

Tallow and Belongil Creek

Tallow and Belongil Creek are unique coastal systems. Called Intermittently Closed and Open Lagoons (ICOLs) they open and close to the ocean depending on the build-up of sand at the mouth of the creek. This outline primarily focusses on Tallow Creek due to items of Council resolution 19-602 calling for urgent dog management at this location.

Belongil Creek, located 2.5km north-west of the Byron Bay town centre stretches for approximately 3km. Its upper reaches connect to the extensive Belongil-Cumbebin Swamp system via a network of drains. The catchment hosts an array of high-value ecological features including threatened species habitat (flora and fauna), endangered ecological communities and wetland and wildlife corridors. Part of the urban area of the iconic tourist destination of Byron Bay is also drained into the creek, along with the commercial area of the Industrial Estate. Agricultural lands surrounding the estuary as well as residential and commercial development in the low lying areas of the catchment prone to flooding when the creek is closed.

The lower catchment of Tallow Creek is characteristic of ancient dune systems with drainage lines running parallel to the coastline, with the main channel opening to the ocean at Tallow Beach within the Arakwal National Park. It is a unique and special area, due to its environmental and cultural significance providing much needed refuge for native and international species.

The decommissioned sewage treatment ponds (Old South Byron STP) at Suffolk Park adjacent Tallow Creek have become a refuge for birds with 73 different bird species recorded during a survey in October 2019. Byron Bird Buddies have been monitoring the site since 2007 and consistently record a variety of bird species utilising the old ponds.

One of the species recorded is Latham's Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) an international migratory shorebird. There are thirty-seven international migratory shorebird species that regularly visit Australia each year. These species are listed as migratory under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Listed migratory species are a matter of national environmental significance and are also protected under international agreements (JAMBA and CAMBA).

Council's vegetation and Koala mapping for Tallow Creek reveals:

- The majority of the area south of the Arakwal National Park is High Environmental Value
- The area is mapped as Preferred Koala Habitat with Koala Sightings also recorded adjacent the site
- The entire area is also a wildlife corridor linking with Arakwal National Park estate to the north



The creek system crosses through a variety of land tenure - National Park Estate, private land – commercial and residential, Crown Land and Council Operational Land. This mix of land tenure creates complexities for management of this special area due to the variety of values and competing interests.

These coastal systems face similar threats to other natural areas within Byron Shire which include:

- Habitat disturbance (loss of plant and animal species) due to coastal development
- Adverse social or environmental impacts resulting from passive recreational activities and dog walking
- Loss of amenity due to conflicts between user groups
- Reduced water quality due to runoff from coastal development and a degraded catchment
- Impacts resulting from an insufficient community awareness of the values and threats to the coastal environment, and lack of engagement with managing this environment
- Insufficient or inappropriate governance and managing of the coastal environment

Birds/Wildlife and Dogs

The impact of domestic pets on wildlife dogs on native wildlife is well known. A wide variety of native animals ranging from wallabies, lizards and many species of bird, to rarer or threatened species such as bandicoots, koalas and quolls, may be at risk from domestic pets in urban areas (Department of Environment, 2004 website). Domestic dogs provide essential companionship for many people in the Shire, however, if left unchecked can have a huge impact on biodiversity. Responsible dog ownership is paramount, however even dogs restrained on leads can disturb birds by their presence and cause displacement.

During the holiday season dog/wildlife interactions increase due to increased numbers of residents and visitors at these locations. Council has allocated 'dog off leash exercise areas' at 8 locations within the Shire where people can take their dogs to the beach or park for 'off leash' exercise. In accordance with the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, in public places, a dog must be restrained accordingly/effectively by a lead and in control of a competent person.