10 Coolum Creek

Yandina and Doonan Creeks meander from their source in the Eumundi Range near the suburb of Yandina Creek and join to form Coolum Creek near the suburb of Coolum Beach. Coolum Creek then flows into the Maroochy River approximately 6.3 kilometres upstream of the David Low Bridge at Bli Bli.

Land use along the banks of Coolum Creek is predominantly native vegetation; there are no residential developments. However, Unitywater manages and operates the Coolum Sewage Treatment Plant adjacent to the creek's eastern bank off West Coolum Road. The Sunshine Coast Regional Council also manages the Coolum Creek North Conservation Area adjacent to the creek's western bank and the Coolum Creek South Conservation Area adjacent to the creek's eastern bank from its confluence with the Maroochy River. Both banks of Coolum Creek retain all of their native riparian vegetation. The downstream section of the creek forms part of the Maroochy fish habitat area under fisheries legislation.

The Reference Group is not aware of any environmental issues, such as erosion or bank instability, which may present a problem within Coolum Creek.

The waters of Coolum Creek are navigable for small ships up to five metres in length, like dinghies and speed boats; and passive craft, like canoes and kayaks. The depth of navigable water is about 1.5 metres at lowest astronomical tide, with less than one metre near the creek's entrance. There is a mid-channel island within the creek approximately two kilometres upstream of its confluence with the Maroochy River. The width of navigable water varies from approximately 40 metres at the creek's mouth to less than 20 metres near the southern end of the mid-channel island.

The remains of two old cane train bridges cross the creek separately near the southern end of the mid-channel island. There is no clearance for ships beneath these bridges, except during the lowest of tides. There are also anecdotal reports from shipping inspectors that underwater obstructions and fallen trees are common upstream of the bridges. The waters of the creek upstream of the bridges are navigable by only the smallest of ships, such as unpowered dinghies, canoes and kayaks.

Water skiing activities are prohibited on waters of Coolum Creek.

There are no aids to navigation in Coolum Creek, but there is a series of signs erected within the creek and at its mouth.

There are no public boat ramps for Coolum Creek; however, there is a launching area near the end of West Coolum Road, which is approximately 920 metres upstream of the creek's confluence with Maroochy River. Anecdotal reports from shipping inspectors suggest there is a high likelihood for submerged logs and other navigation obstructions upstream of this road.

Maritime Safety Queensland does not conduct regular hydrographic surveys of Coolum Creek. The most recent survey was conducted during February 2001.

10.1.1 Waterway users and issues

The user density for Coolum Creek ranges very low to low, even during weekends, public holidays and school holidays.

The waterway users of Coolum Creek are mainly:

- dinghies and speed boats engaged in recreational fishing
- occasional fast moving personal watercraft
- occasional passenger vessels conducting environmental tours
- slow moving passive craft, like kayaks and canoes.

The remains of the two cane train bridges create a physical barrier for all but the smallest ships. The bridges are effectively the end of navigable waters of the creek.

The Reference Group identified the prevailing waterway issue for Coolum Creek as the creek's natural features (for example, its shallow entrance and the presence of underwater obstructions), which mean that ships cannot navigate the creek safely at high speed.

Maritime Safety Queensland has received one report of a marine incident in Coolum Creek since July 2000. A commercial passenger vessel grounded and became stranded on a mud bank during an environmental tour in June 2006.

10.1.2 Existing legislative requirements

A general smooth water speed limit of 40 knots applies to all ships on Coolum Creek because no other speed limit has been fixed for the waterway. The general speed limit was fixed by gazette notice on 21 May 2004.

A speed limit of 30 knots or less applies to all personal watercraft used for hire and drive operations, following recommendations from a coronial report in March 2010. The speed limit was fixed by gazette notice on 27 May 2011.

The operational speed limits provided by sections 127, 127A and 128 of the *Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Regulation 2004* also apply.

All waters of Coolum Creek are stated by gazette notice as waters where water skiing is an activity that endangers marine safety. The gazette notice was published on 28 February 1997.

Maritime Safety Queensland has not received any complaints regarding contraventions of marine safety legislation on Coolum Creek, since at least January 2007.

10.1.3 Recommendations

Coolum Creek is a narrow and shallow waterway subject to low levels of ship traffic, even on weekends, public holidays and school holidays.

The Reference Group believes the existing water skiing prohibition achieves an acceptable level of marine safety and should be maintained.

The Reference Group believes that high-speed ship operations on Coolum Creek up to West Coolum Road compromise marine safety, because of the creek's natural features. The group contends that a ship's master navigating these waters

at high speed is unable to comply with the operational speed limits of the *Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Regulation 2004* and rules 6, 8 and 9 of the Collision Regulations.

Importantly, the Reference Group acknowledges that a contravention of any one of these legislative requirements may cause a marine incident, which in turn, may be evidence of a contravention of the general safety obligation imposed by section 43 of the *Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994*.

The Reference Group also believes that high-speed operations on Coolum Creek upstream of West Coolum Road are unsafe, because of the creek's natural features.

Consequently, the Reference Group believes that the existing regulatory regime for Coolum Creek should be expanded to provide a better marine safety system, and therefore makes the following recommendations:

General recommendations

1 – Enforcement presence

3 – Existing water skiing prohibition for creeks and waterways flowing into Maroochy River

4 – New speed signs

5 – New water skiing signs

6 – Update Beacon to Beacon

7 – Review of new speed limits and water skiing prohibitions by December 2012

Specific recommendations

43 – Coolum Creek – new speed limits of 20 knots and 6 knots

That the General Manager should fix by gazette notice a new speed limit of 20 knots for all ships on waters of Coolum Creek from the creek's confluence with Maroochy River to approximately 920 metres upstream from the creek's confluence with Maroochy River (a point adjacent to West Coolum Road); in conjunction with

That the General Manager should fix by gazette notice a new speed limit of 6 knots for all ships on waters of Coolum Creek upstream from approximately 920 metres upstream from the creek's confluence with Maroochy River (a point adjacent to West Coolum Road).

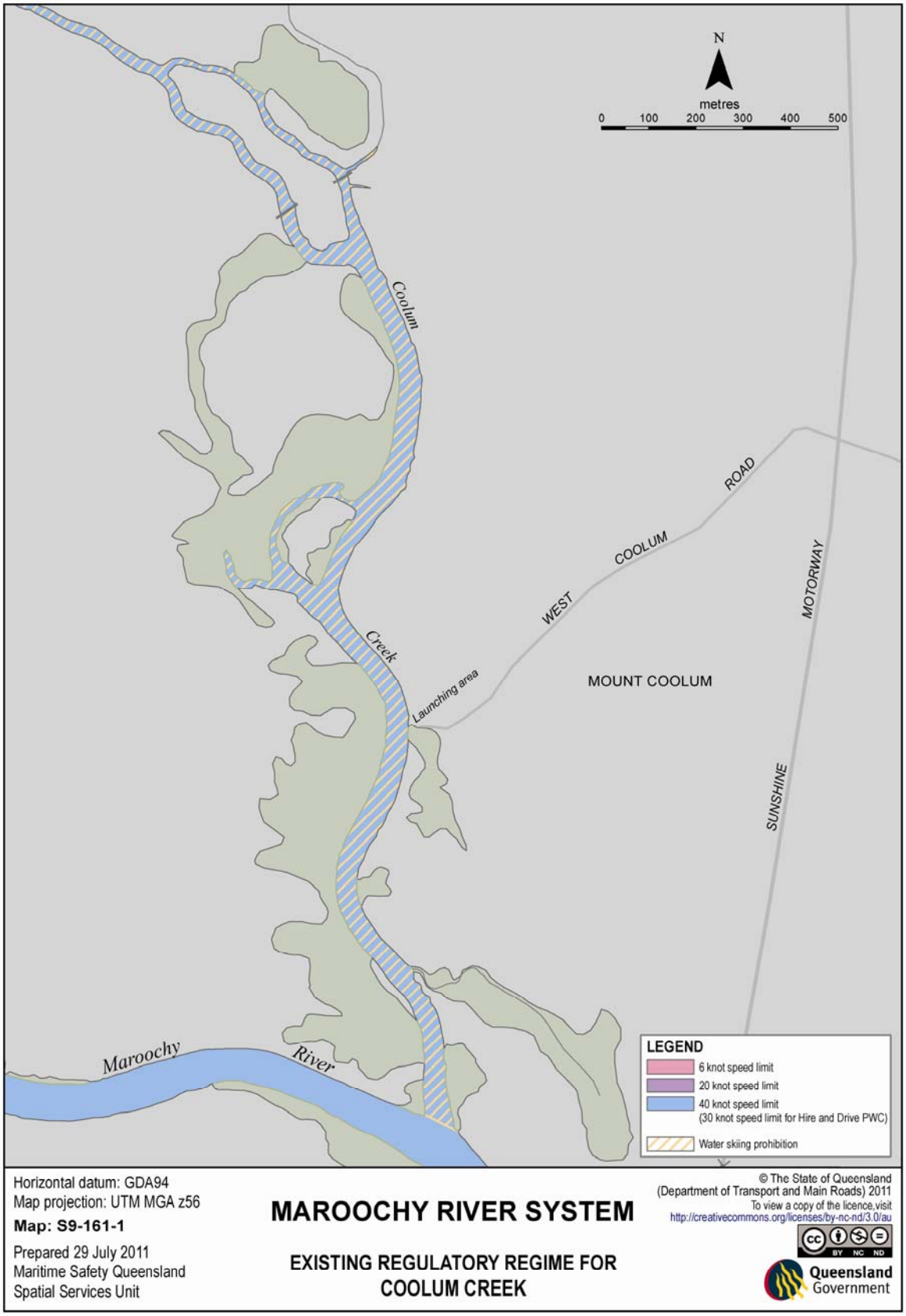
44 – Coolum Creek – new warning sign

That Maritime Safety Queensland should erect one new warning sign in Coolum Creek near West Coolum Road – POTENTIAL OBSTRUCTIONS / NAVIGATE WITH CAUTION.

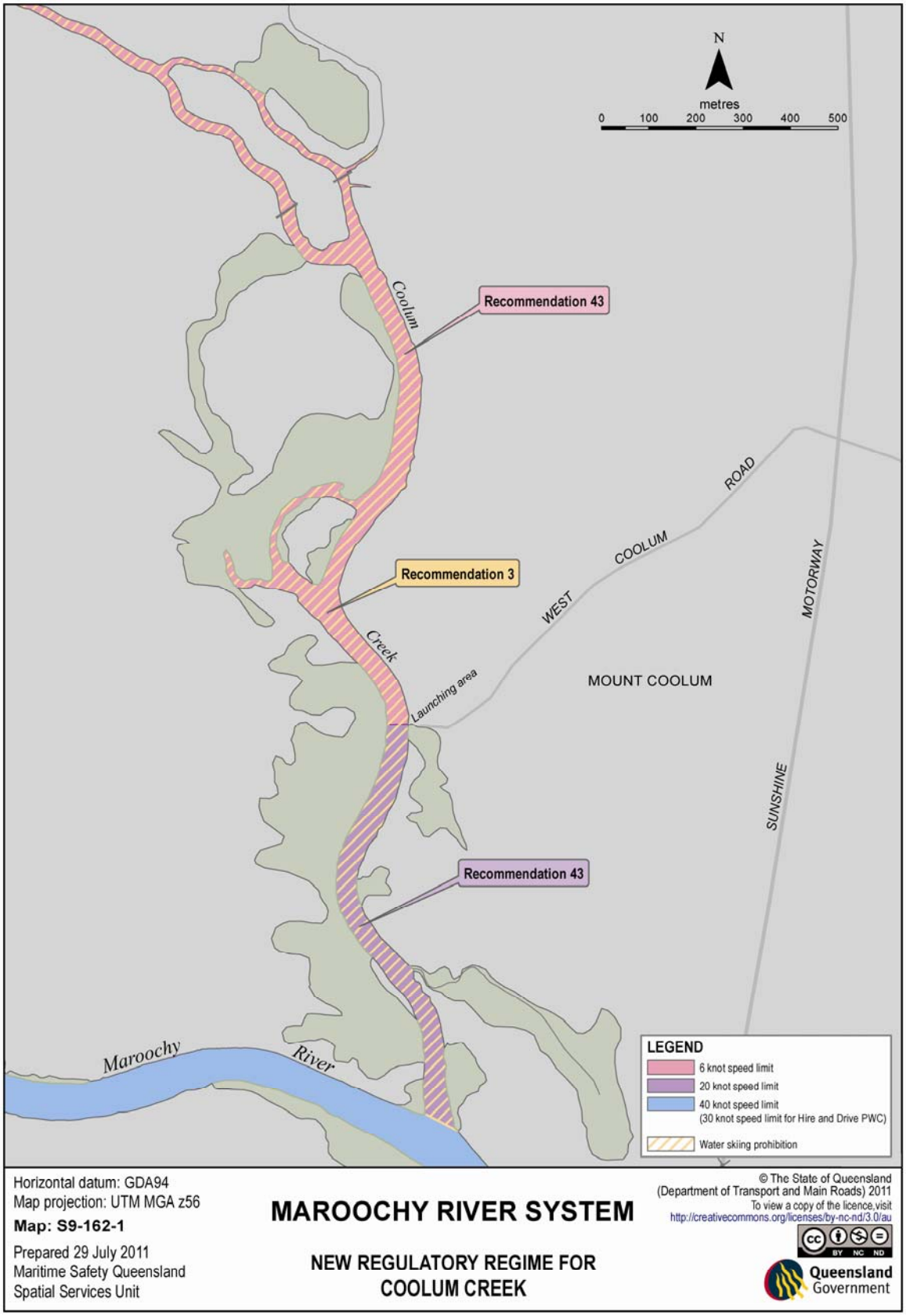
The Reference Group identified the biodiversity and environmental value of Coolum Creek as unresolved issues that require better management. The Reference Group

intends to refer these issues to the Sunshine Coast Regional Council for consideration.

Maps that depict the existing regulatory regime and the new regime recommended by the Reference Group can be found on pages 85 and 86.



Map S9-161-1 – Existing regulatory regime for Coolum Creek



Map S9-162-1 – New regulatory regime for Coolum Creek