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Chief Executive Officer
Douglas Shire Council

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

**RE: Withdrawal of Development Application and Resubmission
MCUI 2021_4231 Air Services and Caretakers Accommodation at 23-33 Port Street and 35-39
Port Street, Port Douglas**

Dear Madam

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 principals 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 principals of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire.

We do not support, and make the following comments about the revised application **MCUI2021_4231/1**.

Background

The applicant proposes to develop an Aviation Facility at the subject site for the purpose of providing passenger transport including connections from the Cairns Airport to support the local tourism sector. Associated uses are said to include medical transfers, aerial firefighting and search and rescue operations on an as required basis.

The proposed development will comprise of the following: • 2 Helipads • 2 Helicopter (4-seater and 8-seater) • Hangar (448m²) • Office (100m²) • Caretaker's Accommodation (58m²) • Aviation refuelling tanks (2 x 5000L) • 9 Parking Spaces (includes Caretaker) • 2 Bus Set Down spaces •

We are advised that Nautilus Aviation currently operate helicopter services at the Sheraton Mirage Port Douglas- approximately 1.4km south of the proposed site. The Sheraton's Integrated Resort Development Scheme deed of agreement does not allow for a hangar or refuelling in the location of the helipad, and it is asserted that the process to amend the Scheme is 'incredibly complicated'. This has resulted in the applicants seeking to re-locate to the new site and enhance its operation, including by having on site security.

DSSG wonders why the existing arrangements for hangar, refuelling and security are no longer appropriate.

Perhaps it is an economics argument, or a desire to expand the business? We are of the view that a failure to negotiate appropriate arrangements at the existing site is not a problem the community should be forced to deal with.

The applicant asserts that:

"The proposed development is of an appropriate scale and can be managed so that it advances the purpose of the planning scheme and supports the achievement of the Strategic Framework, in particular:

.....

3.5.6 Element – Air and acoustic protection and hazardous materials (1) Other than the Mossman Sugar Mill and some of the marine industries in Dickson Inlet at Port Douglas, there are no areas of land devoted to the heavier forms of industry that would generate significant air or acoustic problems. As a result, it is possible that new industrial development may present future challenges. The key management approach in planning is to separate sensitive land uses from generators of nuisance. Given the historical development of the Shire (i.e. the Mossman sugar mill and port industries), this is not always practical and mitigation measures need to be implemented as an alternative.

3.5.6.1 Specific outcomes (1) The air and acoustic environment and hazardous materials are carefully managed to maintain the health and well-being of the community and the natural environment. (2) Industries that have the potential to cause greater air and acoustic impacts and/or that include hazardous materials are separated from sensitive land uses. (3) New noisy recreational activities such as major motorsport activities are not likely to be compatible with the amenity of the Shire. Impacts on sensitive receiving environments, including environmental habitats is to be avoided.

DSSG cannot understand how 40 take-offs and landings per day can be said to be avoiding "adverse impact on amenity of adjacent and surrounding land".

Social considerations

There is clear evidence that local residents and businesses do not support the development. Concerns have been raised about noise, environmental issues and the lack of regulation or control on the activity.

The applicant asserts that "The new site: • Will continue to be operated in a manner that is compatible with the Port Douglas Community • Will not result in unacceptable impacts on the amenity and tranquillity of Port Douglas".... The proposed development will not have an unacceptable level impact on the amenity in terms of air, noise, odour, electrical interference and vibrations associated with the use".

These assertions are not supported by any specific community consultation; and cannot be dismissed.

Environmental concerns

DSSG sees two main environmental concerns with this application.

1. Noise

The applicant advises us that the take-off flight path will be over the sewerage treatment plant, and the landing over the Inlet.

The applicant has designed the operation to comply with the noise testing report attached to the revised application which concludes that:

“In summary, helicopter measurements indicate up to one (1) Airbus H130 and up to one (1) Robinson R44 helicopter may land and take off each hour between the hours of 8am to 6pm. Alternatively, up to three (3) Robinson R44 helicopters may land and take off each hour between the hours of 8am to 6pm”

This amounts to 40 take-offs and landings every day. DSSG is of the view this is a significant impact on the liveability of the residential area adjacent to the proposed development.

According to the Helicopter Association International (HAI), the sound of a helicopter flying at 500 feet is about 87 decibels. At 1,000 feet, the sound drops to 78 decibels. For comparison, a vacuum cleaner is about 75 decibels while a power lawn mower is about 90 decibels. (Neither of those make infrasound). The noise levels are much higher on take-off and landing. Apart from houses and businesses within the vicinity, people using the area nearby for recreation will be exposed to the full impact.

In addition, a helicopter does not go straight up when it takes off. It gains altitude flying forward at an angle. We are not informed of the regulated flight heights, but it is safe to assume there will be a considerable area exposed to the noise of helicopters at a much lower height. See video below.

[Helicopters Landing & Taking Off "Raw Sound" - YouTube](#)

In accordance with 9.4.3 Environmental performance code, Performance Outcome 2 requires that: “Potential noise generated from the development is avoided through design, location and operation of the activity”. Acceptable outcomes include “AO2.1 Development does not involve activities that would cause noise related environmental harm or nuisance” In response, the applicant has said the application: “... does comply with P02 of the Environmental Performance code as potential noise generated from the development can be mitigated through design, location, and operation of the activity.”

DSSG is of the view that there is insufficient mitigation of noise related environmental nuisance.

2. Impact on vegetation and waterways

DSSG notes the Biotropica re-survey concludes that :

*“A listed weed species *Sphagneticola trilobata* (Singapore daisy) was recorded within the site and care must be taken to ensure that the distribution of this species is not increased as a result of the proposed works....Care should be taken to ensure that stormwater and any potential spills are treated appropriately so that the water quality in the adjacent watercourses and mangroves is not affected”.*

We suggest Council should require removal and control of Singapore Daisy and appropriate clean up and monitoring of spills to ensure water quality is not impacted, and support the recommendation of Biotropica: *“It is recommended that the proposed landscaped area between the development and Dickson Inlet is instead subject to revegetation using native species to create additional habitat for native and flora species. This, together with the eradication of several weed species from the site would create a net environmental gain.”*

We also note the survey identified a number of migratory or threatened species may be transiting the site. DSSG is concerned at impact of helicopter activity on those migratory birds.

“Given the proximity to Dickson Inlet, it is possible that shorebirds (including some threatened and/or migratory species) may utilise the adjacent mangrove / shoreline areas or observed overflying the site.....”

In accordance with 9.4.3 Environmental performance code, Performance Outcome 3 requires: - “PO3 Potential airborne particles and emissions generated from the development are avoided through design, location and operation of the activity”. Acceptable Outcomes include: “AO3.1 Development does not involve activities that will result in airborne particles or emissions being generated”. In response the applicant has said: *“The proposed use is designed to mitigate potential airborne particles and emissions via the impervious surface that the helicopter take-off/land on. The operation of the use will also mitigate adverse environmental harm or nuisance via keeping the area clean of foreign objects. The design of the proposed*

development also includes buildings along the eastern boundary to mitigate impacts encroaching from the site. The helicopter landing area will be imperviously sealed to reduce airborne particles."

DSSG is concerned at dust impact from helicopters. 'Rotor downwash' is a commonly ignored phenomenon that occurs during **helicopter** hover in close proximity to a ground surface. It has the potential to cause significant damage to nearby vehicles and objects, as well as people.

[Helicopter Rotor Downwash – Excessive wind, FOD and brownouts, what are the risks? - JJ Ryan Consulting](#)

It is not clear what impact this has on the natural environment over time.

Safety concerns

Aside from the obvious safety risk of a helicopter crash in this built up area, DSSG sees two main safety concerns with this application.

1. Bunded fuel storage

DSSG is concerned that additional fuel storage is a considerable escalation of safety risk in what is already a hazardous environment. The risks of environmental damage, explosion and fire are increased in an area which is very close to the main residential and business area of Port Douglas.

The application includes 2 x 5000L storage tanks for the storage of aviation fuel, located on the northern side of the hangar. We are told these storage tanks will be above ground, bunded and roofed.

In accordance with 8.2.4 Flood and Storm Tide Hazard Overlay Code, Performance Outcome PO6 requires that: "Development avoids the release of hazardous materials into floodwaters". Acceptable outcomes include: "For Material change of use AO6.1 Materials manufactured or stored on site are not hazardous or noxious, or comprise materials that may cause a detrimental effect on the environment if discharged in a flood event". In response the applicant has said that the development complies with the performance outcome due to the siting, roofing and bunding of the fuel storage tanks.

Spills from an above ground tank are more likely to result in an escape into the environment. Bunding does not guarantee it will be contained.

In accordance with 6.2.5 Industry Zone code, Performance Outcome PO8 requires: "Development collects and disposes of waste materials and caters for spillages in a manner that prevents contamination of land or water". Acceptable outcomes include AO8.3: "Contaminating materials are stored at levels above the defined flood / storm tide event, whichever is the highest". In response the applicant has said "Will be complied with." It is not clear how this will be achieved.

DSSG is concerned that storm tide flooding may pose risks of escape of fuel into the waterway and surrounding environment and believes that a hydraulic and hydrology report, prepared by a suitably qualified professional should be required.

2. Increased vehicular traffic

If there are 20 flights per day during peak season, we assume an increased volume of vehicular traffic in this area as a result. Has Council considered the impact on the access roads and on resident amenity?



Yours sincerely

Didge McDonald
President