
Designation as the 10th World Surfing Reserve recognises the world class quality of our five point breaks, the strength of our local surfing community and the commitment of the environmental activists who came before who fought to protect the green canvas on which our surf breaks are painted.

The Reserve, from North Sunshine Beach to the Noosa River, is a symbol of best practice in town and environmental planning. The local stewardship committee pledges to defend the integrity of the breaks, and promote a spirit of co-operation and sharing enabling future generations of surfers to enjoy our waves safely and harmoniously.
The Noosa World Surfing Reserve is a not-for-profit association dedicated to the preservation of Noosa as one of the great surfing destinations of the world.
It is proudly supported by:
• GemLife Resorts
• Noosa Heads Surf Life Saving Club
• Noosa Shire Council
• Tourism Noosa
• Accom Noosa
• Fuyu Surfboards
• RACV Resort
• Noosa Malibu Club
• Noosa Boardriders
• Land & Sea Brewery
• Hinter-Coast Transport
• Noosa Festival of Surfing

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Cover photo: Noosa World Surfing Reserve ambassador Dean Brady deep inside Eno’s. Photo Nathan Tyack.

Stylish Noosa longboarder Nic Brewer drops in and glides across a perfect First Point peeler. Speed blur photograph by Paul Smith Images.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Message from Noosa Mayor Tony Wellington</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Message from Noosa World Surfing Reserve</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Why Noosa?</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>NWSR Map</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Breaks</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Noosa’s Indigenous Heritage</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>The Battle for Noosa</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surf Life Saving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When Surfers Discovered Nirvana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Clubs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Festival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our Ambassadors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our Happy Place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noosa Surfing Directory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It’s a kind of miracle – or at least a geographical marvel – that Noosa should enjoy a series of world-class point breaks. And there are five – count them! – idiosyncratic point breaks, each with their own character, and all within a delightful walk of one another.

My favourite used to be the most easterly break, Granite, with its thick-set take-off and barrelling finish. But these days, with political responsibilities luring me away from the beach, I rarely have time to go past Nationals, right at the entrance to the National Park. Nationals has its own character, with multiple take-offs and lots of sections: somewhat less sausage-machine regularity than the more status-laden Tea Tree.

But all these waves are so damn good it seems churlish to rank them. And when the points aren’t working, or the wind’s from the north, there’s always the open beaches, including Sunshine Beach with its long gutters, or A-Bay for those who like to combine bushwalking with their surfing.

All this is to say that Noosa is blessed in so many ways. First, because over half of century of political activism has ensured it didn’t get developed into a cookie-cutter copy of so many other coastal locales. And second, because this surfing mecca has attracted some of the nicest, most laid-back and friendly surfers on the planet. To be one of these surfers is a dream come true. And arguably everyone in Noosa, surfer or not, is living their own dream.

Tony Wellington is a writer, photographer, artist, film-maker and environmentalist, as well as a mayor! A founding member of the Noosa National Surfing Reserve Committee back in 2013, he surfs the dawn patrol every day there’s a wave.
By Phil Jarratt, President

After a four-year campaign fuelled by blood, sweat and tears, and a couple of disappointments along the way, it all came down to me waiting on an international phone call in the wee small hours of Friday, 17 November, 2017. Finally the phone rang. I swooped on it and a voice from the other side of the world, in a tiny beach town called Punta de Lobos, miles from anywhere in Chile, whispered: “You’ve got it!”

This was how I learned that the 19-member Vision Council of World Surfing Reserves had voted overwhelmingly in favour of Noosa becoming the tenth World Surfing Reserve. WSR and its parent body, the Save The Waves Coalition, have their headquarters near Santa Cruz, California, but the reason the call came from Chile was that the announcement had been made at the annual Vision Council meeting at the dedication of the Punta de Lobos World Surfing Reserve.

The 2017 decision marked a major milestone for the hardworking committee that came together in December, 2013 at the instigation of Matt Horder from the Sunshine Coast Sports Federation, who felt it was high time Noosa became a National Surfing Reserve. With the help of important stakeholders like Noosa Council, Tourism Noosa and representatives of the surfing community, we put together a committee representing all beach user groups. I was elected chair, with Drew Pearson (Tourism Noosa board) treasurer and Juanita Bloomfield (now Terry) from Tourism Noosa secretary. Joining us were Omar Bakhach (Parks and Wildlife), Chris Doney (Noosa Heads Surf Club), Libby Winter (Noosa Parks Association), Di Cuddihy (Noosa Malibu Club), and Cr Tony Wellington and Alison Hamblin from Noosa Council.

Noosa was dedicated as a National Surfing Reserve in March 2015, and we moved straight into a campaign to become a World Surfing Reserve, hosting members of the WSR Vision Council so that they could draw their own conclusions about our surfing community and breaks, and preparing a far more detailed submission. Through this whole process of stewardship, which really only begins with our dedication ceremony, it has been my privilege to serve with a dedicated and hardworking Local Stewardship Council which, in 2020 consists of:

Phil Jarratt (president)
Michael Court (vice-president, representing Noosa Boardriders Club)
Di Cuddihy (secretary, representing Noosa Malibu Club)
Libby Winter (treasurer, representing Noosa Parks Association)
Dan Bedford (communications officer)
Drew Pearson (representing Tourism Noosa)
Chris Doney (representing Noosa Surf Lifesaving Club)
Omar Bakhach (representing Noosa National Park)
Matthew Horder (representing Sunshine Coast Sports Federation)
Dr Javier Leon (representing Sunshine Coast University)
Cr Jess Glasgow (Noosa Council observer)
Cheryl Pattison (Noosa Council observer)
WHY NOOSA?

By Nik Strong-Cvetich, Executive Director, Save The Waves Coalition

For decades Noosa has been a leader in both surf and conservation culture in Australia, and worldwide. Its series of righthand pointbreaks, protected by the Noosa National park and adorned by some of the last remaining stands of lowland coastal rainforest, makes it a surfer’s and nature-lover’s dreamland. The experience of walking the coastal track to one of the many world class pointbreaks, untouched by human development, is unique in the surfing world. It is for this reason Noosa was selected as the 10th World Surfing Reserve.

A program of Save The Waves Coalition, World Surfing Reserves (WSR) identifies and preserves the world’s most significant surf ecosystems and their surrounding habitats. Drawing upon conservation models established by UNESCO’s World Heritage Program and National Surfing Reserves Australia, WSR builds coalitions with local surfers, NGOs, local government and businesses in surf communities to protect, steward and defend ecologically valuable and historic surfing locations.

1) quality and consistency: the diversity and quality of the waves within the WSR area;
2) environmental characteristics: the area’s environmental richness and fragility;
3) surf history and culture: the spot’s broader significance to surf culture and history; and
4) local support and capacity: the local community support and capacity needed to protect its surf ecosystems.

Noosa meets all of these criteria in spades; there is a variety of world-class breaks that accommodate a wide range of levels and surfing styles, which break consistently through the year. Similarly, Noosa’s coastal habitat is among the most intact in Queensland, with endemic species found only in its stands of remaining lowland coastal rainforest. Noosa’s long and rich surf history has spawned many world class surfers, paddlers, and shapers, influenced and inspired by its coastal heritage. Lastly, Noosa’s forethought and management of the National Park is unparalleled within Australia, and its local community is completely dedicated to the protection of its coastal resources.

As the world sets its sites on protecting 30 percent of our marine environment by 2030, Noosa serves as a model of how we protect what we love, while safeguarding our environment for future generations. Noosa joins the network of WSRs around the world as a shining example of how to do it right.
From the Noosa Rivermouth to Sunshine Beach is not very far as the crow flies (or the surfboard paddles) but this short stretch of coast incorporates some of the finest surf breaks in Australia, ranging from powerhouse beach breaks to long, peeling points, and catering for surfers of all abilities and all manner of surfcraft.
The dog-friendly section of North Sunshine Beach to the headland at the beginning of the National Park boundary is the southernmost part of the Noosa World Surfing Reserve. This beautiful 200-metre stretch of beach offers a variety of beach breaks that can hold swell up to overhead and some, plus it offers considerable protection from summer north-easterlies. Locals live for the days when the elements align and a wedging left thunders down from the headland. Also noteworthy in the area, Devil’s Kitchen offers a heaving left and a right.

ALEXANDRIA BAY

Better known as an unofficial nudist beach than as a surf break, “A-Bay” is actually an east-facing swell magnet that offers a variety of beach breaks when the rest of Noosa is flat. Headlands at either end offer some protection from south-east trades and summer north-easterlies, making this a popular spot for shortboarders. In the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, A-Bay became home to a surfing community of about 40, known to locals as “The Chanters”, who camped, lived, loved and surfed on the leeward side of the southern headland, trekking the coastal track to town daily for supplies until authorities closed the camp.

Above: two views of A-Bay, pristine and empty.
Photos Tony Wellington.
Right: Moods of Granite Bay.
Photos Tony Wellington.
GRANITE BAY

The furthest out of Noosa’s righthand points, Granite lacks the perfect line-up of the others but picks up more swell, and can often produce fun overhead waves on a southerly swell that misses the inner bays. With a mixture of rock and sand creating two take-offs and a long, winding wall, it can be an inconsistent and changeable break, but surfers who experience Granite on a good day with half the crowd of Tea Tree are sold for life. Granite transforms into a beast when the wind turns to the SSW, opening up the wall into a rolling tube.

Granite as good as it gets. Photo Nigel Arniston/On Surfari.
From the lineup at idyllic Tea Tree Bay, a 20-minute walk from the National Park carpark, you look back at an untouched vista of green, not a tourist development in sight. As if that wasn’t enough to justify the walk, the wave itself offers a little bit of everything, from a critical outside take-off behind an outcrop of rock to a fast-breaking middle section, followed by a long inside wall across the near-transparent shallows to the shore. This is a beautiful place to surf for both shortboarders and longboarders.

Rarely surfed in the early 1960s because surfers were spoilt for choice with what they could see from the National Park carpark, Tea Tree came into its own in the hippie-trippy years of the late 1960s and into the ’70s, when visiting surfers discovered the solitude of the little bay with perfect waves suited their needs. In the ’80s and ’90s it was the hub of performance surfing in Noosa, with thrusters and twin fins dominating the line-up, and deep tubes and on-edge roundhouse cutbacks the order of the day.
A beautiful set makes its way from Tea Tree into Eno’s. Photo Nigel Arnison/On Surfari.
National Park is the first surf spot within the boundaries of the Noosa National Park. The most popular section of the wave, sometimes referred to as Gum Trees, is visible from the car park just inside the gates, with a popular picnic ground adjacent. But for experts the real wave begins another 200 metres up the line, directly below the lookout at Noosa Head. This critical section, running across shallow rock ledge, is known as Boiling Pot. When Noosa is receiving the full force of Coral Sea cyclonic depressions, this is where the most exciting ride of your life begins.

After the initial section through the Pot, Nationals takes a breather as it sets up for the middle section past the car park, then gathers pace as it winds down the line – a true performance wave for shortboards and longboards. Depending on the size and direction of swell, the surfer may then choose to pull out or pump wider to position for another fast section through Johnson’s. And on an ideal day of overhead surf, then the wave is just beginning.
Tucked away beneath the tree-lined road that leads to Noosa National Park, Little Cove (or Johnson’s, as it is known to surfers) can look deceptively gentle as rolling swells from the outer bays hit shallow water, but Johnno’s often produces the fastest, hollowest waves of all the bays. On small days it produces waist-high freight trains perfect for longboard trimming. On bigger days the break moves out into the bay, offering the opportunity to ride one wave from the National Park through Johnson’s and into First Point, one of the longest rides in the world.
Above and top right: Little Cove through the trees on a typical small, fun day. Photo Nigel Arnison/On Surfari.
Right: A perfect ankle-snapper. Photo Fenna De King.
The first point visible at the eastern end of Main Beach is widely regarded as the jewel in Noosa's crown, a fast-peeling sandbar righthander that offers barrels for the experts and soft-breaking sections inside for surfers who are slower to their feet. While many consider it one of the best longboard waves in the world, First Point can also offer dredging low tide tubes for agile shortboarders, with a perfect “ramp” for aerial manoeuvres on the inside section. Champion surfers such as Julian Wilson, Josh Constable, Rosie Locke, Harrison Roach and Emily Lethbridge have all honed their skills at First Point from a very young age.

Because of its visibility and accessibility from two car parks, First Point is frequently used by parents pushing their offspring into their first waves, and on the higher tide with little or no swell, it is perfect, although often dangerous, for this purpose. But First Point can also be quite dangerous with a metre or more of easterly swell creating hard-breaking waves over shallow sandbars and a strong sweep running out into Laguna Bay. All surfers should carefully observe the conditions before entering the water.

First Point works best during the December to May wet season, with Coral Sea swells fanned by south east trade winds. In March each year it plays host to the Noosa Festival of Surfing, the world's largest longboard event.
WEST BEACH

The man-made beach between Noosa’s two rock groynes is very fickle, with sand-pumping often adding to the natural movement of sand with the prevailing currents. But three sand banks create reasonable quality beach breaks for most of the year, and usually bounce back fairly quickly after swell events. An A-frame left and right directly off the river mouth groyne frequently offers short rides that back off into deeper water. In the middle of the beach, the bank adjacent to Access 11 has quality lefts and rights breaking into a common channel on the higher tides. A bank just west of the first, or middle groyne, offers a fun lefthander running into a channel.

Surfers need to be aware that Noosa West is used by licensed surf schools and there are frequently novices in the water. It is also a popular beach for other user groups, so please take notice of signage and flagged areas.
Often overlooked by visiting surfers who fail to notice the far-off heads bobbing up and down in the break, the sand bars at the mouth of the Noosa River offer long, peeling lefts and rights. During the wet season the water is often murky, and surf sessions can sometimes be shared with bull sharks, but early morning sessions can be particularly rewarding when there is a metre or more of swell from the east quarter. The sand banks here are notoriously fickle. If you see the river mouth pumping, get on it immediately. It might have moved on by morning.
NOOSA’S FIRST NATIONS

The original inhabitants of the Noosa coastline were the Dalla and Kabi Kabi who had enjoyed the plenty of the land and sea for thousands of years, living off fish and shellfish from the ocean and estuary, and kangaroos, emus and turkeys from the river plains.

According to Noosa historian, the late Dr Nancy Cato, at one time there were more than three thousand, scattered in small camps along the coast and up the river. The Kabi Kabi inhabited an area from as far north as Fraser Island, south to Pumicestone Passage and west to the Conondale and Blackall Ranges, but the biggest clusters were to be found around the Noosa estuary and headland, where food was most plentiful. But apart from spearing fish in the shallows, there is no evidence of the original inhabitants having used the ocean for sport, although it is likely, as in other coastal areas of southern Queensland, that they “surfed” through the small waves of the bays in their simple bark fishing canoes.

Dr Cato and other regional historians have claimed that from these original inhabitants came the name “Noosa,” supposedly a corruption of noothera, meaning shade or shadow. But the Kabi Kabi descendants have pointed to a more plausible explanation, contained in an 1870 survey map in which both “Laguna Bay” and the “Nusa River” are named. During the 19th century it was common to see trader boats from the Dutch East Indies working the Queensland coast for trepang (or sea cucumbers), and nusa was the Malay (and now Indonesian) word for island. The Kabi theory is that the Indies traders mistook the headland for an island and so named it.

But the headland itself was known to the original inhabitants as Wantima (rising up) and first known by Europeans as Bracefield’s Head (sometimes also Bracewell’s Head, or even Cape Bracewell) after a runaway convict who had been discovered living upriver with the Kabi Kabi by the explorer Andrew Petrie in 1842.

An abundance of food resources provided by the numerous waterways and rich subtropical rainforest around Noosa enabled the Kabi Kabi to minimise their nomadic cycle. Fresh and saltwater fish, dugong, eels and turtles and their eggs were plentiful, as were shellfish and crustaceans. The wetlands were home to many species of bird, which provided meat and eggs. Mammals and reptiles such as possums, kangaroo, bandicoot, and snakes were also utilized as food sources. Local plant species that were eaten included yams, waterlilies, tea tree,
bunya nuts, honey, berries, figs, cabbage tree palm, wattles, seeds, quandongs and native plum.

After Queensland was granted statehood in 1859, increasing numbers of squatters and timber getters began taking up land along the Noosa River, creating new frictions with the generally peaceful Kabi Kabi. After the massacre of an unknown number of Kabi men at Murdering Creek on Lake Weyba in the late 1860s, the Queensland government set aside 4,000 hectares of what is now considered prime coastal and estuarine real estate at Noosa Heads, Noosaville and Sunshine Beach as an Aboriginal reserve and mission.

The Kabi Kabi took little notice of this (if, indeed, they were ever made aware of it) and the only European to act upon it was Reverend Edward Fuller, who struggled along with a small mission on the eastern shore of Lake Weyba until it closed down in 1877. The following year the government cancelled the reserve declaration and put the land on the market at seven shillings and sixpence an acre, withholding a bit more than 500 hectares (most of it now the Noosa National Park) for the establishment of a township at Noosa Heads.

Aboriginal reserves were established inland across south east Queensland and within a few years most of the indigenous inhabitants remaining within the Noosa district had been removed to settlements such as Cherbourg and Barambah. In 1897 the Queensland government enacted laws that forced the removal of any who had escaped the net. It would be 25 years before the Kabi Kabi were able to return to Noosa.

Today, surfers, like other members of community, pay our respects to the traditional owners of this land – past, present and future – and their rich history and culture, which is reflected in local events the Booin’ Gari Festival (held every September) and Floating Land Festival (held every other year).
SETTLEMENT

While Captain Cook sailed straight past without even noticing Noosa (although he did name Double Island Point), Matthew Flinders noted the existence of a headland as he sailed past on the Investigator in 1801.

Castaways Richard Parsons and John Finnegan washed up on a beach south of Noosa in 1823 and were taken in by Gubbi Gubbi in the Coolum area, and escaped convict John Graham lived with the Gubbi Gubbi near Tewantin for six years from 1827. Eliza Fraser survived the wreck of the Stirling Castle in 1837 and lived with the Gubbi Gubbi at Elanda Point until rescued. And the convict Bracewell reluctantly left the Gubbi Gubbi when “rescued” by Andrew Petrie’s expedition in 1842.

But the first “free white men” (as historian Nancy Cato described them) to see the beach at Noosa Heads were Petrie and his companions Russell, Wrottesley and Joliffe, who dropped anchor in Laguna Bay in May, 1842 and were helped ashore through the churning Coral Sea swell by 20 or 30 Gubbi Gubbi, while Petrie kept his loaded rifle pointed in their general direction. With Bracewell acting as interpreter, Petrie learned of the vast stands of timber to be found all over the hinterland. By the 1860s the word was out in Brisbane Town and timbergetters had set up camps along the upper reaches of the Noosa River and begun to fell large quantities of kauri. When gold was discovered at Gympie in 1867, the huge increase in the number of travellers through the region only hastened the process.

Although upriver Tewantin had been a rest stop on the “shortcut” route to the Gympie goldfields since the 1860s, when a Maryborough ferryman and explorer named Walter Hay had blazed the first trail, Noosa Heads and Noosaville were settled almost exclusively by sea. Inaccessible by road from the south because of rivers and thick heathlands, they were reached by boat downriver from Tewantin, or else over the treacherous bar from ports to the south and north. Development was slow, despite the fact that cashed up Gympie mine managers began building holiday homes along the river at Noosaville, leading to the naming of the riverfront track “Gympie Terrace”.

In 1879 Noosa came under the control of the Widgee Divisional Board which immediately surveyed the sand spit fronting Laguna Bay for the creation of the village of Noosa. Allotments along Hastings Street were offered for sale shortly afterwards, but no blocks sold. Also at this time the ranger for the Gympie district advised that a “Town Reserve” at the headland be excluded from the land available for selection, being “of great attraction to visitors”. This was the genesis of the Noosa National Park.

Eighty acres at Noosa Heads were transferred to Walter Hay, leading to the subsequent establishment of Noosa Heads. Hay established a 10-roomed residence he called “Bay View” (now Halse Lodge), which became the first boarding house at Noosa Heads. Most of Hay’s customers came from the Gympie goldfields and surrounding properties, arriving by mail coach after many rough hours, and then transferring to a small boat for the final leg from Tewantin. Business improved after the construction of a rail line connecting Brisbane and Gympie, and after the opening of Cooroy railway station in 1891 a stage coach (later a motor coach) took tourists down the escarpment to the Noosa River.
Interest in surf bathing had been growing along the Australian east coast since Sydney’s archaic daylight bathing bans had been overthrown in the early 1900s, and when over-enthusiastic bathers started drowning in dangerous seas, the surf life saving movement had its beginnings. While Noosa had far too few surfing visitors to sponsor a life saving club, John Donovan, proprietor of the Laguna House inn, paid for the installation of a safety reel, the first on the Sunshine Coast, in front of his establishment, and a team from the Royal Life Saving Society came up from Brisbane to perform an instructional drill at Easter, 1915.

In 1925 a road passable by cars was cut down the escarpment from Cooroy to Tewantin, and that Christmas more than 200 vehicles used it to reach the Noosa River, where some 2000 holidaymakers were ferried to Noosa Heads. The following summer numbers were even higher, prompting the Noosa Shire Council to hire a life saving instructor to patrol the beach. There was plenty of talk about forming a life saving club, but nothing happened until the Brisbane developer Thomas Marcus Burke cut a deal with the council for the purchase of 500 acres of coastal land stretching from what is now Sunshine Beach but was then known as Golden Beach. The purchase price was £11,000, enough to cover the costs of a proper road from Tewantin and two bridges. Noosa was at last to be on the map for the growing number of car owners, and its future as a tourist destination was assured.
THE BATTLE FOR NOOSA

Since property developer Thomas Marcus Burke purchased almost 500 acres of coastal land south of Alexandria Bay from Noosa Shire Council in the late 1920s for £11,000, there had been an ongoing battle to preserve the Noosa Headland and protect it from the ravages of development.

The original, land-locked Noosa National Park, designated in 1939 and finally opened by Sir John Lavarack, the Governor of Queensland in 1949, did not include what is now the coastal walkway, and TM Burke, now run by the founder’s son Marcus, had a large section behind Alexandria Bay and Paradise Caves earmarked for residential development. The development-driven Noosa Shire Council of the day wanted to build a coastal drive to connect the new developments with Hastings Street. By the 1960s, although most of the surfers who had begun to visit were unaware of it, pro-development pressure that could have changed the coastline forever was growing by the month.

In 1962, Dr Arthur Harrold and Max Walker founded the Noosa Parks Association, Queensland’s first community-based conservation group, to fight for the extension of the park around the entire headland. The NPA won its first battle against all odds in 1964, when the Queensland government blocked the coast road plan by extending the park to the sea. But this was only the beginning for the NPA. It would take 26 years for the entire coastline from Sunshine Beach to Noosa Heads to be totally protected as National Park, and Dr Harrold and a small group of dedicated members were to spend more than 30 years fighting the developers, and often the Council, to maintain Noosa’s unique coastal environment. And while we have come to regard the headland as safe now, the NPA stands ready to fight again.

The battle to save Noosa’s headland and coastal National Park was just one of many fought by Noosa Parks Association and the

broader community over the decades that Noosa was becoming recognised as a coastal paradise. In the 1960s and ’70s sand miners applied for leases between Sunshine Beach and Coolum (rejected after public outcry) and in what is now the Cooloola Wilderness on the North Shore of the Noosa River, with the Cooloola high dune system under threat all the way to Double Island Point. The NPA and other conservation groups fought for more than a decade before the area was finally protected as a National Park.

The Noosa Parks Association was less successful in its opposition to the development of Hays Island inside the Noosa River mouth (now Noosa Sound) and the extension of the rivermouth sand spit and building of two rock groynes to protect it. Moving the mouth more than 200 metres to the north west had huge ramifications for the natural sand movement within Noosa’s meta-curve beach, as did the subsequent building of a rock wall along the beach front and the introduction of sand pumping from the river. Although the sand build-up on Noosa’s points now varies to a much greater degree than it did before man’s intervention, fortunately the quality of the waves created by the sand banks usually returns after a matter of weeks or months, unlike other Queensland surf breaks where the construction of groynes has destroyed quality waves forever.

Whenever old surfers gather in Noosa today, there is always a litany of complaint. There’s nowhere to park or camp, the price of a cup of coffee is outrageous, the crowds in the water are impossible to deal with and the board hire companies send backpackers out into the break without any basic tuition or safety guidelines. There are elements of truth in all of this, but the benefits of living in, or having access to this extraordinary surfing playground far outweigh any negatives. Noosa’s five perfect point breaks remain the jewels in a crown of near-pristine parkland fringing crystal clear blue water.

Just minutes away from a world class resort village, Noosa’s surf breaks remain beautiful places in which to ride beautiful waves.
SURF LIFE SAVING

Although Noosa’s first surf life saving reel, housed at Laguna House, overlooking the beach from a sand track that would become known as Hastings Street, sat in readiness from 1915, Noosa would have to wait more than dozen years before the first chapter in the history of the Noosa Heads Surf Life Saving Club was written. On 1 April, 1928, a delegation from the Alexandra Headland Surf Life Saving Club (formed 1924) visited Tewantin and “the Heads” to provide a holiday patrol and give a display for local men, although the Gympie Times correspondent noted that he “had not heard of one case where the Life Saving Club was needed”.

Nevertheless, a public meeting was held the next day at the Cooroy Memorial School of Arts and the Cooroy Royal Life Saving and Surf Club was formed. (Later, presumably after someone had pointed out that Cooroy was 25 kilometres inland, the name was changed to Noosa Heads Royal Life Saving and Surf Club.) In December 1928, 13 members of the NHRLS gained their Royal Life Saving Society Still Water and Surf Bronze, thus qualifying to patrol the beach. Initially, the NHRLS operated from a tent on the beach, but during 1929 a modest wooden clubhouse was built about 100 metres in front of where the surf club is now, but subsequently moved back twice to avoid cyclonic swells. In May 1931 the club’s name was changed to Noosa Life Saving and Surf Club.

Given the struggles that Noosa would have to retain its pristine coastline against development proposals in later years, it is worth noting the role played by the T.M. Burke company in the early years of surf life saving in Noosa. With a huge landholding fronting what is now known as Sunshine Beach, on the more treacherous south-facing open beach, T.M. Burke lobbied heavily for the new club to conduct patrols at “New Noosa Beach” as well as at Laguna Bay, and offered the financial inducement of funding for a bigger clubhouse to be constructed at “New Beach”.

Advertisements in Brisbane and southern newspapers proclaimed: “Southwards from the foam-lashed splendour of the Noosa heads, there runs an eight mile stretch of glistening sand, and slow waves roll in gently on this Golden Beach; here thousands will revel, in perfect safety, in the sun-kissed surf.” This was true enough of Sunshine Beach on a perfect winter’s day, but a southerly blow could also make it one of Queensland’s most treacherous beaches, a fact with which the Noosa lifesavers were soon acquainted.

The opening of the new coast road to Burke’s New Noosa estate on Saturday, 19 October 1929, was a gala affair, with nearly 1,000 cars travelling across the new bridges from Tewantin for an official luncheon in marquees erected on the sand hills. Tewantin’s Royal Mail Hotel provided a
sumptuous luncheon of “Weyba crab salad, Noosa whiting, Gympie asparagus, Doonella duck and Coolum ox tongue”.

No one present at the gala opening could have foreseen that events that month on the other side of the world in New York would have far greater consequences for the future of the beachfront estate than the potential dangers of its surf. On October 29, 1929, Black Tuesday hit Wall Street, ushering in the Great Depression, the deepest and longest-lasting economic downturn in history up to that time.

Land at Burke’s New Noosa was soon virtually worthless, with 20-perch ocean frontages bought for £60 being surrendered to Council for non-payment of rates. The New Beach was most often deserted, but the Noosa lifesavers, men of their words, continued to patrol both sides of the headland, often having to walk the long miles between one beach and the other.

The Great Depression continued to affect the operations of the fledgling Noosa club into the 1930s, with patrols in danger of being discontinued on several occasions, only to be rescued by public appeals in Tewantin and

Right: The first Noosa Heads surf club, 1930. Photo Noosa Library Service.
Below: The 1940 version. Photo courtesy NHSLSC.
Cooroy. There was also growing pressure from an increasing number of summer holidaymakers for club patrols to focus on Laguna Bay, rather than the “ghost town” beach at New Noosa. In 1936 the Noosa club stopped its patrols there, but that meant the club was without a home again, trading the luxury of the Burke-built wooden clubhouse for another tent on Main Beach.

In 1938 the Queensland government announced a surf club subsidy program in which they would provide seven shillings and sixpence for every pound raised by the club. On this basis, the fundraisers went to work again and in October 1939, just weeks after Australia had joined Britain in going to war, the Noosa club accepted plans for the construction of a single-level “fibrolite” clubhouse with an eight-foot veranda looking out over the surf.

The new clubhouse was officially opened at Christmas 1940, but a year later, following the attack on Pearl Harbour and Japan’s entry into the war, the clubhouse was requisitioned by the military to be used as a Volunteer Defence Corps station, and the club suspended operations for the duration of the war.

According to surf club historian Robert Longhurst, Noosa’s “Dads’ Army” looked after the surf club well, and handed it back in good shape in 1945, unlike many requisitioned surf clubs that were virtually destroyed. Apart from some new timberwork for the lookout tower, the clubhouse was good to go when patrols resumed for the summer of 1945-46.

The postwar years were good for Noosa, and with generous support from local businesses, the surf club was soon able to acquit its construction debt and invest in a surf ski and 18 bunk beds for members from out of town (just about all of them). Electricity was connected in 1947 and a telephone soon after. The smarter business heads in the membership cut a deal with a beach hire service to take a penny in the shilling for each hire of the newly popular rubber surf-o-planes. This helped pay for a public address system and, by 1949 the club’s first boat, the Noosa, which took every able-bodied member to lift, but performed brilliantly in the water, bringing its crew several branch titles.

Through the 1950s the Noosa surf club’s most successful fundraiser was its annual Boxing Day “Miss Noosa” contest. In this time before political correctness, thousands of people flocked to the beach to watch the parade of entrants clad in daring swimsuits (usually on the back of a flatbed truck) followed by a crowning ceremony. These
functions usually swelled the coffers by more than £100.

As the 1960s dawned so did a new age of leisure in Australia, with motels springing up along the coastline and thousands of people hauling caravans into campgrounds that were hurriedly rebranded as “caravan parks”. Noosa’s first motel and pub went up side by side on Noosa Hill, overlooking Laguna Bay, but the campground at the river mouth end of Hastings Street remained determinedly primitive, with no hot water or septic toilets. None of this deterred a new kind of tourist, cash-poor but time-rich, and drawn to Noosa by a rumour that was gaining currency along the coast – that Noosa was home to five perfect point breaks that offered some of the best surfboard riding waves in the world.

In more recent times, Noosa Heads has become the most successful surf club in Queensland, with the spectacular views from its bars and restaurant attracting record crowds year-round. The “downstairs” club has also excelled, fostering champions in all life saving disciplines, and its weekend patrols saving hundreds of lives each summer. Above all of this, the club has an impeccable record as a corporate citizen, supporting all kinds of events and causes, and being one of the major supporters of the Noosa World Surfing Reserve.

Clockwise from left: Noosa surf club boardriders, 1962; post-surf carnival keg in the clubhouse, 1956; female supporters club, 1958; 1952 surf carnival, all photos courtesy NHSLSC; Supporters club president Anton Mogg and NHSLSC president Ross Fisher present NWSR president Phil Jarratt with gold partner cheque.
WHEN SURFERS DISCOVERED NIRVANA

The generation of ex-servicemen who started bringing their families to Noosa in the 1950s included many keen body surfers and surf ski riders, but they mainly focused on the beach breaks of Main Beach, paying scant attention to the perfect waves rolling in along the point breaks every time an east swell combined with a south east wind. It wasn’t until a Maryborough-based lifesaver named Hayden Kenny (later to become surfing’s first ironman champion in 1966) saw balsawood Malibu surfboards in action when an American lifeguard team toured Australia in 1956 that the potential of the points was realised.

Kenny, then 20, ordered a replica of the American Malibu from Sydney surfboard builder Gordon Woods – a 10-feet-six inch hollow wood veneer “okinui” weighing more than 30 pounds – and brought it down from the family farm to Noosa to try it out in late 1957. He told surf historian Stuart Scott: “I remember that first time, walking over the sand dunes right beside the surf club, and there was First Point just going off. After that I kept going back. I had it absolutely to myself from 1957 to 1961.”

By 1960 there was a small crew of Noosa surf club members who surfed the points regularly, but never more than a few at a time, and they usually all knew each other... until the arrival of strange, loud man with an eye-patch and a North American accent, his surfing wife and a diminutive teenager with a rascal’s grin. It was 1961 when young Bob McTavish arrived in Noosa for the first time with Pa and Ma Bendall, the legendary Caloundra Canadians, when McTavish, a Brisbane radio station panel operator, was a semi-permanent fixture at Caloundra Surf Club. Most mornings Pa Bendall would stop by the first aid room where the young surfer slept and take him surfing. One morning Pa announced that they were going to Noosa. Bob knew that this was a village a long way up the coast, but that was about it.

They threw Bob’s board on the roof of Pa’s Ford Ranch Wagon and took off through the rolling hills and sugar fields to Noosa, where a steep hill dropped down to the beach to reveal a perfect point break with no one out. According to McTavish, “Ma had a shocker and Pa found it peeled a bit too fast for him, so I had these perfect little waves to myself!”

Later in the day, McTavish persuaded Pa to tie the boards back on the car and drive further out on the point, over a couple of hills and around a few bends into a National Park where more perfect waves peeled down the rocky shore. Soon he was catching long rides from the Park through the beautiful little inside bay, and even onto First Point. McTavish was immediately hooked on Noosa.

By the end of 1961, McTavish had joined the booming surfboard manufacturing industry in Sydney, where he occasionally let slip tales of the magical point breaks up north of Brisbane, but it was a long, long way, and with so many new discoveries like Crescent Head and Byron Bay, few people even considered the marathon drive.

Idyllic Noosa Heads, 1950s. Photo Noosa Library Service.
Noosa surf historian Stuart Scott opened up a can of worms when he tried to establish who were the first “local” boardriders. First problem was the definition of “local”. Noosa Heads itself had only 100 dwellings in 1961, so very few people were true locals. However, Tewantin teenagers Bill Griffiths and Ian Rogers were pretty close to the real thing, as were George Berry, Jim Tyrie, Greg Walker and Joan, Sue and Bob Davis, whose families had homes close to Main Beach. These youngsters started out riding home-made balsa and hollow boards before graduating to second-hand Malibus.

Among the earliest “Brissos” to haunt Noosa’s points were Brian Cooney, Merv Magee and Ray Kingston, along with a few Gold Coast surfers, including Mal Sutherland, who made his first trip in 1961. From Gympie, the Madill brothers, Garth and John, were regular visitors. Whenever these well-known
Surfers were on hand for a good swell, the legend of Noosa grew, but it was not until the surf magazines started to take notice that crowded waves became an issue.

Ironically, it was Hayden Kenny, the man who had enjoyed four years surfing Noosa by himself, who was responsible for the first surf magazine coverage, in a 1963 issue of Surfing World. Under the heading, “The Mysterious North”, Hayden claimed Noosa’s waves as “the best in the Commonwealth”, and illustrated this over three pages with photos of perfect Tea Tree going unridden, and a surfer ripping at National Park. According to Stuart Scott, Noosa surf club captain and keen body surfer Ron Lane walked into the bar of the new Reef Hotel, threw the magazine onto the counter and said, “Now we’re stuffed!”

By the mid-1960s, Bob McTavish was back in town and regarded as the unofficial “mayor of Noosa”, having created something of a surfboard testing ground on the points while shaping boards for Hayden Kenny at Alexandra Headland. Around him, some of the most innovative surfers and shapers in the world had gathered to test the limits of design and performance on the perfect small waves, among them Californians George Greenough and Bob Cooper, and Australians Russell Hughes and Nat Young, who would go on to win the 1966 world championships on ‘Sam’, a board he designed with McTavish in Noosa.

Through this period Noosa was at the cutting edge of surfing design and performance in Australia, and inevitably increased media exposure led to bigger crowds. By 1966 filmmakers Bob Evans and Paul Witzig had joined the stills photographers shooting the action.

Although no one denied that the Hayden Surfboards crew were usually the best surfers in the water, none of them actually lived in Noosa, and when Surfing World’s art editor John Witzig depicted himself, along with McTavish, Russell Hughes and other surfers in hippie garb in the National Park rainforest, on the cover of the March 1967 issue with the headline, “The Wild and Wonderful Days of Noosa”, it was a step too far for many locals. Witzig protested that the “wild” of the headline referred to the surf created by Cyclone Dinah, and not the lifestyles of the locals, but only a few of them listened.

Noosa’s locals now included Mick Wilson, Bobby Aitken, Nick Ferguson, Bruce McKean...
and Trevor Hewston from Brisbane, Rick Bennet from the Gold Coast and Peter Troy from Torquay, Victoria. Trevor Hewston took a lease on the disused Green Gables Café, the only commercial building in Sunshine Beach, and turned it into Noosa’s first surfboard factory, soon employing half the local surfers plus southern itinerants like Kevin Platt. Meanwhile Rick Bennet opened the town’s first surf shop on Hastings Street, and soon married local gidget Lynne Jones, who started Sunlovers’ Bikini Shop just around the corner. Within a few years, surfers had become entrenched, if not totally accepted, within the small town’s business community.

In 1968, Noosa’s first stand-alone surfboard riding club, Noosa Heads Surfriders, was founded with Peter Troy president. Troy was a good organiser, and within a few months he and a committee of surfers were presenting Australia’s first “professional” surfing contest, the Noosa Heads Open, which boasted over $1,000 in prizes and cash. The inaugural event was won by Gold Coaster Graham Black, and the 1969 Noosa Open, taken out by Sydney superstar Ted Spencer, featured most of Australia’s leading surfers. By 1970 (won by Gold Coaster Rick Neilsen), the surf contest had become secondary to the party at Tewantin’s Royal Mail Hotel, that year featuring surf psychedelic band Tamam Shud, and the event fizzled out in a pall of thick blue marijuana smoke.

By this time the nine-foot Malibu surfboard, perfect for riding Noosa’s long and peeling point breaks, had fallen out of favour on the incoming tide of the so-called “shortboard revolution”, and Noosa’s popularity as a surfing destination began to wane. But by the 1980s, as Baby Boomer surfers began to settle into comfortable middle age and long for the easier paddling of bigger boards, a longboard renaissance began, particularly on the point breaks of northern NSW and southern Queensland.

In Noosa, everything old was new again.
THE CLUBS

Two clubs representing both styles of surfing have produced local champions and kept Noosa in the forefront of the sport for decades.

From the late 1960s, Noosa’s first surfboard riding club, Noosa Heads Surfriders co-existed relatively comfortably with the Noosa Heads and Sunshine Beach surf clubs, despite some differences of opinion over where surfboards should be ridden. These issues were generally smoothed over by keen boardriders like Mick Wilson and Dave Cook who were members of both surfing and life saving clubs.

The bonds between boardriders and lifesavers were strengthened when surfers used their boards to help in rescues, and consolidated over beers at the surf club or a shared table at the Reef Hotel.

As boards got shorter, many surfers began to focus on the more challenging waves of the outer bays, and for a decade or so, the smaller waves of First Point and Johnsons were left for “mum and the kids”. But the longboard renaissance of the mid-1980s saw the perfect peelers come back into favour, and the Noosa Malibu Club joined Noosa

Surfriders in providing regular competition and training for both disciplines and all levels of surfers.

The Noosa Malibu Club was founded in 1986 as the result of the amalgamation of two existing (albeit somewhat dysfunctional) longboard clubs – the Big Boys and The Animals. The Mal Club, as it soon became known, quickly became a force in Queensland longboarding, with members representing at regional and state level. But the accent was always on fun, and club contests usually morphed into barbeques and picnics involving the whole family.

The Mal Club also played a significant role in civic affairs, raising money for local charities and from its inception, creating community events, like the Kids Klassic, a junior surf contest that ran from 1986. From 1992, the Noosa Malibu Classic became the club’s major focus.

In the 1990s and into the new century both Noosa Malibu Club and the renamed Noosa Boardriders Club nurtured such future champions as Julian Wilson, Nick Wallace, Ryan Campbell, Dean Brady, Rosie Locke and Josh Constable. Today the list of emerging young champions is long, and as many of the new generation of surfers ride both longboards and shortboards, the clubs are increasingly drawn together in promoting surfing in Noosa.
In 1992 the Noosa Malibu Club introduced the two-day Noosa Malibu Classic, an amateur regional longboard event that soon went national, then became international, introduced a professional division in 1996 and evolved into a surf culture festival in 1998. Today the Noosa Festival of Surfing is the biggest surfing event in the world, with more than 600 entries across more than 20 divisions, and attracting competitors from more than 15 countries.

Back at the start, a few hardworking members of the Noosa Malibu Club had come up with a great idea - a longboard surfing contest that would celebrate Noosa’s perfect point break waves and bring together the growing tribe of traditionalist surfers. A weekend amateur comp that quickly grew into Friday, the Noosa Classic was cool, rootsy and fun, and as a small publisher fairly new to town, it didn’t take me long to get on board as a minor sponsor.

Under contest director John Lee’s guidance, the Noosa Classic introduced professional divisions in 1996 and immediately attracted the best internationals of the era. Hawaii’s Bonga Perkins became the first multiple Noosa title-holder from overseas and also the event’s greatest ambassador. But there was something going on at the Noosa Classic that went beyond longboarding. I detected a new recognition of surfing as a culture that embraced diversity - shortboarding, longboarding, paddling, tandem, whatever. Noosa wasn’t the first place to recognize this, but it was where the elements combined to make the perfect expression of that diversity.

Inspired by this realisation, my publishing business partner John Brasen and I approached the Noosa Malibu Club with an offer to produce a festival, loosely based on the Biarritz Surf Festival in France, and built around the existing pro-am surfing event. The club accepted and in 1998, the first Noosa Festival of Surfing came blinking into the fierce sunlight of a Noosa March.

Somehow we convinced big wave legend Greg Noll and three-times world longboard champion Rusty Keaulana to come as our international guests alongside Australians Nat Young, Bob McTavish, Tom Carroll and Rabbit Bartholomew.

We were blessed with great weather and perfect small waves that first year, and the Noosa Festival had a life. The following year, major sponsor, dairy company Pauls Ltd (Breaka Flavoured Milk) decided we were a good bet and backed our expansion program. For the 1999 Breaka Festival we flew legends in from all over. We cheekily created our own world tandem surfing championships. We stumped up good money for the pros. Buffalo Keaulana and Bill Wallace led the ho’okupu traditional opening ceremony, birds sang in the trees, Hastings
Street was alive with surf buzz...and the northerlies came in and we got “skunked” for surf all week.

For the only time in the event's history, not one heat was run at First Point. Fortunately, a peak off the Castaways’ car park proved adequate for the contests, and for the many exhibitions, including a rematch of the 1964 world title final, won again by Midget Farrelly. While many people still remember the Castaways year as the first great height the festival had attained, it was ridiculously hard work for our small management team, operating on a secondary podium 15 minutes out of town. So in the new century, we took a small step backwards, but consolidated the festival with the backing of surf companies like Surftech, Classic Malibu and Golden Breed, and the ongoing support of the Noosa community.

By the 2000s there was never a problem talking overseas stars into coming to Noosa, and many became regulars. Wingnut Weaver was Surftech’s front man and major party dude for several years, Brian Keaulana, Dave Kalama and Dave Parmenter became our waterman regulars, while Aussie superstars like Layne Beachley, Mark Richards, Peter Townend, Rabbit Bartholomew and Tom Carroll never tired of supporting the event, nor of adding credibility to our contention.

Above: Classic style of multiple Noosa Festival champion Harrison Roach.
Above right: Matt Cuddihy foot drag stall in the 2013 Duct Tape Invitational. Photos Ian Borland.

Alex Knost soul arch hang ten in the Duct Tape Invitational. Photo Ian Borland.
that the Noosa Festival embraced all kinds of surfing.

After some years away working in Europe and America, I was asked to come back on board as a consultant to the festival in 2007. Through various committee changes, the Noosa Malibu Club had done well to keep the momentum of the festival going, even when money was hard to come by, so it was a pleasure to come back into the fold.

Largely due to the enthusiasm, stoke and altruism of lead sponsor Global Surf Industries, the Noosa Festival continued to grow in spirit and style. As a long-term secondary sponsor, Nick Van De Merwe’s Golden Breed also helped ensure the survival of the world’s best surf festival. Just as Noosa-based sponsors like Classic Malibu Surfboards, Madill Toyota and others took the weight in the formative years, GSI and GB kept the torch alight through some difficult years. More recently, regional companies like Cricks motor dealership, Laguna Real Estate, PJ Burns Builders and VetshopAustralia, along with Tourism Noosa and Tourism and Events Queensland have been generous and supportive funding partners.

After more than 20 years involvement, I stepped back as event director in 2015 and my daughter Sam Smith took over the role until 2018, when our family company decided to move on. In 2019 the Noosa Malibu Club appointed World Surfaris as festival managers, and under CEO John Finlay and his team, the festival has continued to grow.
THE STEWARDSHIP PLAN

Since the Noosa National Surfing Reserve Committee was established in 2013 to create a pathway to Noosa’s acceptance as firstly a National Surfing Reserve, and then secondly as one of only a handful of World Surfing Reserves, our hard-working committee has worked steadily towards creating a template for stewardship of our prized surfing assets not only during the processes of reserve designation, but for generations into the future. Our guiding mantra throughout this six-year journey has been to educate the surfing community, and the broader general community, to “share, respect, preserve”. Now, in accordance with the guidelines laid out by the World Surfing Reserves, Inc, our Local Stewardship Council is translating this mantra into an education/awareness matrix. The stewardship plan is to unite all relevant community groups with the local surfing community in an ongoing effort to preserve and protect the surfing assets of Noosa, now officially identified as among the world’s best. Our Local Stewardship Council aims to play a leading role in facilitating discussion, planning and action to ensure that the voice of all beach users will be heard in determining the future of our world class points and beach breaks. This will include education and promotion of awareness of the fragility and value of our coastline, and encourage local and visiting surfers to help make surfing sustainable for all by observing simple rules of water safety and etiquette. Over the following pages we will show you the programs we have already established.

SURF CODE

The problem with housing five of the world’s best point breaks within its borders is that the Noosa World Surfing Reserve regularly plays host to thousands of visiting surfers during the swell events that create the perfect waves that have become world famous. We can’t turn back the clock to those halcyon days when Noosa was a “secret break”, but we can promote a code of conduct that will make surfing here less dangerous and more enjoyable for all.

NWSR has identified two underlying causes of surf rage: ignorance of the basic rules of safe and respectful surfing in crowded conditions, and an ingrained localism that implies that people who live here have a greater right to enjoy our waves than others do. Since surfing has always been about the ongoing search for the perfect wave, this latter goes against the surfing ethos and the spirit of aloha. In many cases the first element here inflames the second, ie tempers rise in direct proportion to the number of unskilled beginners in the water. The Local Stewardship Council of NWSR

Time to lighten up. Crowd surfing can be fun. Photo Fenna De King.
plans to put in place programs that will directly address each of these aspects.

The first of these is the distribution of signage and literature at all points of surfboard hire and/or surfing lessons. This literature will explain in a most basic way how a simple code of conduct in the surf can make the activity better for everyone, from absolute beginners to the most grizzled and highly competent veteran. It will describe the way the wave zones work, where to paddle out and when and where it is appropriate to paddle for a wave.

The second is an ongoing communication through surfing associations and surf media of the absolute necessity to face the realities of crowded surf and learn to deal with it. In general terms, we are asking the surfing community to work with us to create, by example, a more respectful and enjoyable surfing environment.

The Noosa World Surfing Reserve has devised a simple Surfer Code to reduce the chance of conflict and injury on our world class breaks. Follow the code and help.

There are two main rules here:
1. Surfer on the inside, closest to the breaking wave has the right of way.
2. When a surfer is to his or her feet first, up and riding the wave, don’t turn on the inside to catch the wave. This is NOT cool and is called “Snaking.”

These two acts show a lack of respect. Paddling up the inside of a surfer who has been waiting in line for the next wave isn’t cool at all. Don’t turn and catch a wave on the inside of a surfer already riding or paddling onto a wave. This will cause friction in the water and is certain to lead to an altercation.

When a larger set approaches and you are out of position, take on the white water instead of paddling wide, hindering other surfers. Don’t throw your board, instead paddle through the white water using a “duck dive or turn turtle”. Never let your board go; try to hang onto it as you may “clean up” a fellow surfer. Most of all take turns and respect your fellow surfer, after all you are all out there to have FUN.

- Wear a legrope at all times; a loose board can become lethal
- Avoid surfing near swimmers and swimming near surfers
- Do not push learners on boards into the path of an oncoming surfer
- Jet ski operators should stay well wide of surfers; your wake ruins the waves

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Now that you are in Noosa and you want to hit the surf, there are a few rules to take into consideration before you start. They will help make your surfing adventure FUN.
While many people who don’t surf already appreciate the intrinsic aesthetic value of our surf breaks, they may not understand the direct economic benefits that flow from keeping them among the world’s best. With the assistance of the University of the Sunshine Coast, NWSR aims to make a convincing case of the value of our surfing assets and the benefits they bring to the entire community. Local Stewardship Council member Dr Javier Leon, USC senior lecturer in Physical Geography, explains.

In our course, students have the opportunity to study the science of surfing, including wave characteristics and tourism benefits, in a new geography subject. The Geography of Surfing course began in January 2019 – the first of its kind in Australia, although similar to courses offered at Santa Barbara and Plymouth, UK.

Using technology such as drones and GPS devices, students of Geography of Surfing measure waves along the iconic Noosa point breaks that have been recognized as the 10th World Surfing Reserve. They also conduct surveys to collect “surfonomics” information, including where surfers are coming from and how much money they spend locally, which will be used to help local businesses better understand the economic benefits of surfing.

Surfing has become a global multi-billion-dollar industry, spreading from manufacturing centres in China to artificial wave pools in Dubai, and every piece of coastline with waves in between. Our course examines theoretical aspects of the main physical coastal processes and the human geography of modern surfing culture. Students develop a practical understanding of the geography of surfing in the light of rapid global change by conducting intensive fieldwork on the surf-rich Noosa area, including measuring beach topography using drones, forecasting and modelling waves, and interviewing surfers and surf-related business owners and employees.
Understanding the relationships between surfers and waves and how surfing culture transcends and transforms places can provide key insights into the human ecology and sustainability of coastal systems.

This research project aims to increase our understanding of the impact surfing has in the surf resource system associated with the Noosa World Surfing Reserve (i.e. surf quality). The aim will be achieved through three objectives: 1) surfing waves will be characterised using cutting-edge technology such as drones and GPS, 2) non-invasive observational data will be collected on the age, gender and surfboard preference of surfers, and 3) data about valuing surfing activities will be collected via a survey.

The ongoing findings, to be shared with NWSR, are expected to contribute to an understanding of the importance of surfing to the Noosa region from environmental, socioeconomic and cultural perspectives.

Some random results from a survey of 151 respondents conducted during 2019:

- 43% rated themselves as advanced, 46 as average and 11 as beginners
- Average years surfing: 22 years, maximum 66
- Most frequently used board: longboard 42%, shortboard 28%
- Stance: 26% goofy, 74% regular
- 51% considered locals, 42% non-locals
- 95% aware Noosa is a World Surfing Reserve
- Gender: 79% male, 21% female
- Age: 24% 25-34 years old, 10% 65+
- Tertiary education: 54% bachelor or postgrad degree
- Employment: 35% full-time, 11% part-time, 25% self-employed, 12% student, 4% unemployed, 10% retired
- Income: 24% 60-100k before tax household income, 13% over 150k
Noosa’s surfing demographic is one of the broadest in the world, stretching from eight to 80, and possibly beyond. Living next to five perfect point breaks, why wouldn’t you want to get into our great sport as early as you can, and why would you ever quit?

Our waves are frequently conducive to learning to surf, and rarely so challenging that we senior surfers have to put the board on the rack. We live in a paradise for surfers of all ages, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be serious about health and safety in the water. Having had a near death experience in the surf, I know of what I speak. This is what I wrote about my 2014 heart attack in the Bali surf:

The wave that took my breath away, and might have taken my life with it, was the one I didn’t see coming. It smacked me down to the ocean floor from behind, like a coward punch, just as I broke the surface and gasped hungrily for air.

I should have been expecting that second wave, since it had been the first of a multiple-wave set that nailed me initially, and surfers are supposed to know these things intuitively, but in my struggle to get my bearings and find the surface, I’d lost all the planning and logic that a good surfer normally employs. It was simply that moment that every surfer becomes acquainted with sooner or later, that moment when you think that maybe, just maybe, you have bitten off more than you can chew.

When the force of the wave finally passed and I burst to the surface again, I took in air in shallow, raspy breaths, pulled my leash towards me until I could clamber onto my surfboard, and lay, spread across it, while smaller sets of waves washed me – and it – closer to the inshore reef. It was then that I had the scariest realisation. My breathing was still laboured and not returning to normal as it should, as it had every other time the ocean had given me a hiding. I was gasping and wheezing and I was powerless to do anything other than allow the force of the waves to push me into the shore.

This particular morning wasn’t one for fools and heroes. It was just a few old guys having

During swell events, fierce currents can drag swimmers and surfers right across Laguna Bay. In the bay itself, lifeguards can see people in trouble and act. For surfers on the outer bays, it’s often a different story. Photo Fenna De King.
fun, until one of them wasn’t. More than a dozen Australian men over 50 died in the surf in Bali that season and the next. I was extremely lucky not to be one of them.

Many of my surfing mates in Noosa have been through similar experiences. Some have died. But it’s not just a heart attack that can kill you in the surf. A knock to the head, a dizzy spell, a fin cut near vital organs, any of these can be fatal, especially when you are out of sight surfing the outer bays or river mouth. Which is why our Noosa World Surfing Reserve partnered with the Noosa Heads Surf Life Saving Club to present a pilot program called Surfer Rescue during the summer of 2019-20. These free four-hour sessions, originally developed by Surfing NSW, incorporate CPR training and surfboard rescue techniques.

In the words of surf club education officer Jonno Donnelly: “Surfer Rescue is designed to give participants practical skills and knowledge to save a life in the surf with the equipment they have in the ocean. The aim of the program is to give participants the tools to recognize and provide rapid and efficient response to serious injuries and potential fatalities that may occur outside of patrolling hours, or beyond direct supervision by a lifesaving patrol.”

Our state governing body, Surfing Queensland, is hoping to receive government funding to introduce Surfer Rescue onto every surfing beach in Queensland. Until they do, we’ll continue to partner with the surf club to help save lives within the Noosa World Surfing Reserve.

Phil Jarratt
Proudly supporting the Noosa World Surfing Reserve

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If ever you needed to produce evidence that the surf breaks of the Noosa World Surfing Reserve have the right stuff for producing champions, look no further than our ambassadors.

JORDAN MERCER
A legend of ironwoman and ocean paddling for more than a decade, and still only 26! After an entire summer on the sidelines due to injury, Jordy came back with a bang in 2019 in Hawaii, taking out the gruelling 52-kilometre Molokai to Oahu ocean paddle race for the first time in the prestigious surf ski division. An all-round water woman who loves catching a few waves on a longboard when the points are running, and is now learning to stand up paddle, Jordy represents the Noosa World Surfing Reserve’s commitment to all kinds of surfing.

JULIAN WILSON
Julian kick-started his 2019 world championship campaign by becoming a Noosa World Surfing Reserve ambassador, but if it wasn’t the best season for achieving a coveted WSL world title (he finished the year at eleventh), having wife Ash and baby daughter Olivia on tour with him for the American and European legs made the year for the family man, now 31. Since joining the tour, Julian has racked up five event wins, and has frequently threatened but not yet delivered a WSL world title. But beyond contest results, Julian is regarded as one of the best all-round surfers in the world.

JOSH CONSTABLE
Now 39, and back in fine form after competing with distinction on the WSL World Longboard Tour in 2019, the 2006 world longboard champion and multiple Australian champion will start the 2020 tour at his home break and rarin’ to go. Another great product of the Noosa points, Josh gets better with age, and we’re backing him to give another world title a serious nudge before he’s done.

DEAN BRADY
Former pro tour surfer and leading surf and fitness coach Dean Brady became a Noosa World Surfing Reserve ambassador late in 2019. Noosa born and bred, Dean has an impeccable local sports and community pedigree, with grandfather the late Phil Cave a former Noosa councillor, rugby league player and life member of Noosa Surf Club. Dean started winning junior comps at Noosa Boardriders when he was just 12, then went on to take out state and national junior titles. After finishing school, he travelled the world as a Rip Curl team rider, having a brief tilt at the ASP World Tour (now the WSL) before deciding that being a free surfer was more his thing.
Of all the excellent photographers who focus on the breaks of the Noosa World Surfing Reserve, no one captures the sheer fun of the Noosa surfing experience quite like Fenna De King. There’s a reason for that – she and her family live it every single day.

Fenna writes: “Growing up in Fiji, I spent most of my childhood surrounded by the ocean. Fast forward 20 years … one husband and two children later, I’ve blissfully stepped back in time. Who would have even imagined that an insatiable passion for longboarding would uncover a slight talent for photography. Constantly learning, all I hope to do is to replicate what I can see in front of me .. the undeniable beauty of the ocean and all who are in it, radiant in all its colours and textures. This is my happy place.”
NOOSA SURFING DIRECTORY

Please support the companies, clubs, and events that are supporting the Noosa World Surfing Reserve. Huge thanks to all of our photographic contributors. Major contributors are listed, but special mention also to: Nathan Tyack, Andrew Shields, Tony Wellington, Keith Hamlyn, Neil Armstrong, Stuart Scott, Bob Weeks, Mark Morgan, Noosa Library Service and to Panga Productions for video services.

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