

LANCELIN COASTAL EROSION MISCONCEPTIONS / MISINTERPRETATIONS

On Thursday, 17 October 2019 the Shire put out a media release relating to its recent decision at its Council Meeting held 15 October 2019 to change its approach on tackling coastal erosion at Lancelin.

As many community members would know, Council voted in July 2019 to construct a geotextile wall at Grace Darling Park. However, Shire representatives have since met with representatives from the Department of Planning, Lands & Heritage and the Department of Transport. These representatives had further advice to provide on the matter about certain areas Council hadn't taken into consideration when making its decision. Consequently, Council has rescinded its decision in favour of doing further research.

Thursday's media release has generated much debate however and it has become evident that there are a number of misconceptions and misinterpretations in relation to this latest development relating to the erosion of Grace Darling Park.

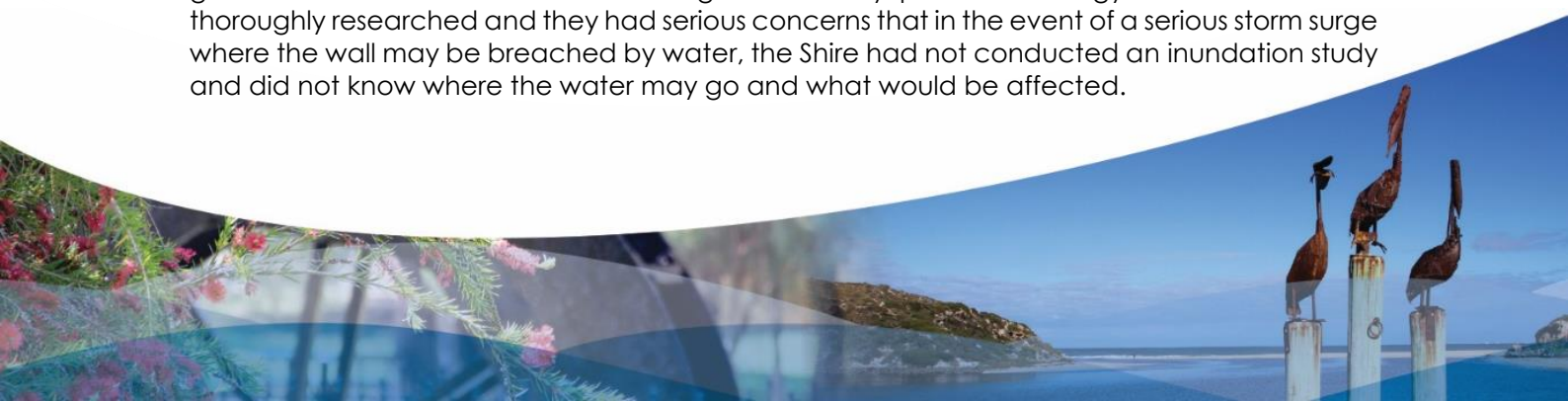
In the interest of clarifying these misconceptions, community members are invited to please read and take note of the following:

"The plan to build a wall at Grace Darling Park has been scrapped permanently"

This claim is false. Council only "rescinded" its decision but it did not decide to drop the idea completely. The reason for the rescission was that when new research is conducted, it will likely change how Council will proceed forward with the remediation works of any variety. Consequently, a new decision would have to be made by Council and the previous decision rescinded at that point in any case. Council simply decided to undertake the rescission of its decision now as opposed to later.

"The State Government has turned its back on Lancelin"

The Shire of Gingin cannot speak on behalf of the State Government but we will point out that the State Government has access to far greater resources than the Shire does at a local government level. The State is unwilling to fund any planned strategy unless it has been thoroughly researched and they had serious concerns that in the event of a serious storm surge where the wall may be breached by water, the Shire had not conducted an inundation study and did not know where the water may go and what would be affected.



Consequently the State Government refused to fund any strategy until such time as the Shire has undertaken the proper studies.

“The Shire should relocate Grace Darling Park north of its current location to the unused Cuncliffe St carpark”

At this point in time the Shire's priority is to protect the township of Lancelin and there are no plans to relocate Grace Darling Park and its facilities. However, Council has received significant funding to improve the Cuncliffe St carpark area and this will include grass areas.

“The Shire is incompetent”

Council and staff at the Shire are sorry to hear that some in our community feel this way. Staff and Council are here to serve the community to the best of our ability and we are highly committed to doing so.

Our priority is to make sure that whatever tactics are employed to deal with coastal erosion they are:

- Safe and won't cause any harm to the community
- Effective in so much as they work in both the short and long term
- Financially viable and won't bankrupt the Shire in future
- Well researched so that they will protect the community and work with the natural environment where possible

Unfortunately coastal erosion is a complex issue which most coastal local governments in Australia are having to find more complex ways to deal with for the first time in living human history thanks to climate change and rising sea levels. There are many strategies that can be employed with many variable factors involved. No single strategy may work for every local government which is why the Shire of Gingin must do its due diligence and research any strategy with the upmost of care.

Staff and Council take our duty to the community very seriously and whilst it may sometimes appear that we are “incompetent” because it is taking a long time to implement a course of action, we would rather be labelled as such then get something wrong and potentially have a tragedy occur.



“If we build the wall it will protect Lancelin permanently”

Unfortunately sea walls are not permanent. Once water regularly goes over the top of the wall during storm surge events then they will be compromised and then easily fall apart.

With sea levels predicted to continue to rise over the next 100 years at least, any geo textile wall that the Shire does build will only have a lifetime guarantee of 15-20 years and it may not be possible to construct a replacement wall in the same place once the original wall reaches the end of its lifespan.

“It is so cheap to build a sandbag wall. Why doesn't the Shire just get on with it?”

To build the wall properly it would take a tremendous amount of finance that the Shire simply cannot afford on its own – hence the requirement of State Government funding assistance. The Shire simply does not have the ratepayer base and the ongoing maintenance costs would be substantial. Even with the wall in place, sand renourishment works would still have to be undertaken or else a large vertical drop would develop in front of the wall as the beach is washed away and the structure of the wall is compromised.

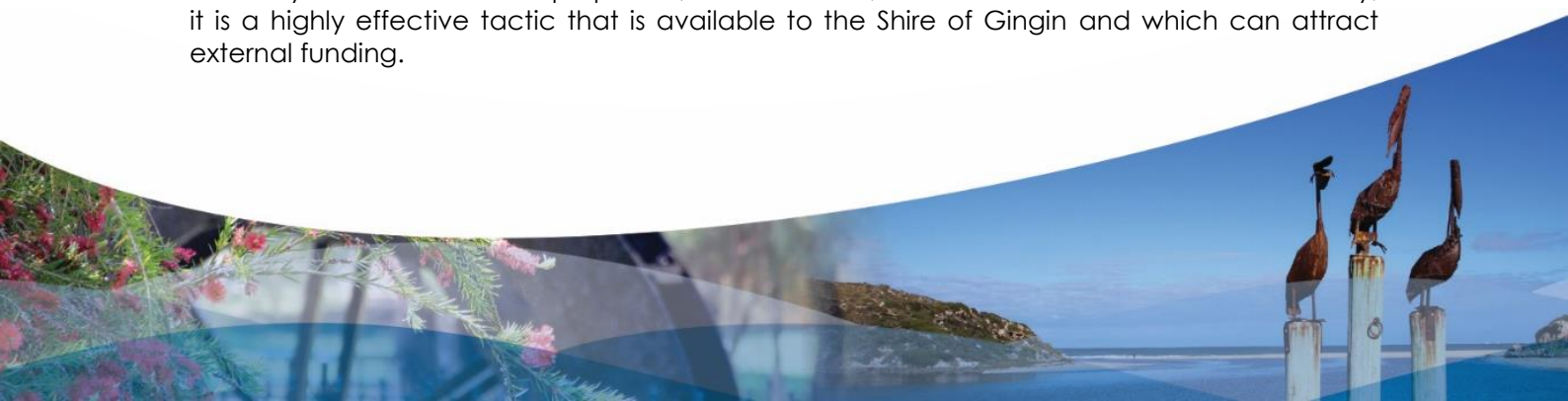
The geo textile wall at Grace Darling Park would cost as follows for a period of approximately 20 years:

Finance cost for construction and loan	\$ 1,600,000
Maintenance (on average \$7,500 per year)	\$ 150,000
Sand renourishment (est \$40 – 50K per year)	\$ 1,000,000
Removal of wall at end of life	\$ 50,000
Contingencies	\$ 100,000
Total Estimated Whole of Life Cost	\$ 2,765,000

This equates to an average of **\$138,250 per annum**.

“Sand renourishment is a waste of money and resources”

Sand renourishment is the Shire's only current strategy to starve off further erosion that is supported by the State Government. Whilst the sand may be washed away in a single storm event, it generally protects the beach from any further serious erosion. Despite its cost, this is relatively minor and its main purpose is, as mentioned, to starve off further erosion. In this way, it is a highly effective tactic that is available to the Shire of Gingin and which can attract external funding.



“The next big storm will wipe out Grace Darling Park”

Thanks to the Shire’s sand renourishment activity, this occurrence is highly unlikely. Whilst the Shire cannot 100% guarantee that a freak storm surge of unusual power won’t cause this to happen, it is relatively unlikely.

“The Shire wants to tear down the town for some other purpose”

This statement is simply untrue. Many staff members and Councillors live in Lancelin and we highly value both Lancelin and all of our other four towns. To lose any of our communities would be a severe blow and this is simply not an idea the Shire is willing to entertain.

That isn’t to say that Lancelin will not change in the future. It may very well experience growth or shrinkage due to any number of factors and the Shire will support the community through that period.

“The Shire has turned its back on Lancelin”

This statement is untrue for many of the reasons listed already. A large portion of our community lives in Lancelin and Council and the Shire represent the whole of all of its residents. WE WILL FIGHT FOR ANY OF OUR COMMUNITIES no matter their size, location, etc. All are equally important and ultimately we want our community members to be safe and happy where they live with a financially viable Shire that can support them.

“Council doesn’t want to spend the money”

It is not that Council and the Shire do not want to spend the money protecting Lancelin or any of our coastal communities from erosion. Rather, it is simply that the Shire cannot afford the proposed geo textile wall (or any other erosion prevention strategies of a similar size or larger) without external funding. If the Shire were to build the wall on its own it would simply not be able to afford it. Unfortunately the rate payer base is just too small.

The State Government has asked the Shire to undertake further studies and upon completion of those, it will be eligible to apply for more funding from the State. The Shire will do whatever is necessary to tackle this issue to the best of its ability but it must be able to afford to do so.

