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28 February 2021

Chief Executive Officer
Douglas Shire Council

Via email: enquiries@douglas.qld.gov.au

Cc: Mayor Michael Kerr via Michael.Kerr@douglas.qld.gov.au

Councillor Lisa Scomazzon via Lisa.Scomazzon@douglas.qld.gov.au

Councillor Zammataro via roy.zammataro@douglas.qld.gov.au

Councillor McKeown via Peter.McKeown@douglas.qld.gov.au

Councillor Noli via Abigail.Noli@douglas.qld.gov.au

Chief Executive Officer via: mark.stoermer@douglas.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir

Douglas Shire Sustainability Group Inc. (DSSG) is an incorporated association active in the Douglas Shire since 2005, in support of sustainability in this region.

DSSG is a community-based environmental advocacy organisation whose objects are:

- To promote and encourage the adoption of the principles of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire;
- To the protection and conservation of the unique environment in the Douglas Shire and its surrounds, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics and World Heritage areas;
- To promote social, economic and environmental balance;
- To promote and support environmentally sustainable practices, education and great environmental awareness amongst visitors to and residents of the Douglas Shire;
- To recognise and promote the sustainable practices of the traditional owners of the Douglas Shire; and
- To promote and encourage the adoption of the principles of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire.

DSSG has contributed to the economic development of the Douglas Shire, including through membership of the Sustainable Development and Attracting Investment Taskforce which was part of the development of the 2017-2021 Economic Development Strategy (the strategy). We are disappointed to note the 2017-2021

strategy has been removed from the Council web site. It would be useful when making submissions, to compare the existing strategy to the draft strategy.

DSSG supports a principle of sustainable (environmental, social and economic) growth in the region, believing that the opportunities created or identified in the strategy are realised for the benefit of the community, visitors and everyone else who values the natural and cultural assets that exist within the region.

We understand the draft strategy was developed by the Economic Strategy Review Committee (ESRC) established by the previous Council, with input from others (unknown) and Council employees. We understand the ESRC comprises Douglas Chamber Commerce, Tourism Port Douglas Daintree and “invited business leaders’. It would be useful to understand the entire membership of the ESRC.

We provide the following feedback on the Draft Economic Development Strategy 2021 – 2024, published on 5 February 2021.

In summary, DSSG supports the general thrust of the three key drivers and the five supporting priorities. It is in the detail that we provide most of our feedback.

General comments:

DSSG is concerned at the lack of specific reference or statements of commitment to protecting our special environment.

Page 6 - Purpose of Economic Development - point 4 – Better environment – increasing the number of locally based rate-paying companies supports Councils ability to deliver community projects and facilities”

In our view, this is a stretch of the concept of a ‘better environment’, and certainly has nothing to do with protecting or enhancing our natural environment. This purpose statement seems to say that economic development has no relationship with our natural environment, and protection or enhancement of our natural environment is of no value to our economic development. Of course we acknowledge that the following paras on this page mention the environmental values, however this appears as an additional afterthought. If protecting or enhancing our natural environment is not viewed as a purpose of economic development it becomes nothing more than a wish.

Recommendation: Amend the wording of Point 4 on Page 6 to either clarify this is not the natural environment and or include specific reference to protecting and enhancing our natural environment.

We are concerned to note there is only one reference to conservation of our natural environment. At page 22, under discussion of priority “Ensure environmental and social links to the economy are strengthened and maintained”, is an action statement:

Progress the region’s commitment to its Eco-Destination Certification by exploring economic development opportunities that continue to support the preservation and conservation of the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest World Heritage Areas.

If the logic here is that Eco-destination Certification leads to preservation and conservation of the World Heritage Areas by providing an economic incentive to protect these Areas, DSSG is disappointed and alarmed that this is the only commitment in this document.

Recommendation: Refine the priority statement to indicate Council’s commitment to conservation and management of our natural environment (not just World Heritage Areas), recognising that social and economic advantage flows from active conservation and management.

Actions might include developing a reef and rainforest conservation and management strategy, committing to a climate policy, engaging conservation groups, indigenous groups and conservation agencies.

In addition, Council might commit to assisting businesses to adopt practices that are truly eco-friendly, for example accommodation places that minimise use of resources and limit carbon emissions, and tour companies that use environmentally friendly transport options and employ carbon off-sets.

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| Specific comments Priority Drivers: |
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1. Tourism – Diversify & Expand Our Tourism Offering

Action: Collaborate with TPDD to produce and implement a Destination Tourism Plan, a business plan for building and managing the region’s visitor economy.

Action: Collaborate with TPDD to develop and deliver an Events Strategy focusing on the attraction and development of events that encourage off-peak visitation, cross-shire dispersal, and contribute to the economy and liveability of the Douglas Shire

DSSG recommends that Council ensure public feedback on both a Destination Tourism Plan and an Events Strategy.

DSSG recommends that any Events Strategy be accompanied by a sustainable events policy which demands environmentally friendly approach such as banning use of plastics, carbon off-sets and limiting environmental damage from events.

Action: Increase demand for the region’s uniquely exotic fresh produce by establishing a Food Tourism Working Group. The group will be responsible for refining Douglas Shire’s food story, designing a value proposition and providing recommendations to Council and TPDD to enhance the food and wine experience in the region.

DSSG particularly supports this action.

2. Agriculture – Diversify & Innovate In Agriculture

DSSG generally supports these actions, noting the need to share strategy and success factors regarding Daintree Bio Precinct.

Action: Facilitate informed discussions between Council’s Food Tourism Working Group and the local Agriculture industry around the supply of paddock to plate experiences to cater to the increased demand from travellers.

DSSG particularly supports this action.

3. Population Diversification – Targeted Growth of the Shire’s Population

DSSG does not support growth of the Shire’s population. We are very concerned about natural restrictions to our population, including maintenance of agricultural land, water security, access roads, general infrastructure and services.

Action: Analyse the planning scheme to identify potential sites and business development opportunities within the Douglas Shire to support lifestyle developments and actively promote these opportunities.

DSSG does not support amendments to the Planning Scheme to facilitate further development.

We note the comments of the Mayor when releasing the draft Strategy document:

“To become a thriving economy, Douglas Shire needs smart, targeted and sustainable development to attract a modest increase in its population and capitalise on the deep affinity the southern pre-retirement and retirement demographic has with our destination.”

DSSG does not support increased establishment of 'retirement villages' or 'home parks'. Isolation and reliance on private transport are key features of such developments. More modern thinking in urban planning is toward inclusive infrastructure, such as closely connected living and learning "micro-neighbourhoods", ensuring people of all ages remain the "heart" of the economic, social and cultural life of communities. <https://theconversation.com/retire-the-retirement-village-the-wall-and-whats-behind-it-is-so-2020-135953>

We note the following at page 16

This segment is characterised by highly skilled, professional, and affluent individuals. Many are not job dependent as they work remotely and may also travel. They want the lifestyle that the Shire offers, and they seek environmentally sensitive outcomes, specifically, regarding development.

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| Specific comments: Priority Statements: |
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Priority statement: Provide Infrastructure That Connects People, Enhances Liveability & Supports Business

Action: Deliver a second water intake and progress a feasibility study for long-term water storage options with a capacity of at least one billion litres (1GL).

DSSG is concerned that this commitment could lead to construction of a large dam or similar storage structure without any sharing of costs or location. A dam this size would require significant land and huge amounts of concrete. The design engineering alone would be a considerable cost.

DSSG cannot support this commitment without more information and requests Council to make public the details of costs, design and location.

DSSG supports generally the other actions, noting particular support for the use of environmentally friendly transport options, improved internet access and increased public art.

Priority statement: Develop An Innovation Culture across Business & the Community

Action: Foster a culture of innovation in the community by enhancing economic development opportunities within world-leading projects like GBR Legacy's Living Coral Biobank, Mossman Botanical Gardens, Daintree Micro grid, State-delivered Wangetti Trail and the Daintree Bio Precinct

DSSG is strongly supportive of GBR Legacy's Living Coral Biobank, and believes projects like this, focussing on science, education and conservation, are game changers for our Shire.

DSSG supports the concept of the Daintree Bio Precinct but we are concerned that there is no public knowledge about the strategy and the likely success of the project.

DSSG supports the provision of reliable, environmentally and economically appropriate power on the Daintree Coast. We do not support the installation of a single, one-size-fits-all power supply. We believe the needs of power users can be achieved by:

a) upgrading individual stand-alone power systems at private residences with a uniform system platform, through household assistance packages from Government to upgrade their now ageing systems; and

b) supporting the commercial precincts at Cow Bay and Cape Tribulation with two separate, appropriately sized micro plants that are based mainly on large solar arrays and battery storage with a backup source.

DSSG notes that the Wangetti Trail project will involve the destruction of mangrove and littoral forest at the southern end of Four Mile Beach. In our view, this action is not necessary for the successful operation of the

Trail and serves to highlight how environmental planning is not given adequate attention when development projects are considered. DSSG does not support the privatisation of national park assets.

Priority statement: Build Direct Links between Our Indigenous Community & the Economy

DSSG supports the proposed actions.

Priority statement: Ensure Environmental & Social Links to the Economy Are Strengthened and Maintained

See comments above.

Priority statement: Reduce Red Tape & Improve Business Support

DSSG generally supports the proposed actions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Didge McDonald', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Didge McDonald
President