

Chapter 5

The impact on the Gold Coast's terrestrial environments

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We tend to think of the Gold Coast as a water environment. As tourists know, it sits on the shore of the vast Pacific Ocean. That is why most come. They have seen the magnificent photographs. If not perched on flattened dunes looking east to the ocean, a significant part of the urban Gold Coast environment is located around natural and human-made water environments. Of these we will say little here, other than to note their extent. The focus of this chapter is the city's terrestrial environments, reporting on and ultimately, after describing the environments, discussing what proportion of them that existed before European settlement still remain today. This will allow us to make our first assessment of the environmental impact of the construction the city of the Gold Coast.

There are 480 km of rivers/creeks/streams in the city of the Gold Coast. This is close to an order of magnitude greater than the length of the city's beaches. As explained, the floodplains of the lower reaches of the rivers/creeks were converted from natural swamps into farming land then to canal estates. Such is the extent of the canal estate development and other engineered waterbodies that there are 774 ha of lakes, canals and water impoundments. There are also natural coastal wetlands which over the eons have provided habitat for native animals plus resting grounds for migratory birds. In this chapter we put aside consideration of these environments and turn to the Gold Coast's vegetation cover now compared to its pre-development state. A great deal has been lost. We provided an insight into this in Chapter 1. Plate 3 shows that the coast and near-coastal area has been cleared almost completely.

Let's look at a reminder of the natural Gold Coast. Fig. 5.1 is a photograph taken nearly 100 years ago. Three people walk towards the beach along a golden sand track freckled with leaves from the overhanging, shade-providing native trees. That track is now Cavill Avenue, undoubtedly the best-known street on the Gold Coast.

The Moreton Bay Islands

We shall commence on the east of the city, even though it is difficult to think of virtually uninhabitable islands as part of the city. Including nearby islands in city boundaries is a recent change of government policy in Queensland. (These islands are depicted in the north-east, in dark green, in Plate 5). Before that occurred, the islands in Moreton Bay were a 'no-man's land' in terms of governance and all sorts of illegal real estate deals were