

# **THERE IS NO I IN A CLEAN BEACH: TALLEBUDGERA BEACH SWEEPS AWARD-WINNING PARTNERSHIPS INTO CLEAN BEACH ACTION!**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Australia's coastline is iconic for its white sandy beaches and picturesque crystal clear waters. This is no doubt the case, as 49% of the coastline predominantly consists of 10,685 sandy beaches (Farmer and Short, 2007). These beaches have been further classified into 15 types, with six dependent on wave action (Farmer and Short, 2007). What is interesting to note, is that this wave action has physically contributed to those soft sand sediments many people enjoy, and have more importantly carved coastal communities around Australia.

In, around and along coves, bays and open beaches, Australian communities have evolved amid the waves change - physically and culturally. With such dynamic environments being home to over 85% of Australia's population, there are many pressing issues (Lazarow, 2007). Litter is just one issue that is choking our coastline and in current times climate change is a slicing and rising issue too. This is why proactive partnerships in coastal management are now more than ever essential for a sustainable beach environment and community.

The development of coastal networks and coast care alliances has been a productive way to initiate community momentum in coastal management (Barker, 2005 and Lazarow & Osborn, 2008). Community capacity building between diverse stakeholders has in some sense, 'closed the gap' between government, experts, community groups and individuals to identify coastal themed issues (Edwards, 2010). This has most certainly been the case for Keep Australia Beautiful's Clean Beaches initiative, which is an annual competition between coastal communities vying for the top Cleanest Beach title. The intriguing aspect is that it is not just about the cleanest beach, but the partnerships developed to address management, implement innovation and minimise impacts.

Tallebudgera Beach, on the Gold Coast, is no stranger to clean beach action, currently holding Australia's Cleanest Beach title. The magnificent features of Tallebudgera Beach sets the scene with a diverse range of environmental, social, indigenous and cultural values. Surrounded by valuable community pride, the local community work closely together, restoring dunes, keeping the beach litter free and notifying Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) of any issues. This driving passion is the foundation for community capacity building, which in all proactively helps GCCC to best manage the beach and the surrounding environments. One thing to remember is that as Gold Coast's population now reaches over 500,000, there are many more coastal pressures to consider than a litter free beach. Tallebudgera Beach is a prime example of how collective action puts best management into practice and more so

highlights how we – coastal managers – can learn and adapt to issues through the community's eyes.

This paper will highlight how Tallebudgera Beach swept those essential partnerships into clean beach action; being awarded Australia's Cleanest Beach for 2010-11.

## **COMMUNITY ACTION IN COASTAL MANAGEMENT**

Collective community engagement programs in coastal management have provided a proactive avenue for communities to become aware and voice concerns/ opinions. More so, this has leveraged an organic ground-swell process and promoted coastal community connections for an educated, engaged and empowered community. Additionally, the investment in community-focused projects has also strategically benefited key priority areas, for instance, where there is on-ground restoration work, and has even facilitated the collection of scientific data (McKenzie, L.M *et al.* 2000). This has been a significant step towards an inclusive process for decision-making, thus, community involvement in coastal management has become an effective and efficient driving component for the management of the coast.

One thing to keep in mind is that volunteers have become vital core strength behind many coastal awareness management initiatives. Clearly, without community involvement community engagement programs would not be effective, efficient or even prove successful. The underlining component is that there needs to be a reason for action, an achievable solution and more importantly an incentive for community members to drive change. Fortunately, community value, knowledge and pride for a beach and its environments can be seen along any coast. However, the level of community participation and action becomes dependent on the creative and innovative investment in such intrinsic values. This means, that there needs to be strategic coordination by a coastal community engagement officer who can promote and drive fresh coastal passion in the community.

## **SETTING A PARTNERSHIP SCENE**

The nearly decade long Coastal Community Engagement Program (CCEP) facilitated through Griffith Centre for Coastal Management (GCCM), in partnership with GCCC, provides just that. A suite of free coastal community programs for the Gold Coast community have been developed to help close the gaps between researchers, managers and the community. The CCEP houses CoastEd – coastal outreach and educational resource development, BeachCare – Gold Coast dune care, and Gold Coast's Keep Australia Beautiful Clean Beaches nominations. All three programs synchronise key coastal messages with on ground action coordinated by effective engagement that outreaches to a diverse network of beach stakeholders alike.

The benefit of having a partnership program between a local council and research institute and is that there is collaboration between what is happening and what needs to happen on a beach. Further, through the capacity building with community stakeholders, there are additional eyes to help direct on-ground management. For instance, the Gold Coast may have 30,000 visitors on any given day, many of which visit and enjoy the beach visage. This means there needs to be a substantial investment into the beach environment to ensure they are kept clean, accessible and provide a unique coastal atmosphere for people to enjoy – and remember. With over 42 kilometres of ocean foreshore to actively manage, this is when delivering community programs open community participation in the management plan.

## WHAT MAKES A BEACH THE CLEANEST BEACH?

The underlying vision is that we all want to visit a clean beach - no one goes to check out a surf of litter. However, unfortunately, coastal and marine debris is of growing concern, with approximately 80% of the world's ocean debris originally land based (KAB, 2011a). Additionally, coastal erosion, urbanisation, pollution and climate change places further pressures on many coastlines, which seems to be all doom and gloom. However, on a positive note there are many coastal communities around Australia putting ground-swell passion into action – vying for the cleanest beach title.

Keep Australia Beautiful recognises the importance of education and community participation to keep Australia beautiful and more so the coast. Their annual competition, Clean Beaches, identifies the country's best kept beaches, with the top title of Australia's cleanest. It is a positive competition that encourages all local governments, indigenous groups, Surf Life Saving, schools, beach residents and community groups – all coastal stakeholders alike - to collaborate and participate to best exemplify all aspects of the management of a beach, shore or coastal treasure (KAB, 2011b). The advantage is that it provides a positive platform to encourage all stakeholders to care, promotes how community's best manage their coastal strip, identifies coastal heroes, shares challenges and creates a network between coastal communities to learn from each other.

*What makes a beach Australia's Cleanest?* Firstly, is it not just about a litter free beach, instead, how a community recognises best management practices with innovation, sustainability and partnerships at the heart. There are eight categories in the Clean Beaches competition to address, which helps capture how a community puts management into action and further identifies the unique ways Australian communities address the many issues and pressures along a coast. Secondly, how a community capitalises on clean beach action and symbolically dresses the beach throughout the competition also proves how one can sell a beach to take the top notch acknowledgement.

Tallebudgera Beach, a hidden coastal gem on the Gold Coast, has proven just that being the current Cleanest Beach in Australia. Situated south of Burleigh Hill National Park, the beach offers many coastal environments for those with the discovery nature, such as an open surf beach, calm waters of Tallebudgera Creek and a unique dune environment. It is a coastal treasure amongst the glitz and the glam, where at any time or day people are enjoying what Tallebudgera offers best. Surprisingly, there was little financial investment into the trimmings of the beach visage to take out the award. This proves that, coastal communities don't need to invest millions into a beach, instead acknowledge all aspects of the beach, especially those key partnerships and people that make it a 'special place.'

*The result:* Tallebudgera Beach was awarded three national category awards – Community Action and Partnerships, Litter Prevention and Young Legends - and the overall competition; how each category was addressed is further explained.

**Community Action and Partnerships** – *this category recognises achievement in community beautification, presentation, health, well-being and pride. Also recognises partnerships between government, business, industry and local community networks.*

Tallebudgera Beach was firstly acknowledged for the network of partnerships that have been created on the beach. The beach offers a unique capacity opportunity with a local council, research institute, Tourist Park, beach school campus, two Life Saving Clubs, and many community groups/ programs, which together, leveraged key coastal themed messages (*the hills, creeks, mangroves, foreshores, dunes and open beach of Tallebudgera, connect community ownerships for the benefit of the environment*). It was definitely about getting to

the grassroots and identifying those key people that keep Tallebudgera 'clean'. Partners and their actions are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: The community action and partnership network identified at Tallebudgera Beach for the award nomination.

<b>Partner/ stakeholder</b>	<b>Action</b>
Gold Coast City Council	Catchment and beach management, general maintenance duties, investment in community programs
Griffith Centre for Coastal Management, BeachCare and CoastEd	Research and management advice, community programs and education, on-ground dune care, nomination coordination
Tallebudgera Beach School	Environmental education – from the Creek to the Coast, environmental awareness activities
Tallebudgera SLSC	Education – from the Creek to the Coast, beach and creek safety patrol duties, environmental awareness activities
Tallebudgera Tourist Park	Business partnership and tourism services
Neptunes RLSC	Creek safety patrol
SeagrassWatch	Community engagement, education program and healthy waterway awareness
Tallebudgera Catchment Care Group	On-ground catchment works
Waterwatch	Community engagement, education program and healthy waterway awareness
Early morning swim group	Identifies issues and directs them to GCCC
Local boardrider associations	Community action in the surf and creek zone, surf awareness
Key community individuals	Everyday litter pick-ups, increase community ownership and local knowledge
MangroveWatch	Pending - a new program for Gold Coast community

*The local media* was another critical partner that proved Tallebudgera Beach was Australia's Cleanest. All the initiatives were outstanding; however without an avenue to promote action and encourage community participation the underlying message to care would not have been delivered. The growing relationship between GCCM and the local media proved a success as it presented opportunities to engage with a diverse network of partners and individuals leading up to the national judging. It was important to highlight that everyone played a role in the management of the beach, and that the local coastal heroes needed to be identified. Holding a clean-up event with media coverage during the nomination phase helped facilitate this process, which opened opportunities for stakeholders to meet, share local knowledge and further identify local heroes. Leading up to the judging day, coordination and continuing acknowledgement of each stakeholder managed community momentum and encouraged additional media coverage on the judging day – which just happened to be the day Yasi crossed Northern Queensland.

**'Dame Phyllis Frost' Litter Prevention** – *this category recognises community litter management, reduction and education initiatives.*

Litter is one issue that could easily be prevented, simply by not littering and the effective management of litter, yet communities around Australia deal with the very same dilemma. Stakeholders of Tallebudgera Beach took a proactive response to this issue by going beyond accessibility to bins on the beach and general beach litter maintenance, with a

nationally recognised management plan, student daily rewards and prevention through educational engagement.

- GCCC – proactive litter maintenance with daily operated beach sweepers;
- Tallebudgera Tourist Park – education and access to recyclable and general waste bins;
- Tallebudgera SLSC – litter prevention through educational activities and limited packaged items available in the kiosk;
- Tallebudgera Beach School – daily awards for the most amount of litter picked-up, further acknowledgements to those students who identify prevention measures; and
- BeachCare – facilitated Clean Up Australia Day and additional clean up events to further promote key messages and awareness in the general community.

**Resource Recovery & Waste Management** – *this category 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.*

It was this category that awarded Tallebudgera Beach the State's cleanest. The initiatives that continually promote environmental sustainability managed to be further acknowledged as the Nation's best. For example, the local tourist park has Eco-Friendly STAR Accreditation, which is a unique initiative that recognises simple environmental practices that reduce impacts. The park also educates guests about/and practices responsible waste management, and the ground staff use in-house green waste practices, such as garden mulching and wherever possible reuse, reduce and recycle to conserve resources, recover and reuse materials.

Tallebudgera Beach School also capitalised on resource recovery and waste management, inside and outside the classroom. The unique facility allowed the adoption of the Queensland Sustainable Schools Environmental Management Plan, which flows into the Earth Smart Science program and has implemented effective activities to change student's attitudes about wastage. The school has signage, general, recycling and paper bins. Students are continually rewarded and reminded through interactive activities in the school diary with the theme – *Let's Get Sustainable*.

**Environmental Innovation & Protection** – *this category 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.*

Environmental innovation and protection sits at the heart of climate change adaptation. It is about finding new ways to protect coastal environments, and the valuable networks between the local community, corporate and government bodies. The unique partnership between GCCC and GCCM identified best management of Tallebudgera Beach and rising issues with climate change. Situated along an estuary and ocean foreshore, there are a whole host of issues that needed to be acknowledged. The recent publication of the Gold Coast Shoreline Management Plan proved successful throughout the judging process, as the comprehensive study identified recommendations with reflection on community values and involvement, physical processes, ecological processes, beach management and the economic value of beaches.

Current management includes an annual dredging campaign and active catchment management, plus additional management of the surrounding dunes providing soft management solutions to help manage and protect the much loved coastal resources.

**Water Conservation** – *this category 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.*

What is important to acknowledge, is that throughout each category that there has been a level of community action and partnerships developed, and additional education to reinforce key messages to sustainably manage the beach. Water availability is another coastal conservation issue, which each stakeholder actively addressed.

- Tallebudgera Beach School – appropriate wash down bay areas, interactive education;
- Tallebudgera Tourist Park – sustainable water-use practices, education, rain-water tank supplying family-friendly wet play area;
- Tallebudgera SLSC – water conservation education, automatic shut off taps, appropriate wash down bay areas; and
- GCCC – automatic shut off taps, recyclable water used during maintenance, investment into education programs.

*Key theme - most of all these water saving initiatives cascade into the next generation – benefiting society and nature for generations to come.*

**Energy Innovation** - *this category recognises sustainable energy management which focuses on innovative energy efficiency measures and climate change issues*

Following the environmental theme, Tallebudgera Beach brings historical, cultural, social and environmental aspects together and in all provides a passive; environmentally friendly focused recreational area for everyone. GCCC and the local community continue to find new innovative ideas to save energy consumption. As part of Gold Coast City Council's Bold Future Vision – Responding to Climate Change – a number of energy innovative sources have been at Tallebudgera Beach:

- Solar powered beach patrol towers;
- Greenhouse friendly barbecues – new energy efficient technology;
- Solar powered lighting for the new park lights;
- Green Starred environmentally-friendly accredited tourist accommodation; and
- Community education programs to further key messages and practice energy innovative measures in the home environment.

Additionally, the Tallebudgera Beach School, engaging environmental education has been the successful link at the school, as fun and rewarding activities highlight where, how and why students can reduce their energy consumption. Initiatives include additional points for sustainable elements within the accommodation cabins, for example, use of natural lighting and cooling and did you know facts and personal reflections in the school diary. Tallebudgera SLSC also acknowledged the need to be responsible in resource consumption and aims to raise funds to install solar powered cells. All cooking heating is gas operated and encouragement to have cold showers has also managed to reduce their energy intake.

**Heritage & Culture** – *this category recognises communities which proudly preserve and value cultural history.*

Tallebudgera Beach has a long indigenous history and cultural elements. Originally known as Maybree after a certain tree that grew in the area, Tallebudgera was soon given its name after the abundance of fish in the tidal creek. Tallebudgera is an Aboriginal word, meaning 'good fish', 'talle' meaning fish and 'budgerree' meaning good. The traditional owners of

Tallebudgera Beach are acknowledged through the local Aboriginal traditions and dreamtime murals along the Oceanway, north of Tallebudgera SLSC. In 2008, the Tallebudgera Beach School and Griffith Centre for Coastal Management partnered and were granted Gold Coast City Council funds to re-do the existing faded murals. Three participating local schools were engaged in the project and contributed to each mural – thus, creating school children knowledge and awareness of the local Aboriginal traditions and dreamtime stories.

Other heritage and cultural acknowledgements include:

- Tallebudgera SLSC uniforms with traditional artwork and an annual refugee day to educate refugees about safe swimming and healthy environmental practices; and
- Neptune's Royal Surf Life Saving Club's long history patrolling the calm Tallebudgera estuary waters.

**Young Legends** – *this category recognises positive environmental outcomes which encourage and promote youth initiative and environmental education and/or achievement.*

There is the saying, many hands make light work, and if the dictionary could be rewritten, Tallebudgera Beach would be in the definition. The positive environmental outcomes at Tallebudgera Beach can set the benchmark for other thriving coastal cities. Effective and positive community engagement that promotes youth initiative has been a success along this picturesque part of the golden Gold Coast.

- **Tallebudgera Beach School** – boasts one of the best locations in Australia. With pristine ocean waters providing the sandy shores of northern Palm Beach and the wide-open estuary of Tallebudgera Creek bordered by Burleigh Mountain National Park, the school engages with over 8000 school students from across Queensland each year by hosting school camps. Established in the 1950s, the school prides itself by “letting the outdoors be yours” and educates youth on many subjects and activities that involve coastal issues and safe aquatic practices. The school empowers students with daily environmental badges for groups that collect the most amount of litter. To further the environmental message, the school has an upper catchment campus, where students understand the connection between the green and the gold. The school has won previous State Young Legends awards.
- **CoastEd** – a coastal education program supported by GCCC is there to educate students and the community about the coastal environment. A free coastal outreach program, CoastEd is on the beach, or takes the beach to the schools and community halls to talk about what we love best – the beach - and how to keep it healthy and sustainable. CoastEd has won many Regional Young Legends awards in previous years.
- **BeachCare and SCISCO** – partnered towards the end of 2010 to address the cascading calls to care for the beach environment. The disengaged youth from SCISCO Career Pathways have been given the opportunity to adopt a piece of paradise from Tallebudgera Beach to northern Palm Beach. This has included monthly dune care – planting locally sourced native dune plants, removing invasive weeds and picking up beach litter, as well as learning about coastal processes, dune management and the names of the local fauna and flora. BeachCare has become an avenue for youth to become engaged in coastal conservation, which has promoted positive environmental outcomes. One memory that must be mentioned was the acknowledgement of the hard work the young guys carried out during a dune care activity from a local retired resident – what a rewarding moment!

## LESSONS LEARNT

It is important to reflect on the barriers for any process, especially in coastal community engagement. In coastal management, following best management can raise a positive outcome, however, when working with communities there can be many unforeseen variables. In hindsight through the Clean Beaches competition, there was difficulty finding every key stakeholder to firstly capture local knowledge, secondly, identify the day to day management of the beach, and lastly, to help drive the nomination. For example, it wasn't until the national nomination when groups such as the Early Morning Swim Group or the Outrigging Club were engaged with. There are a couple of reasons for this, being that over 30 nominations were collated for the Gold Coast region and it would have been impossible to engage with every beach stakeholder for the regional awards within the resource framework. Secondly, surprisingly in the community network, most stakeholders did not want the acknowledgement as they do what they do because of their connection to the beach environment and not for such acknowledgement. It was important to respect peoples' privacy and verbally acknowledge them during the judging process.

The timing process from the regional to the national awards was also constraining, as information needed to be gathered over the summer break, which was when some major stakeholders were away (e.g. Tallebudgera Beach School). Additionally, in a time where program planning for the other CCEP initiatives usually occurs, the nomination and judging phases of the competition added a surprising amount of workload to an already busy schedule. However, such additional workload is minimal in reflection to the benefits that have surfaced through the coastal networks on the Gold Coast from the award.

## POTENTIAL BARRIERS

There were many potential barriers highlighted throughout the award process, which were overcome by funding allocations, already established networks and engagement initiatives.

*Funding:* Financial resources are always a constraining dilemma in any program, especially, not to say the least, in coastal community engagement. It has been fortunate that the coordination of Gold Coast's Clean Beaches nominations is annually funded by GCCC through the CCEP. This has allowed for a part-time coordinator to collate essential information needed for the regional, State and National nominations, promote the competition and facilitate additional activities for stakeholder engagement. In hindsight, without the driving 'paid' element it would have been impossible to highlight all aspects of the beach environment to be awarded Australia's Cleanest. Lastly, there is that saying 'you have to be in it to win it.'

*Establishing networks through a branded program:* It was fortunate to be able to drive the Clean Beaches competition through an already coastal community branded program, CCEP – BeachCare program. This allowed people to relate the nomination to a proactive program and identify with BeachCare's core business theme – *care for your local beach with BeachCare* – which encouraged stakeholders to participate in the nomination and judging process. Further, the promotion of the initiative through the diverse BeachCare network limited time on collating a stakeholder database and allowed room to move with other promotional avenues.

*Media:* The growing relationship with the local media network through the BeachCare program further allowed for successful press releases to reach stakeholders. An initial, during and post competition news article allowed the promotion of the underlining message that we all need to work together to keep our beaches 'clean'. With a common budget of zero dollars for marketing in coastal community engagement, this relationship proved successful.

## **KEEPING AUSTRALIA'S CLEANEST BEACH CLEAN**

You can't get clean beach action without those essential partnerships – there is no I in a clean beach. Since being awarded Australia's Cleanest Beach, there has been further investment in coastal community capacity building along Gold Coast's beaches. Since the status of being awarded Australia's Cleanest Beach community and potential sponsorship opportunities have grown. Additional coastal community engagement resources have further complimented the acknowledgement, including coastal information sheets, information videos and an additional project between GCCM and Tallebudgera SLSC. This was foreseen as essential to further clean beach messages, as there were many constraining issues highlighted through the process. Such limitations would not have been identified without the close working relationship between all stakeholders.

### **TAKE HOME MESSAGES**

- Healthy beach = happy community
- Partnerships bring action
- Creative investment in non-financial resources is essential
- Driving person to coordinate the process
- There is no reason why every beach isn't Australia's Cleanest
- Make sure you have a holiday booked for after the process

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The community surrounding Tallebudgera Beach must be foremost acknowledged for their commitment and passion towards the sandy shores of Tallebudgera Beach. The community continually encompass the heritage, cultural, social and environmental values Tallebudgera Beach offers; GCCC for their innovative management and support for the coastal community groups and engagement programs; GCCM for their commitment to hold the flame of enthusiasm that drives a sense of coastal community spirit; Tallebudgera Beach School, Tallebudgera SLSC and Tallebudgera Tourist Park are all important partners of the beach environment and are of benefit to the coastal environment, community and visitors. The support from Keep Australia Beautiful Queensland has reminded the local community, private and public partners why Tallebudgera Beach is so special.

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