with revegetation of Letitia Spit and the establishment of a community garden.

Water Conservation

Recognises sustainable water management within communities which has combined innovative water conservation and water re-use initiatives at the private, industrial and municipal levels, benefiting society and nature.

Water efficiency and water saving initiatives are becoming a natural part of the way that the Council and community in Fingal Head are operating. Elements that are relevant to this category include:

- TSC has installed showers and taps which turn off automatically in public areas and provide filtered water bubblers in major parks;
- TSC plant local native plants in the parks which require no watering;
- TSC building regulations require the installation of water tanks to all new or renovated buildings;
- TSC sets goals and runs competitions to reduce household water use across the shire;
- The local school has established a waterwise native garden and bush tucker garden and have installed large rain water tanks;
- Members of the community are encouraged to have waterwise gardens and grow local native plants which require no watering;
- The TSC runs development education programs on water conservation and water quality for the community and schools including the Water Cycle Model trailer.

Energy Innovation

Recognises sustainable energy management which focuses on innovative energy efficiency measures and climate change issues

TSC have a Sustainable Programs Unit with staff dedicated to improving energy efficiency and understanding within the community and, for example, run programs and incentives to encourage the installation of solar panels.

They also:

- offer free installation of efficient light globes and shower heads;
- install automatic shut off switches for lighting in public amenities;
- have building regulations that include requirements for passive solar design.

Heritage & Culture

Recognises how communities proudly preserve and value cultural history.

Fingal Head is very conscious of the local heritage including indigenous and non indigenous culture. In a way it is possible to interpret the different value system chosen by the residents of Fingal Head as a manifestation of the value they place on maintaining their connection to the local environment and to understanding the human elements that are enhanced by the approach they are taking.

Their commitment to maintaining all elements of the area's history and culture is indicated by the large number of initiatives and programs that have been instigated and carried out. These include:

- Fingal Head Public School has developed the Dreamtime Bush Tucker Garden with the help of an Envirofund Grant, the local community both indigenous and non indigenous, Fingal Head Coastcare, local businesses and the Tweed Shire Council. The garden consisted of a signposted trail through established bushland which includes a gazetted midden in the school grounds. An accompanying booklet explains the bush food and medicinal plants use. This is popular educational tool and is visited by many groups. It was recently visited by Costa from Gardening Australia
- Fingal Head Coastcare and the Tweed Shire Council with the assistance of a CMA Caring for Our Country grant, the Tweed Historical Society and heritage consultants constructed a walkway to protect the foundations of the lighthouse keepers house. The foundations were cleared and protected and signage was erected.
- A walking trail with 5 nodes of interpretive signs is being developed with the Tweed Shire Council. All signs include a welcome to Aboriginal Land and request for respect for the whole environment.
- The Fingal Head Community Association is currently collecting heritage photos and oral histories to preserve and record the physical and social history of the Fingal area.
- Educational walks and activities – Fingal Head Coastcare conduct natural environment walks for the community and other community groups and TBLALC operate Indigenous youth education and experience programs.
- Booningbah Cultural Tours are operated by a local indigenous elder who gives participants experience in local Aboriginal activities. Also a group of local elders frequently cater for community events with tradition food and cooking.

- Fingal Head community celebrates a variety of environmental events and competitions e.g. turtle hatching in Dreamtime Beach, Fight or Flight Photographic Competition– bird photograph competition, Art Competition – Faunification.

Young Legends

Recognises environmental achievement through youth initiative and/or by a community, which encourages and promotes youth initiative and environmental education programs and/or achievement.

Fingal Head Public School won the KAB NSW State Young Legends Award in 2011 and 2013 and were runners up in 2009. They have won the Northern Rivers Young Legends Award a number of times. The school, in conjunction with Fingal Head Coastcare, has an ongoing environmental education, bush regeneration and dune protection program. This includes:

- Collecting and sowing native plant seeds and potting on plants in the local Coastcare nursery;
- Weeding and planting trees and other plants in the local forests, wetlands and headland;
- Planting ground covers on dunes to stabilise these dunes after erosion events;
- Establishing a signposted bush tucker garden visited by other groups and schools and also providing student guided walks through this garden;
- Planting a waterwise and bird friendly native garden in the school yard;
- Propagating and planting rare, threatened and endangered plants and the vine for the endangered Richmond Birdwing Butterfly;
- Assisting with the re-establishment of the endangered ecological community on Fingal Headland and maintaining the endangered Littoral Rainforests;
- Participating in Clean Up Australia Days, Planet Ark Tree Days and community planting days;
- Hosting NAIDOC and other indigenous cultural days and activities;
- The school is currently involved in the Tweed Shire Council Beach Bird nesting Program aimed to raise awareness of these endangered birds and their habitat.