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Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
Attention: Darren Schneider

Via email: Darren.Schneider@dnrme.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Schneider

RE: CONSULTATION \$1 MILLION STUDY FOR RENEWABLE SOLUTIONS FOR THE DAINTREE

Douglas Shire Sustainability Group Inc. (DSSG) is an incorporated association active in Douglas Shire for over ten years. We are a community based environmental advocacy group with a significant number of members. Our strategic objectives include environmental protection of the Daintree coast.

We are aware that DNRME has received a budget allocation of \$1 million for a feasibility study into renewable power options for the Daintree Coast. We recently wrote to the Minister outlining our views about power infrastructure and consultation in the Daintree (Attachment A).

We have supported the Australian Tropical Research Foundation (AUSTROP) in their review of the initial Daintree Power report prepared in May 2018, by Sunverge Energy Australia Pty Ltd (Sunverge) for ARENA¹.

An updated report has recently been prepared by Sunverge². AUSTROP has now reviewed that updated report, and their response is attached. (Attachment B).

A representative of DSSG, Mike Berwick, has spoken with DNRME staff, and subsequently had a phone link with ARENA, where he expressed our reservations about the Sunverge Report. Simon Woods from ARENA, encouraged liaison with you. When speaking with your colleagues, Mike was asked if he had any advice on how best to consult the community, given \$1 million has been set aside for feasibility studies into energy options for the Daintree Coast.

DSSG strongly advises that effective engagement and comprehensive documentation of existing energy arrangements are fundamental to an effective feasibility study

We have come to the view, and further recommend, that the best way to achieve this is to engage a locally based individual, supported by independent expert advice, for three years to offer:

- assessment of all household energy systems for performance and functionality,
- free hybrid energy technical service to residents and business, and
- free design and costs for new or upgraded systems to all households and businesses.

¹ http://www.dssg.org.au/fileadmin/content/new/Austrop_Response_to_Powering_Daintree.pdf

² <https://arena.gov.au/assets/2018/08/powering-daintree-sunverge.pdf>

We suggest this person be someone who lives in the community to facilitate building a positive relationship with other residents and with local business. As a community that has been over-surveyed for little tangible result on a range of issues, meaningful engagement will be challenging. It will also be challenging to build an understanding of the current on-site infrastructure at approximately four hundred and eighty four widely dispersed premises.

Furthermore it is a commonly held view that the \$1 million should be applied to something more constructive than simply another study with residents, many of whom will not engage. Hence the suggestion of a free troubleshooting, design and advice service coupled with data collection. This would cost far less than the sum allocated.

The money could be also be used to establish a micro-grid for Cow Bay as suggested in the attached AUSTROP response.

DSSG believes a feasibility study should require that:

- any new power system be founded on renewable energy, building on the extensive renewable infrastructure that currently exists at almost every household;
- the Daintree Coast be established as a model for an integrated array of mainly stand-alone, renewable energy systems - this means good design with locally available parts and technical services; and
- publicly-funded infrastructure only supply existing residents and not promote further development – i.e. not providing power to land that is best purchased and added to the conservation estate, which is currently ongoing by three different purchase-for-conservation NGOs and has been funded by past governments.

Given the area's exceptional and threatened biological values, any public investment into major infrastructure such as that suggested by Sunverge, should be preceded by a Community Conservation Plan as recently proposed to the Daintree Joint Management Group.

Yours faithfully



Laurene Hull
Secretary