September 2026 Newsletter



Welcome

This month's newsletter offers a brief look at a few local matters, including an important update on community consultation and the latest on Collingwood Beach dune vegetation. We've also added a few quick community updates to keep you in the loop.

Also in this issue:

- DA neighbour-notification changes now in effect from 1 September
- Cleared vegetation at Erowal Bay Road
- Bird flu detection in Jervis Bay

- Parking upgrades at the Bay & Basin Leisure Centre
- A favourite Vincentia walk



Re-opening the door to community voices in land-disposal decisions

In July, Shoalhaven City Council made a significant change to its land-disposal policy: it removed a long-standing requirement to consult with the community before any final decision to sell public land. In its place, the draft policy introduced a weaker instruction to "consider" community interests. This shift has already shaped how land-sale decisions are progressing-with communities across the Shoalhaven blindsided by proposals to sell public and community land, often learning of them only when they appear on a Council agenda.

The change matters because public land plays different roles in different places. Residents understand how local spaces function, what they enable, and what would be lost if they were sold. When consultation is removed, this knowledge is excluded from early due-diligence assessments. Council cannot reliably determine whether land is genuinely surplus to need if the people who use it have never been asked. As a key stakeholder in public land disposals, the community reasonably expects a say in decisions that shape future access, services, and opportunities.

What happened on 25 August

At the 25 August Council meeting, councillors considered item CL26.189, a rescission motion seeking to reverse July's policy change and send the draft replacement policy to a public workshop. A VCF committee member delivered a

deputation outlining how the removal of mandatory consultation (a key component of POL22/47) has already affected land-sale proposals. Ahead of the meeting, VCF circulated clear public information explaining why community input—and the rescission motion—was essential and how it would influence all future land-sale decisions.

Councillors voted 10–1 to carry the rescission motion—a strong acknowledgement of widespread community concern and a major step toward restoring transparency, trust in Council process, and meaningful community involvement.

Why this matters

For the past two years, consultation on land sales has not occurred at all. Public and community land—including reserves, heritage properties, and locations supporting subsidised community services—have been recommended for sale without affected operators, residents, or the wider community being aware. The draft policy would have locked this “no consultation” model in permanently.

Reversing the change means Council now has the opportunity to rebuild a policy that protects community voice, strengthens due diligence, and ensures decisions about public land are made with a full understanding of local impacts.

What the workshop will achieve

Council has confirmed that a public workshop will be held to review the draft policy. No details have yet been provided—including timing, format, or who will be able to participate. The workshop is expected to allow councillors, staff, and community members to examine the draft policy together, identify gaps, and ensure the final version reflects community expectations for fairness and transparency. This will be the next major step in shaping how future land-sale decisions are made.

A fuller background and our submission are available on our website.



Collingwood Beach: the dunes behind the debate

Much of Vincentia's appeal lies in its proximity to the water and its bushland setting. At the heart of this remarkable landscape is Collingwood Beach and Reserve.

The coastal dunes and vegetation along Collingwood Beach are much more than an attractive backdrop. They form a functioning natural system that stabilises sand, supports the integrity of the dunes and reduces the impacts of wind and storm damage and ongoing coastal erosion. The diverse vegetation also provides valuable habitat and a movement corridor for native wildlife.

There is a current proposal before Council to significantly prune trees within the nature reserve to improve views for a number of properties bordering the foreshore.

Severe pruning of mature trees and shrubs can place significant stress on them. Removing a substantial proportion of the canopy reduces their ability to photosynthesise thus affecting the balance between its canopy and root system and contributing to its decline.

The protection and maintenance of the Collingwood Beach Reserve has a long history of community involvement and cooperation with Shoalhaven City Council. In the mid-to-late 1970s, residents along Illfracombe Avenue became increasingly concerned about storm and sand erosion affecting their properties. This was the result of removing dune vegetation to improve views across the bay.

Residents responded with ongoing program of planting and maintaining vegetation suited to the natural dune environment. This work was developed in consultation with Council.

Today, a dedicated group of 13 local volunteers contributes about 15 hours monthly to bushcare activities. They cover the area from Moona Moona Creek to Greenfields National Park, including Stuart King Reserve and Violet Clarke Reserve.

Their work entails rubbish removal, weed management and planting. Activities are undertaken in accordance with Council-approved plans and planting guidelines and coordinated through a Bushcare Coordinator. Any new planting, including replacement of existing vegetation, requires Council approval.

Undoubtedly a water view is highly valued by property owners. If all property owners across Vincentia made similar requests, the cumulative effect would fundamentally alter the bushland character and integrity of our local coastline.

The natural environment of Jervis Bay is not made up of isolated attractions. Its beaches, dunes, bushland, wildlife and waters are interconnected. Responsible vegetation management entails taking into account the long-term interests of both the entire community of residents and visitors.

The Collingwood Beach dune motion (CL26.192 – Notice of Motion: Ongoing Maintenance of Vegetation & Dune Care Action at Collingwood Beach) was addressed briefly at the 25 August Shoalhaven Council meeting, but has been deferred to the 22 September Ordinary Meeting.



The NSW Government's new plan reduces your say on neighbouring DAs

Across NSW, two major planning changes—the newly finalised Community Participation Plan (CPP) that took effect on 1 September, and the yet-to-be-finalised Complying Development Certificate (CDC) variation pathway-will significantly reduce neighbour notification and public consultation in the development application (DA) process.

The NSW Government's announcement that the plan is now in effect described these changes as part of "landmark reforms to make the planning system faster, fairer and more focused on outcomes." For developers, that may be true-but for local residents, the reforms reduce visibility, notification, and the ability to respond to development that directly affects their homes.

In simple terms, the NSW Government has decided that community input should occur only at the very beginning, when councils prepare their long-range strategic plans. Once that big-picture document is set, they believe there's no need for public consultation at the other end of the planning approval process, when individual development proposals are lodged-even when those proposals are out of character, oversized, or directly impact adjoining properties.

The Government's reforms sit within a broader push to increase housing supply, improve affordability and accessibility, expand rental options, and reduce homelessness—goals most people support—but the mechanism chosen comes at a cost to neighbours who lose the right to understand or respond to development that materially affects their own livability.

The proposed CDC changes go further: most residential development would no longer require neighbour notification at all. A large house, extension, or dual occupancy deemed "complying development" could be approved with no opportunity for neighbours to comment, no visibility of whether it meets planning standards, and no appeal rights. Residents would only find out when construction fencing goes up next door.

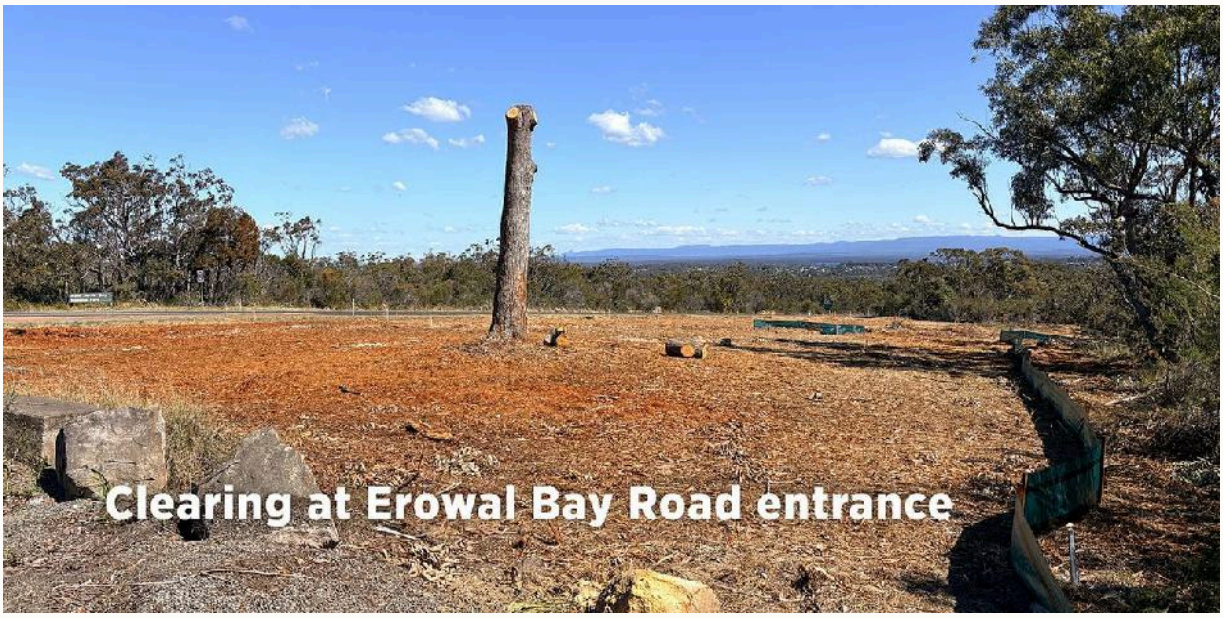
This isn't hypothetical—it's already happening. And locally, Shoalhaven City Council has shown no appetite to counter this shift. Recent Council decisions have moved in the same direction, reducing community consultation requirements and aligning local policy with the NSW Government's approach.

For Vincentia and the wider Shoalhaven, the outcome is clear: our right to participate in planning decisions and to know what is being built next door is

being dismantled, and Council is aligning itself with that change. VCF has raised these concerns in submissions to both the CPP and CDC processes, because community knowledge—the lived understanding of our streets, neighbourhoods, and coastline—cannot be replaced by high-level plans or internal staff assessments alone.

The VCF will continue to advocate for retaining and protecting community input in development decisions that directly affect residents.

You can read both of VCF's submissions in full on our website.



Environmental concerns over new Erowal Bay stockpile site

Vegetation clearing began at the Erowal Bay–Naval College Road intersection in mid-August as part of Council's new depot works. The scale and location of the clearing including removal of native heathland, exposure of bare soil, and changes to the roadside landscape—prompted strong community concern. Residents also noted risks relating to erosion, altered drainage pathways, stockpile-related contaminant runoff, and potential pollution entering Jervis Bay National Park. In response to these concerns, Council staff provided a Community Information Session on 2 September, during which they confirmed Council has self-reported to the EPA for breaching clearing conditions by undertaking vegetation removal during the breeding season of threatened species. This disclosure significantly heightened community concern.

At the session, more than 35 residents attended to seek clarity on the project. Key issues raised includedEnvironmental impact—loss of native vegetation and

clearing during sensitive breeding periods.

- High-value landscape—significant visual damage to a scenic gateway, including loss of bushland character at one of the region's most valued natural entrances.
- Community engagement—limited notification and no opportunity for community input prior to works commencing.
- Traffic safety—increased vehicle movements at an already busy intersection, particularly during peak holiday periods.
- Drainage and runoff—concerns about erosion, stormwater flows, and potential contaminant runoff from the stockpile.

VCF position

VCF is deeply concerned by the environmental risks associated with the clearing and by Council's admission of an EPA breach. The site forms a key gateway to Hyams Beach, Booderee, and Jervis Bay National Park—areas recognised globally for their pristine natural environment—making this a particularly poor outcome. The situation also highlights broader issues with Council's engagement and land-use decision-making processes, including the importance of retaining strong community consultation requirements at the centre of Council decisions.

The Erowal Bay community and the Basin Villages Forum are seeking to have this matter listed as an agenda item at the next Council meeting to enable a deputation to formally present community concerns. The BVF has also asked for a cessation of works and a full review of the project. Further information is available on Council's website.



Bird flu detected locally

H5 bird flu has been confirmed in a greater crested tern at Callala Bay. The area remains open, but keep dogs leashed, supervise children, and avoid sick or dead birds. While the exact Callala Bay site wasn't specified in official advice, a confirmed case in Jervis Bay means there's a real risk of further local detections. Report sightings to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888. More information at birdflu.gov.au

Parking congestion at Bay & Basin Leisure Centre

Due to complaints about parking at the Bay & Basin Leisure Centre, Council has proposed new changes including 4P parking, a Kiss & Ride zone and dedicated 24 hour gym parking. Community feedback highlights ongoing congestion driven by school use, construction impacts and accessibility needs. VCF has shared concerns that the changes may not fully address underlying pressures and has asked Council to review options with regular users in mind.



Walking Vincentia: bush, birds, and bay views

If you need a quick reset, the White Sands Walk is hard to beat. There's always something new to discover. It's an easy track for most people—a mix of sandy paths and a few rocky patches—winding through coastal forest and those quiet spots among the trees where you suddenly get filtered views of pristine beaches or Point Perpendicular across Jervis Bay. There are always plenty of birds

around, and the whole walk has that feeling of being a million miles away from everything, even though you're right at home in Vincentia.



Thanks for reading

We'd love to hear your thoughts—whether you have a Vincentia concern, feedback on this newsletter, or something you'd like us to explore next.

If you value having a clear, locally-grounded source of information about what's happening in and around Vincentia—whether you're here every day or only some of the year—please consider becoming a VCF member. It's $10 a year, and your support helps us monitor local issues, represent community interests, and stay engaged on the things that shape Vincentia's future.

Join here to become a VCF member.

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