

RiverWatch Report

Assessment of Noosa River Management Issues Survey of Vessels and Mooring Structures, July 2018

In July 2018, a RiverWatch survey was made of all vessels and vessel mooring structures present on the lower Noosa River, in order to locate any sunken or derelict vessels, and to identify potential management issues related to vessels and their associated infrastructure.

The survey covered the lower reaches of Noosa River and estuary, from Lake Cooroibah downstream to the river mouth and Noosa Sound. The survey did not extend south of Hays Island into Weyba Creek, Witta Circle, Keyser Island.

Observations were made from the NICA RiverWatch boat, supplemented by observations from the shore for sections upstream of Makepeace Island. A record was made of the numbers of vessels and mooring structures, their location and condition, along 14 sections of the lower river.

Survey Results

The RiverWatch survey recorded 111 medium-length (8-12 metres) vessels kept more-or-less permanently on the lower Noosa River, either attached to a fixed mooring (42 vessels), or to a moveable anchor dropped by the vessel (59); or simply tied to mangroves, trees or stakes on the shore (10 vessels). Along the sections of the river surveyed, there are in addition over 140 permanent jetties¹ and 14 boat ramps. The majority of vessels are lying in three sections of the river, 47 in front of Hilton Esplanade and opposite along the south side of Goat Island; and 45 in E and W Woods Bay, Noosa Sound.

47 vessels were identified as purpose-built Houseboats, and 64 as Other types of medium-length, motor or sailing Vessels². While the great majority of the vessels on the river are suitable for living aboard, the survey did not try to record whether or not they were in use for this purpose.

The survey data are summarised below and shown in more detail in the table – Attachment 1.

Summary Results

Vessels in 14 surveyed sections

111	Total Vessels on the river (excluding dinghies and kayaks)
47	Total Houseboats (HB)
64	Total Other Vessels (OV, medium-length, motor or sail)
0	Total 'Hulks' (sunken Vessels)
3	Total apparently 'Derelict'

Vessel Mooring Structures

57	Total number of Moorings (20 occupied by HB, 22 by OV, 15 unoccupied)
59	Total number of Vessels on anchor only (20 HB, 39 OV)
10	Total number of Vessels tied to shore (7 HB, 3 OV)
>18	Dinghies tied to shore

Other Infrastructure

144	Jetties/ Wharves
14	Boat Ramps, slips, launch sites
1	Marina

¹ Vessels (HB or OV) attached to Jetties or Wharves were not included in the survey record.

² Small dinghies and kayaks were not counted in the survey.

Noosa River Management Issues related to Vessels and their associated Infrastructure

1. Urbanisation of the Noosa River and Foreshores

The survey recorded 111 Vessels (47 Houseboats and 67 Other types) kept more-or-less permanently on the river, in addition to over 140 permanent jetties³ and 14 boat ramps. These large numbers of long-term 'resident' vessels, moorings, jetties and other river infrastructure indicate the intensity of on-water recreation and tourism activities and their impacts in the relatively small area of the lower Noosa River.

These permanent and high visibility structures have created an increasingly 'urban river' environment over much of the lower river, and detract significantly from the previous, more natural river setting. They are not in keeping with a well-managed Queensland estuary, nationally important Wetland, nor internationally-recognised Biosphere Reserve.

Vessel operations and associated infrastructure have a range of significant impacts on the ecology of the Noosa River as well as on other river users.. These include aquatic pollution impacts on the river's ecology, water quality, sediments and wildlife, notably from fuel spillage, fuel exhausts, anti-fouling, careening, sewage discharge; as well as from activities such as littering and fish cleaning in the river, on-board or at boat ramps. Vessels' wakes erode and destroy shoreline habitats; vessels grounding and beaching damage benthic and littoral habitats; vessel operations can inhibit fish, bird and marine mammal behaviour.

Increasingly crowded operations of vessels increase conflicts between incompatible uses of the river: e.g. speed boats vs kayaks and sail boats; boats and swimmers; fishing vs nature study; fishing vs power boats.

2. Conservation of Noosa River Foreshore, Littoral and Riparian zones

More vessels require more foreshore and in-river infrastructure, which further affect the extent and intensity of foreshore activities, impacts on the shore and riparian ecology, and effects on local vehicle traffic volumes, flows and issues such as parking.

Construction of jetties, wharves and slips permanently alters the natural shore ecology, substrates, sedimentation, hydrology, and aquatic wildlife.

A significant proportion of Noosa River foreshore is no longer accessible to the public: private jetties and extension of private properties to the high water level prevent the public – residents and visitors alike – from accessing and enjoying what should be the public asset of the Noosa river foreshore. Significant portions of the Noosa estuary's mangroves, foreshore and riparian bushland, seagrass and other littoral habitats have been degraded or destroyed by over-intensive use and development.

Effective future management of the Noosa River will require these issues to be addressed adequately, through such measures as activity zoning – restricting activities and developments to and from specific designated areas; establishment of a public esplanade along the entire shoreline; development of facilities such as nature trails; rationalising the numbers, uses and management of jetties and slips; and an effective habitat conservation and rehabilitation program.

In the Noosa urban river Biosphere Reserve, there are significant opportunities for creating, testing and retro-fitting eco-friendly Infrastructure such as jetties, wharves, slips and moorings, that are designed, installed and operated so as to enhance the ecology rather than degrade it.

³ Vessels (HB or OV) attached to Jetties or Wharves were not included in the survey record.

3. Hulks, Derelict Vessels and Eyesores⁴

Completely wrecked or sunken vessels ('Hulks') and derelict vessels are a potential source of aquatic pollution (from any materials or fuel oils on board), as well as navigation hazards and eyesores.

The survey confirmed that there are currently no Hulks in the lower Noosa River. However, the survey identified 2 vessels as 'derelict' – see Attachment 1. – meaning that they are in dilapidated condition, eyesores and potential pollution risks, and will require attention if they are not to deteriorate further and be at risk of sinking or breaking apart.

A significant number of other vessels on the river are only in marginally-better condition, and can be considered eyesores as well as pollution risks. The results highlight the issue that there is no requirement for any vessel on the Noosa River to be kept in reasonable condition and appearance, even though they are more-or-less permanent residents, and significantly affect the natural amenity of the river landscape and pose a threat to the river ecosystem.

Future management of the Noosa River should include efficient and straightforward provisions for limiting the numbers and location of vessels, and for the removal of derelict, eyesore and abandoned vessels, plus site rehabilitation. Suitable methods of removal, clean-up and disposal of the derelict vessel materials should be prescribed - including prohibition of on-site wrecking - so as to avoid any potential further environmental impacts caused by the operations.

4. Vessel Mooring and Anchoring in the Noosa River

One of the most significant impacts associated with the operation of vessels on Noosa River is caused by the inadequate management of vessel moorings and anchoring practices on the river and shoreline. Of the 111 recorded vessels kept long-term on the lower river, 42 were on fixed moorings, 59 were only anchored; and 10 were simply tied to trees or stakes on the shore.

There is no publically available plan for the rational location of groups of moorings in the lower Noosa River. More than 50 fixed moorings along just 3-4 sections were recorded by the RiverWatch survey. All are single point swing moorings, which make inefficient use of the limited space available. All the Noosa river mooring units appear to be standard designs, in which the ground equipment is constantly moving, grinding and crushing the river bed sediments, animals and plants, with each movement of the tide and water currents. None are designed to minimise impacts on the river bed or benthic ecology, and thus be suitable for an estuarine conservation area or marine park⁵.

The shortage of fixed moorings in the lower Noosa River is readily apparent: of the 111 'resident' vessels noted, 69 are not on moorings, but simply anchored on the river bed or tethered to the shore. Anchors and anchor lines do significantly more damage to the river bed than even poorly-designed moorings: vessels drop anchors in all parts of the Noosa river (at 9 of the 14 sections surveyed rather than the 4 sections where moorings are installed); anchor lines drag constantly over the river bed, moving and pulverising the bottom community. In the Noosa river estuary, benthic invertebrates, seagrasses and mangrove communities are especially impacted by these activities.

Significant damage to the littoral zone and foreshore vegetation is caused also by vessels being grounded on the river edge and tethered to the shore, trees or mangroves. 10 such vessels were recorded in the July 2018 survey, all apparently long-stayers, along 3 main sections. This is convenient for the owner/ operator's to access the vessel, but effectively takes over a public foreshore site and damages it.

These issues need better long-term management in the Noosa River, through an adequate mooring plan; installation and proper management of low-impact moorings; designation of no-go areas for motorised vessels and anchoring; on-river advice on good practices for vessel operators and activity zoning rules; a substantial program of mangrove, foreshore and riparian vegetation rehabilitation and enhanced bushcare.

⁴ The July 2018 survey was conducted in response to the recent publicity about the State Government making funding available for the removal and cleaning-up of long-term 'hulks' in Queensland's coastal waterways.

⁵ Specially designed and installed **Low Impact Moorings** have been in use in Queensland Marine Parks for more than 30 years.

Noosa River Watch
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MOORING STRUCTURES	NOOSA RIVER SECTION (South shores underlined)																		
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>
Totals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
A. Vessels on moorings	-	-	-	-	2	-	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	16					
B. Houseboats on moorings	-	-	-	-	2	-	8	5	-	-	1	-	-	4					
C. Moorings unoccupied	-	-	-	-	2	-	8	5	-	-	-	-	-	?					
D. Vessels anchored	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	6	9	4	4	1	11	7					
E. Houseboats anchored	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	5	9	-	-	-	-	4					
F. Vessels tied to shore	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-					
G. Houseboats tied to shore	7	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	3					
H. Dinghies+ on shore	18	-	-	-	1	-	4	-	-	-	-	8	-	5					
I. Boat ramps/ slips/ launch sites	14	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	2	-		
J. Jetties/ Wharves, Marina	144	13	3	-	17	-	10	-	-	13	-	4	-	1	33	7	43		
K. Marina	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>
	L. Corrobah to N Shore Ferry (W)	L. Corrobah to N Shore Ferry (E)	N Shore Ferry to Makepeace Is. (W)	N Shore Ferry to Homport Track (E)	Sheep Island to Marina	Lake Doonnella	Hilton Esplanade	Goat Island - South bank	Goat Island - North bank	Wygan Drive	Jetski park to N. Shore Esplanade	N Shore Esplanade to Riving Pan	Noosa Woods - West Bay	Noosa Woods - East Bay	Noosaville Chaplain Pk to Gympie Terrace	Murna Point	Culgea Pk. to Noosa Parade	Witha Circle - Keyser Is	Wetba Ck

Noosa River Watch
PHOTOGRAPHS from July 2018



1.
LONG-TERM ANCHORED
VESSEL IN DERELICT
CONDITION



2.
LONG-TERM ANCHORED
VESSEL IN DERELICT
CONDITION



3.
VESSEL BEACHED AND
TIED TO TREES ON SHORE



4.
LONG-TERM ANCHORED
HOUSEBOAT AND
PONTOONS USED AS
'DEMOLITION YARD'



5.
HOUSEBOAT ANCHORED
AND AGROUND,
SCHEDULED FOR
DEMOLITION

[PILOT OYSTER REEF IN
FOREGROUND]