

Home owners face \$88k fines over canals

Gold Coast Bulletin Article: 5th November 2012

Matthew Killoran | 07:07am November 5, 2012

WATERFRONT property owners on the Gold Coast will soon cop \$88,000 fines from the council if they don't fix crumbling canal walls. With about 15,000 waterfront property owners stretched across 440km of canals the council stands to make up to \$132 million. But city solicitor David Montgomery fears a disaster is looming with many of the ageing canal walls already collapsing and taking neighbouring walls with them.

The council is expected to vote today to go out to public consultation on the new local laws giving them the power to issue the fines. Under the proposal, only significantly damaged walls will be targeted, but if owners fail to act after being ordered to by council they will be slugged with an \$88,000 fine.

Jetties, pontoons and boat ramps will also come in under the law. Gold Coast Barges owner Greg Sweetman said the canals suffering the most from age and disrepair were in the suburbs of Mermaid Waters, Runaway Bay and even The Sovereign Islands. "Some of the walls just fall over night if they're not maintained," he told the Bulletin. "They often come down after a big rain event."

Mr Sweetman said fines might not work but the council had to take some form of action. "At the end of the day I don't know if fines work, but they need to be able to force people to look after it," he said. "If your wall collapses it can take a chunk of your neighbours' wall out with it."

He said it could cost up to \$100,000 for the work to replace a collapsed revetment wall in a canal. Mr Montgomery said most canal walls had a life span of 35-45 years and most on the Gold Coast were approaching or had already passed that point.

A council investigation in 2007 found some of the revetment walls along the Coast's canal systems were first built back in the early 1950s.

He said problems were already arising from these older walls. In 2005 a canal wall at one property in Hope Island collapsed, taking out the walls of seven neighbouring properties.

"Owners are responsible for revetment walls because they receive the benefit of it," he said. He said while the council was responsible for the canals, which it dredges every three years, revetment walls were the responsibility of property owners.

No date has been set yet for the start of the public consultation period for the new laws.

The Gold Coast City Council is also examining plans for beachfront residents from Bilinga north to Main Beach to pay more than \$10 million to complete the A-line boulder wall, designed to protect homes and public infrastructure on the coastal stretch.