

Statement from the Maleny Platypus Action Group led by Jon Woodlands - in response to Woolworths Letter

Tuesday April 20

We have always believed that the central issue relating to the development of the old Boxells site is that any large-scale development is wholly inappropriate. There are many reasons for restricting development of this site but most critical is its proximity to the Obi Obi Creek and consequential environmental characteristics of water quality, catchment care and rich habitat for many of native flora and fauna species. A supermarket development will severely compromise the site's appearance and commanding position at the entrance to Maleny, impacts of substantial floodwater upstream, school childrens' safety to and from school and traffic congestion caused by site access vehicles.

Whilst we respect the right of any developer we are also concerned what impact a proposed Woolworth's supermarket might have on a small town such as Maleny. Many residents and visitors cherish this rural atmosphere, quality small businesses and local shopping facilities. We are fearful if small business is unable to compete effectively with a large scale Woolworths. Indeed, evidence would suggest that many local jobs and businesses would not survive. The Queensland retail traders and shopkeepers Association 1999 suggests that for every job gained in large supermarket chain stores about 1.7 jobs are lost in local, independently owned shops.

We are disappointed that Maleny's Local Area Plan and council zonings have not prevented this development from gaining approval. We note that the Local Area Plan in 1994, devised in consultation with this community, had this site designated as open space but was not transferred to the strategic plan prior to the Cornerstones development application. Notwithstanding this, we are disappointed that the developer and Woolworths continue to pursue development on this particular site against community wishes. In fact Woolworths own research indicated that there was no public support for a Woolworths development on this specific site, whereas there might have been some support for such a development elsewhere. Woolworths is now offering to sell back the site to the local council for a price which is far in excess of the price paid and would be too expensive for the community to bear.

We restate our position that this is an inappropriate development site and would appeal to Woolworths to show some corporate and ethical responsibility to a community with which it wishes to do business. Whilst we accept that local council planning regulations have led to this situation we do not believe it is right to develop the site against community wishes just because one can.

With respect to civil disobedience undertaken on the site to protect native vegetation we wish to point out that every other avenue had been exhausted prior to that action. Also, such action actually prevented illegal clearing of some significant native trees. Whilst we do not condone civil disobedience it seems the only possible response in this situation. We further reserve the right to continue such protective action locally, nationally and internationally to bring attention to this issue.

END