



Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef Minister for Science and Youth Affairs

Our Ref: CTS 02824/22
Your Ref: A827571

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24 March 2022

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 24 February 2022 regarding Parliamentary Petition No 3594-21 opposing the proposed Cooloola Great Walk Ecotourism Project.

The concept of ecotourism experiences based on low impact, well managed and regulated long distance walking trails or tracks is widely supported throughout the world. Based on the highly acclaimed and successful Tasmanian experiences, Queensland committed to developing a series of these, known as The Great Walks of Queensland in 2001. Since then, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has invested significantly in their implementation throughout the State.

The Cooloola Great Walk is one such completed example and it is now proposed to augment it with an ecotourism experience.

The Project proposes the establishment of low key, removable commercial eco-accommodation facilities and guided tours along the Cooloola Great Walk. This is a purpose built existing 102 kilometre walking track linking Rainbow Beach and Noosa North Shore through the Cooloola Recreation Area, which includes the Cooloola section of Great Sandy National Park.

An expression of interest process was run by the Queensland Government in consultation with representatives of the Kabi Kabi First Nations People, the Traditional Owners and native title claimants of the Project area which has resulted in a preferred proponent.

The Project concept includes low key, low impact removable infrastructure at multiple locations and is being delivered through the Queensland Ecotourism Trails Program, which aims to promote premium, nature-based, ecologically sustainable ecotourism development within and around national parks. This is a core element of the Government's broader strategy to grow the State's tourism industry. Successful projects delivered under the Queensland Ecotourism Trails Program will provide a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits for Queenslanders, including:

- creating new funding sources for enhanced management of Queensland's national park estate to ensure the preservation and presentation of the unique natural and cultural values of these areas;
- providing employment and business development opportunities for regional communities through the creation of jobs and increased tourist visitation, with a particular emphasis on creating opportunities for Traditional Owners on their Country;
- providing a more diverse offering of nature-based tourism products, attractions and services in regional Queensland; and
- developing genuine cultural tourism products that foster appreciation and understanding of First Nations People's culture and connection to country, which are designed, led, managed, and provide direct benefit to, the appropriate Traditional Owners.

Should the Project be approved, it will be delivered in accordance with the provisions of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* which provides for the development of ecotourism facilities on Queensland national parks, providing that the use is a) ecologically sustainable, b) in the public interest, and c) provides, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the natural condition and protection of natural and cultural values of the area.

I can assure the House that any ecotourism development on national parks must comply with these legislative requirements. Ecological sustainability and the preservation of park values remain core principles through all stages of assessment, development and operation, and ongoing access to national park land must remain equitable for all visitors. The proposal is being designed so as to not affect any areas currently enjoyed by the public or used by existing commercial operators within the national park.

The Department of Environment and Science is overseeing the development of the Project concept to ensure it is undertaken in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Act and associated ecotourism development policy documents, the Ecotourism Facilities on National Park Implementation Framework and Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines.

To ensure compliance with these requirements, the department has undertaken extensive investigation of the preferred proponent's preferred eco-accommodation sites and proposed commercial operations. This has been guided by advice from independent ecological, cultural heritage and groundwater experts and in consultation with key local stakeholders such as local Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff, the Noosa Parks Association, and representatives of the Kabi Kabi First Nations People registered Native Title claimants.

The department is currently working closely with the preferred proponent to refine critical aspects of the proposed Project that must be resolved to allow assessment of it by State and local government authorities once formal applications for the relevant approvals are submitted.

Should the Project be approved following a rigorous assessment process, the department will require the proponent to adhere to stringent conditions and management protocols to ensure that the unique natural, cultural, and public use values of the Cooloola Recreation Area are not jeopardised by the development. These will be subject to regular performance audits.

The Queensland Government is also continuing to work in partnership with representatives of the Kabi Kabi First Nations People to ensure that the Project does not impact on cultural heritage, and to identify tangible benefits for the Kabi Kabi community. The Government is currently negotiating an Indigenous Land Use Agreement and Cultural Heritage Management Agreement with the Kabi Kabi First Nations People registered Native Title claimants in relation to the Project.

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely



Meaghan Scanlon MP

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