

Specialist Biological Consultants

Survey of coastal vegetation

in Townsville City Council Reserve

at Rowes Bay

Earthworks Report 00c01b

to Townsville City Council

October 2000

Prepared by

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for Earthworks Environmental Services Pty Ltd

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Methodology

A field survey of vegetation was conducted on 3 May, 2000, for the Townsville City Council Sanitary Reserve, located between Rowes Bay and the Belgian Gardens Cemetery (Figure 1). Landforms included beach ridges, swales and swamps. Ten sites were surveyed to identify vegetation types and species composition. Species classification follows Henderson (1997). Naturalised species are identified by an asterisk (*) symbol.

Each vegetation type is described and mapped using a tracing paper overlay of aerial photography (Figure 2). The relationships of the current vegetation communities to those mapped by Skull (1996) and the Regional Ecosystem (RE) model (Sattler & Williams 1999) are given in Table 1. Photographs of vegetation communities and noteworthy flora are presented in Appendix 1. The plant species recorded during this survey are listed in Table 2. The conservation significance of vegetation communities and species are discussed, and some general recommendations are given.

General information

A total of 123 plant species were recorded during the survey.

Vegetation community descriptions

1. Grasslands

1.a. Sporobolus grasslands

Landform: Swales. Inundated by extremely high tides a few times per year. Generally highly saline soils, but less saline than soils of samphire forblands.

Structure and composition: Forms dense swards.

Upper stratum: none

Mid stratum: Occasional Sesbania cannabina, Macroptilium lathyroides.

Av. height: 1.5m % cover: <5%

Ground stratum: *Sporobolus virginicus* dominant. Scattered other grasses (eg *Chloris virgata, Eriochloa pseudoacrotricha, Leptochloa fusca*), herbs (eg *Vernonia cinerea, Aeschynomene indica*), sedges (eg *Cyperus* species, *Fimbristylis* species), and samphires (eg *Halosarcia indica*).

Av. height: 0.5m % cover: 75-100%

1.b. Brachiaria closed grassland

Landform: Swales, in band between deeper wetland areas and dryland areas. Periodically inundated by shallow fresh water. Soils usually not saline.

Structure and composition: May be associated with *Melaleuca* forest. Forms dense swards.

Upper stratum: Scattered Melaleuca dealbata and Melaleuca viridiflora.

Av. height: 10m

% cover: <5%

Mid stratum: none

Ground stratum: *Brachiaria mutica* dominant. *Paspalum vaginatum* and various *Cyperus* species may be common in patches.

Av. height: 0.5m % cover: 100%

2. Samphire forbland

Landform: Swales. Inundated by extremely high tides 10-100 times per year. Hypersaline soils.

Structure and composition: Scattered, highly salt tolerant shrubs (samphires), with large areas of bare mud.

Upper stratum: none

Mid stratum: Occasional Sesbania cannabina, Clerodendrum inerme, mangrove shrubs. Av. height: 1m

% cover: <5%

Ground stratum: Scattered samphires (*Halosarcia* species, *Sarcocornia quinqueflora, Suaeda arbusculoides*), salt tolerant grasses (*Sporobolus virginicus, Chloris virgata**) and sedges (*Cyperus scariosus*).

Av. height: 0.1m % cover: 10%

3. Eleocharis sedgeland

Landform: Swamp within swales. May be influenced by extremely high tides once every few years. Generally somewhat saline soils. Usually inundated by fresh water for 3-6 months per year.

Structure and composition: Forms dense swards, intermingled with patches of open water, which support submerged aquatic plants.

Upper stratum: none

Mid stratum: none

Ground stratum: *Eleocharis spiralis* dominant. *Schoenoplectus litoralis* and *Typha orientalis* may be dominant in patches. Floating aquatic ferns such as *Marsilea mutica* and *Lemna trisulca* are common.

Av. height: 1-1.5m % cover: 50%

4. Submerged/floating forbland

Landform: Swamp within swales. Water too deep to allow grasses and sedges to establish.

Structure and composition: Floating lilies (eg Nymphaea spp) present. Submerged plants, such as Hydrilla verticillata and Utricularia caerulea common. % cover: 50%

5. Woodlands/forests

5.a. Acacia woodland

Landform: Beach ridge, second dune back from beach.

Structure and composition: Open canopy of wattles, with occasional emergent trees. Well developed ground cover. About 20% of area is bare sand.

Upper stratum: Dominated by *Acacia crassicarpa*. *Corymbia tessellaris* and *Canarium australianum* are occasional emergents.

Av. height: 5m % cover: 15%

Mid stratum: Various shrubs (*Clerodendrum floribundum*, *Lantana camara**) and tree saplings (*Acacia crassicarpa, Alphitonia excelsa*).

Av. height: 1.5m % cover: 20%

Ground stratum: Scattered grasses, such as *Panicum maximum**, *Brachiaria subquadripara*, *Cenchrus echinatus** and *Melinis repens**, and herbs, including *Xenostegia tridentata*, *Jasminium didymum*, and *Tribulus terrestris*.

Av. height: 0.5m % cover: 75%

5.b. Vine thicket (mixed) woodland/open woodland

Landform: Beach ridge.

Structure and composition: Diverse range of vine thicket and ground stratum species. Scattered emergent trees reaching up to 15m. Vines conspicuous. 10-20% of area is bare sand/sandy loam.

Upper stratum: Various littoral vine thicket species, including *Acacia crassicarpa*, *Pleiogynium timorense*, *Pouteria sericea*, *Mimusops elengi*, *Alphitonia excelsa*, *Canarium australianum*, *Mallotus philippensis*, *Geijera salicifolia* and *Diospyros geminata*. occasional emergent *Corymbia tessellaris*.

Av. height: 6m % cover: 15-25%

Mid stratum: Numerous shrub/trees, including *Planchonia careya, Pogonolobus reticulatus* and *Clerodendrum floribundum*, and tree saplings.

Av. height: 3m % cover: 10-20%

Ground stratum: A variety of grasses (*Heteropogon contortus, Panicum maximum**, *Melinis repens**) and herbs (*Crotalaria* species, *Indigofera brevidens, Vigna lanceolata, Tridax procumbens**, *Commelina ensifolia, Evolvolus alsinoides*).

Av. height: 0.75m % cover: 75%

Vine stratum: Jasminium simplicifolium, Passiflora foetida*, Milky sapped vine species.

5.c. Melaleuca woodland/open forest

Landform: Swales, bordering swamps and lagoons.

Structure and composition: Occur around fringes of wetlands, such as eleocharis sedgeland. Vary from open forest (50-60% cover) to woodland (25-50% cover), with variable mid stratum and diverse ground stratum. Bordered in some saline areas by a narrow band of mangrove species, such as *Lumnitzera racemosa* and *Avicennia marina*. **Upper stratum**: *Melaleuca dealbata* dominant. *Melaleuca viridiflora, Corymbia tessellaris* and *Acacia crassicarpa* may also be common. Mangroves such as *Lumnitzera racemosa* and *Avicennia marina* may be common along more saline wetland edges.

Av. height: 5-10m

% cover: 25-60%

Mid stratum: May contain vine thicket species (*Pouteria sericea, Alphitonia excelsa, Cupaniopsis anacardioides*). *Pandanus whitei* and *Clerodendrum inerme* may be common.

Av. height: 2-4m % cover: 10-20%

Ground stratum: Grasses such as *Panicum maximum**, *Imperata cylindrica*, *Heteropogon contortus* and *Sprobolus virginicus*. Herbs including *Indigofera hirsuta* and

Crotalaria species. Sedges such as *Cyperus* species and *Fimbristylis* species. Samphires such as *Sesuvium portulacastrum* and grasses such as *Sporobolus virginicus* and *Paspalum vaginatum* may be common along more saline wetland edges.

Av. height: 0.5-1.5m % cover: 10-75%

Conservation significance:

- No rare and threatened flora species were recorded during this half-day survey. However, a number of species may be present in this littoral habitat, but not observed in the short time available. These include *Tylophora williamsii*, *Aponogeton queenslandicus*, and *Grewia graniticola*. *Aponogeton queenslandicus* (Rare) is a water plant, which has been recorded from the Town Common (Queensland Herbarium records). It has also been collected from Stuart Creek. *Tylophora williamsii* (Vulnerable) is a vine found in coastal vine thickets (R. Cumming, pers. comm.). The Queensland Herbarium has records from vine thicket on Mt Stuart and the Pinnacles. *Grewia graniticola* (Rare) is a shrub, recorded in woodlands on hill slopes or coastal dunes, in sandy or skeletal soils. One specimen was collected from a coastal dune on Magnetic Island (Queensland Herbarium records).
- Vine thicket woodland on coastal dunes is equivalent to low microphyll rainforest on coastal dunes (RE 11.2.3 Sattler & Williams 1999), and is considered to be a regional ecosystem of concern, as it is a naturally restricted type. It plays an important role in coastal dune stabilisation, and clearing is considered inappropriate in the Bowen Tree Clearing Guidelines for Leasehold lands (DNR undated).
- Very limited areas of beach scrub (mapped in the present survey as vine thicket woodland) occur in the mainland Townsville region (Lavarack 1991), and much has been degraded by clearing, fire, tracks and weed invasion. The area has been protected from fire by surrounding wetlands and the cemetery. This site represents probably the closest intact vine thicket remnant to the Townsville urban area, and is thus valuable for its high conservation values, and as a potential educational and eco-tourism resource. Numerous vine thicket species, including *Canarium australianum, Pouteria sericea* and *Exocarpos latifolius*, produce fruit which are an important food source for frugivorous fauna (eg Torresian Pigeon)
- The freshwater wetland area in this reserve is remarkably weed-free, with only a narrow fringe of para grass* along the north-eastern edge. This is in marked contrast to the wetlands in the Town Common, which have been heavily invaded by para grass. The low weed levels may be attributable to the regular cycling of the wetland from saline to fresh. The site has retained good connectivity with the sea via Mundi Creek, so extremely high tides inundate a large proportion of the wetlands. Para grass* is intolerant of high salinity, thus regular salt-water intrusion may be limiting it's spread. Substantial areas of *Eleocharis* and other native water plants grow in the site. *Eleocharis*, in particular, is an important food source for brolgas. The site provides habitat for a range of water birds, with brolgas, jabiru, spoonbills and egrets observed during the survey.

- The wetlands in the Sanitary Reserve are included in the Town Common wetlands, which were considered by Lukacs (1996) to have high conservation values. QNPWS (1987) attributed the following conservation values to the Town Common:
 - internationally significant waterbird habitat;
 - regionally important habitat for brolgas and magpie geese;
 - habitat for a range of native fauna;
 - an area which can be effectively managed for wildlife purposes. These values are equally applicable to the Sanitary Reserve.

ecosystem is considered "of concern", as it is a naturally restricted type.

• Sedgelands in the Sanitary reserve are classified as "sedgelands in depressions on Quaternary estuarine deposits", regional ecosystem 11.1.3 (Sattler & Williams 1999). This

Recommendations:

- The surveyed area contains the closest intact example of beach scrub to the Townsville urban region. It provides habitat and food for a range of native animals. Its easy accessibility also makes it a valuable potential resource for educational and eco-tourism activities. It is strongly recommended that the area is conserved and managed for these high conservation, educational and eco-tourism values.
- The wetlands in the Sanitary Reserve provide high quality habitat for a variety of water birds, fish and other native animals. It is recommended that these wetlands are conserved and managed to retain their high conservation, educational and eco-tourism values. They also provide some fire protection for the enclosed vine thicket woodland area.
- Retain connectivity with the sea via Mundi Creek, allowing the site to cycle naturally between saline and fresh water conditions. This will assist in control of para grass*, and maintain the site's value as marine nursery habitat.
- It would be valuable to use the mapping from this survey (Figure 2) to update existing GIS digital mapping of the Sanitary Reserve. Guidelines for converting the present detailed mapping to the broader scale Townsville City Council vegetation mapping (Skull 1996) are given in Table 2.
- A number of invasive weeds have the potential to degrade the area, including *Panicum maximum, Brachiaria mutica, Lantana camara* and *Zizyphus mauritiana*. It is recommended that a weed management plan be developed and implemented for strategic control of these species.

References:

- Henderson, R.J.F. (ed.) 1997. *Queensland Plants: Names and Distribution. Queensland Herbarium*, Department of Environment.
- Lavarack, P.S. 1991. The beach scrubs of the central Queensland coast. ANPWS report.
- Lukacs, G. 1996. Wetlands of the Townsville area. ACTFR report to Townsville City Council.
- QNPWS. 1987. *Townsville Town Common Environmental Park management plan*. Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, Townsville.
- Sattler, P. & Williams, R. (eds) 1999. *The Conservation Status of Queensland's Bioregional Ecosystems*. Environmental Protection Agency, Brisbane.
- Skull, S. 1996. *Townsville City Council Region: Vegetation communities and conservation priorities*. ACTFR report to Townsville City Council.

Legislation:

DNR 1997. Broadscale Tree Clearing Policy. Qld Dept. Natural Resources.
Anon (no date, c. 1998).Local Tree Clearing Guidelines for Leasehold Land for Bowen Shire Locality.
Queensland Fisheries Act, 1994.
Queensland Nature Conservation Act, 1992.
Queensland Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation, 1994.

Queensland Nature Conservation (Protected plants in trade) Conservation Plan, 1995.

Vegetation type	Skull (1996)	Regional ecosystem
1.a Sporobolus grasslands	Coastal grassland	11.1.1
1.b Brachiaria closed grasslands	Para grass	11.1.3/11.2.4
2. Samphire forbland	Salt-marsh	11.1.2
3. Eleocharis sedgeland	Sedgeland	11.1.3 (of concern)
4. Submerged/floating forbland	Open water associated with sedgeland	11.1.3/11.2.4
5.a Acacia woodland	Melaleuca/eucalypt woodland	11.2.5?
5.b Vine thicket (mixed) woodland/open woodland	Beach scrub	11.2.3 (of concern)
5.c Melaleuca woodland/open forest	Melaleuca swamps	11.2.5

Table 1: Comparison of mapping units used in this survey, Skull (1996) and the Regional Ecosystem model (Sattler and Williams, 1999).

Table 2: Plant species recorded during Sanitary Reserve survey.* denotes naturalised species.

Family Aizoaceae	Sp name Sesuvium portulacastrum	Common name sea purslane	Growth form herb
Amaranthaceae	* Alternanthera bettzickiana	alternanthera	herb
Amaryllidaceae	Crinum angustifolium	spider lily	herb
Anacardiaceae	Pleiogynium timorense	burdekin plum	tree
Anacardiaceae	* Schinus terebinthifolia	Brazilian pepper tree	shrub/tree
Apocynaceae	* Catharanthus roseus	pink periwinkle	herb
Asclepiadaceae	Gymnanthera oblonga	vine	vine
Asteraceae	* Eclipta prostrata	white eclipta	herb
Asteraceae	* Emilia sonchifolia	purple emilia	herb
Asteraceae	Pterocaulon serrulatum	ragwort	herb
Asteraceae	Sphaeranthus africanus	sphaeranthus	herb
Asteraceae	* Tridax procumbens	tridax daisy	herb
Asteraceae	Vernonia cinerea	purple top	herb
Azollaceae	Azolla pinnata	ferny azolla	aquatic
Burseraceae	Canarium australianum	mango bark	tree
Caesalpiniaceae	Chamaecrista mimosoides	five leaf cassia	herb
Campanulaceae	Wahlenbergia gracilis	blue bells	herb
Capparaceae	Capparis canescens	wild orange	shrub/tree
Capparaceae	Capparis sepiaria	bumble	shrub/vine
Capparaceae	Cleome viscosa	tick weed, spider flower	herb
Chenopodiaceae	Halosarcia indica	samphire	herb
Chenopodiaceae	Sarcocornia quinqueflora subsp. quinqueflora	samphire	herb
Chenopodiaceae	Suaeda arbusculoides	seablite	herb
Chenopodiaceae	Tecticornia australasica	tecticornia	herb
Combretaceae	Lumnitzera racemosa	black mangrove	tree
Combretaceae	Terminalia muelleri	Mueller's damson	tree
Commelinaceae	Commelina ensifolia	native wandering jew	herb
Convolvulaceae	Evolvulus alsinoides	tropical speedwell	herb
Convolvulaceae	Xenostegia tridentata	convolvulus	herb
Cyperaceae	Cyperus difformis	rice sedge, dirty dora	sedge
Cyperaceae	Cyperus iria	rice sedge, variable sedge	sedge
Cyperaceae	Cyperus polystachyos	bunchy sedge	sedge
Cyperaceae	Cyperus scariosus	sedge	sedge
Cyperaceae	Eleocharis spiralis	eleocharis	sedge
Cyperaceae	Fimbristylis ferruginea	fringe rush	sedge
Cyperaceae	Schoenoplectus litoralis	club rush	sedge
Ebenaceae	Diospyros geminata	native ebony	tree
Euphorbiaceae	Euphorbia tannensis	euphorbia	herb
Euphorbiaceae	Flueggea virosa subsp. melanthesoides	white currant bush	shrub
Euphorbiaceae	Mallotus philippensis	red kamala	shrub/tree
Fabaceae	Abrus precatorius	gidee gidee	vine
Fabaceae	* Aeschynomene indica	budda pea	herb
Fabaceae	* Alysicarpus vaginalis	buffalo burr	herb

Fabaceae
Fabaceae
Hydrocharitaceae
Lamiaceae
Lamiaceae
Lamiaceae
Lamiaceae
Lauraceae
Lauraceae
Lecythidaceae
Lemnaceae
Lentibulariaceae
Lythraceae
Malvaceae
Malvaceae
Marsileaceae
Menispermaceae
Menispermaceae
Mimosaceae
Mimosaceae
Mimosaceae
Moraceae
Myrtaceae
Myrtaceae
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Myrtaceae
Nyctaginaceae
Oleaceae
Oleaceae
Onagraceae
Pandanaceae
Passifloraceae
Philesiaceae
Phormiaceae

	Aphyllodium biarticulatum
*	Clitoria ternatea
*	Crotalaria goreensis
*	Crotalaria laburnifolia
	Crotalaria medicaginea
*	Crotalaria pallida
*	Desmodium tortuosum
	Galactia muelleri
	Indigofera brevidens
	Indigofera hirsuta
*	Macroptilium atropurpureum
*	Macroptilium lathyroides
	Sesbania cannabina
	Vigna lanceolata
	Hydrilla verticillata
	Clerodendrum floribundum
	Clerodendrum inerme
*	Hyptis suaveolens
	Premna serratifolia
	Cassytha filiformis
	Litsea glutinosa
	Planchonia careya
	Lemna trisulca
	Utricularia caerulea
	Ammannia multiflora
*	Sida cordifolia
	Sida rhombifolia
	Marsilea mutica
	Pachygone ovata
	Stephania japonica
	Acacia crassicarpa
	Acacia holosericea Albizia lebbeck
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	Ficus opposita Corymbia clarksoniana
	Corymbia tessellaris Melaleuca dealbata
	Melaleuca viridiflora
	Boerhavia dominii
	Jasminum didymum
	Jasminum simplicifolium
	Ludwigia octovalvis
	Pandanus whitei
*	Passiflora foetida
	Eustrephus latifolius
	Dianella caerulea
*	Brachiaria mutica

thick trefoil	herb
butterfly pea	vine
rattle pod	herb
bird flower	shrub
trefoil rattlepod	herb
rattle pod	herb
Florida beggar weed	herb
galactia	vine
desert indigo	herb
hairy indigo	herb
siratro	vine
phasey bean	herb
sesbania pea	shrub
maloga bean	vine
hydrilla	aquatic
lolly bush	shrub/tree
beach lolly bush	shrub
mint weed	herb
creek premna	shrub/tree
dodder laurel	vine
scrub laurel	tree
cocky apple	shrub/tree
duckweed	aquatic
bladderwort	aquatic
jerry-jerry	herb
flannel weed	herb
Paddy's lucerne	herb
nardoo	aquatic
vine	vine
tape vine, snake vine	vine
beach wattle	tree
silver-leafed wattle	shrub
Indian siris	tree
sandpaper fig	shrub/tree
bloodwood	tree
Moreton Bay ash	tree
silver-leafed paperbark, cloudy tea-tree	tree
broad leaf paperbark, broad leaf tea-tree	tree
tar vine	herb
native jasmine	vine
stiff jasmine	vine
willow primrose	herb
pandanus, screw pine	palm-like tree
stinking passionfruit	vine
wombat berry	vine
blue flax lily	herb
para grass	grass

9

Poaceae

Poaceae	Brachiaria subquadripara	green summer grass	grass
Poaceae	* Cenchrus echinatus	Mossman River grass	grass
Poaceae	Chloris lobata	lobed chloris	grass
Poaceae	* Chloris virgata	feathertop rhodes grass	grass
Poaceae	Cynodon dactylon	green couch	grass
Poaceae	* Echinochloa colona	awnless barnyard grass	grass
Poaceae	Eriochloa pseudoacrotricha	early spring grass	grass
Poaceae	Heteropogon contortus	black speargrass	grass
Poaceae	Heteropogon triticeus	giant speargrass	grass
Poaceae	Imperata cylindrica	blady grass	grass
Poaceae	Leptochloa fusca	beetle grass	grass
Poaceae	* Melinis repens	red Natal grass	grass
Poaceae	* Panicum maximum var. maximum	guinea grass	grass
Poaceae	Paspalum vaginatum	saltwater couch	grass
Poaceae	Sorghum nitidum	brown sorghum	grass
Poaceae	Sporobolus virginicus	saltwater couch	grass
Portulacaceae	Portulaca oleracea	pigweed, purslane	herb
Portulacaceae	* Portulaca pilosa subsp. pilosa	hairy pigweed	herb
Rhamnaceae	Alphitonia excelsa	red ash	tree
Rhamnaceae	Colubrina asiatica var. asiatica	beach berry bush	shrub/vine
Rhamnaceae	* Ziziphus mauritiana	chinee apple	shrub/tree
Rhizophoraceae	Ceriops tagal	yellow mangrove	shrub/tree
Rubiaceae	Pogonolobus reticulatus	dye bush	shrub
Rutaceae	Geijera salicifolia	scrub wilga	tree
Santalaceae	Exocarpos latifolius	native cherry	tree
Sapindaceae	Alectryon connatus	alectryon	shrub/tree
Sapindaceae	Cupaniopsis anacardioides	tuckeroo	tree
Sapindaceae	Dodonaea viscosa	hop bush	shrub
Sapotaceae	Niemeyera antiloga	brown pearwood, milky plum	tree
Sapotaceae	Pouteria sericea	native plum, creek plum	tree
Tiliaceae	* Corchorus olitorius	jute	herb
Typhaceae	Typha orientalis	bulrush, cumbungi	sedge
Verbenaceae	Avicennia marina	grey mangrove	tree
Verbenaceae	* Lantana camara var. camara	lantana	shrub
Verbenaceae	Phyla nodiflora var. nodiflora	phyla	herb
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