

Department of Environment and Science
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13 March 2019

Re: Mount Coolum Draft Management Plan

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Mount Coolum Draft Management Plan.

As the peak body for tourism, QTIC values the importance of strong management plans to support the sustainable development of the natural assets that create Queensland's unique competitive advantage. It is essential that National Parks across the state are effectively managed to ensure their values is preserved for generations to come.

QTIC is the state's peak body for tourism in Queensland and represents the interests of the tourism industry. QTIC is an independent membership-based organisation with in excess of 3,000 members, operating in all sectors of the tourism industry, including business operators, Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs), sector associations and education providers.

The tourism industry in Queensland contributed \$25.0 billion to Queensland's Gross State Product (GSP), representing 7.9% of total GSP¹ and generated \$7.1 billion in exports in the year ending June 2016², making it one of the state's largest export industries accounting for 14.8% of total Queensland exports. The tourism industry consists of over 53,000 businesses across Queensland; nine out of ten of these businesses are small to medium enterprises.

QTIC supports the adoption of a management plan to monitor and maintain the integrity of the National Park and to management the follow of people. The following comments are made surrounding some of the key aspects of the draft management plan:

Iconic Summit Track and Visitor Management

QTIC supports the identification of the number of visitors to the summit track and the visitor management as high. Over-crowding not only damages the natural environment but can also reduce the enjoyment of destinations or experiences and negatively influence the competitiveness of the region. Decisions about protected areas must be strategic and take

¹ Tourism Research Australia, *State Tourism Satellite Accounts 2015-2016*

² Tourism Research Australia - *State Tourism Satellite Accounts 2015-16*, Queensland Government Office of Economic and Statistical Research - Overseas exports of goods by industry.

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into consideration the best uses and sustainable outcomes for Queensland's natural environment, community and sustainable economies – not isolated objectives. There must be a long-term focus on conservation goals not just growth targets, with carrying capacities and maximum tourism numbers considered when assessing management options.

Most researchers agree that a balance between nature conservation and recreation management is essential to avoid problems with national park management. This means that measures must be taken to positively influence visitor behaviour, such as access management and possible road charges, but also measures such as the provision of public transport and footpaths³. Alongside these hard infrastructure improvements, there also needs to be educative signage, providing interpretation and background of the national park. It is also important to provide appropriate and clear information on possible access restrictions and other rules that apply to visitors. A balance between infrastructure management and educational measures will assist in promoting positive visitor experiences and maintaining the integrity of the region.

There is also the opportunity to develop maintenance programs that support a high-quality visitor experience and create managed visitor flows as an outcome of this management plan. The investment in public WiFi facilities alongside other infrastructure projects would enhance the consumer experience and provide opportunities to share and promote experiences. A detailed plan should prioritise infrastructure rejuvenation projects based on high-traffic areas. In order to effectively manage the flow of tourists, there needs to be a clear visitor management plan in place. Research illustrates that when well-managed, tourism can make a positive contribution to the destination⁴.

The implementation of technology across the park may assist with a number of key challenges including people management, knowledge enhancement of park users and engagement with groups of users. There is also the opportunity to utilise technology in people management throughout the park. National Parks within China have successfully been utilising big data and the internet of things to direct and manage highly dense visitor populations across National Parks. To engage with visitors, technology can be utilised as a wayfinding mechanism, or to provide interpretation of the region, heritage and/or specific flora and fauna.

A more detailed breakdown of consumer needs would assist DES in understanding where priority usage areas are, what type of information would enhance experiences and where incompatibility exists. Primary research within the park would assist in determining what visitors are seeking when experiencing the park and the facilities they require to enhance their experience. There should be a close alignment with the Regional Tourism Organisation – Visit Sunshine Coast, in the collection, analysis and management of this information.

³ Beunen, H, Regnerus, H & Jaarsma, C. Gateways as a means of visitor management in national parks and protected areas. *Tourism Management*. (2008). 29. 138-145.

⁴ Hall, M. *Understanding and Managing Tourism Impacts*. (2009).

Climate Change

There is no consideration of the impact of climate change within this plan. As an industry, tourism is identified as being highly exposed to both direct and indirect impacts of climate change. Tourism's dependence on core natural attractors (such as National Parks) places it at high risk due to the strain climate change is placing on natural resources. Research indicates that climate change will have both economic and non-economic impacts on destinations⁵. Forecasts suggests a profound impact will be seen on tourism flows with some destinations likely to become significantly less appealing to tourism, shifting the visitation patterns of tourists and potentially leading to a decline in visitor numbers⁶. This is due to climate directly affecting a variety of resources that tourism relies on including, water levels and quality, bio-diversity and wildlife among others.

Furthermore, climate change is also influencing deterrents to tourists including extreme events such as tropical cyclones and background conditions such as infectious disease vectors and fire risk⁷. It is understood that tourists are more likely to react to sudden or extreme weather events as opposed to average weather, thereby heightening the impact of such occurrences on visitation to the region⁸. Australia's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change is likely to be exacerbated by the potential increase of frequency and intensity of a range of extreme weather events, including heat waves, fires, floods, landslides, droughts and storm surges influenced by climate change⁸. The omission of climate change considerations across this plan downplays the severity of the impact climate change can have in this area.

It is important that when developing the final *Mount Coolum Management Plan* links are made directly to the climate change work completed by the Department of Environment and Science including the biodiversity and tourism *Sector Adaptation Plans*.

The plan should also be directly linked to Sustainable development goals 15 – Life on Land and goal 13 – Climate Action.

For all enquiries regarding the points raised in this letter, please contact me or the QTIC Policy Team on (07) 3236 1445 or email policy@qtic.com.au.

Kind regards

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Chief Executive

⁵ Turton, S et al. "Developing an approach for tourism climate change assessment: evidence from four contrasting Australian case studies" *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. 18. (2010): 429-447.

⁶ Amelung, B., Nicholls, S and Viner, D. "Implications of Global Climate Change for Tourism Flows and Seasonality." *Journal of Travel Research*, 45 (2007): 285-296.

⁷ Pham, TD et al. "Climate change-induced economic impacts on tourism destinations: the case of Australia". *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. 18. (2010). 449-473.

⁸ Amelung, B., and Nicholls, S. "Implications of climate change for tourism in Australia". *Tourism Management*. 41 (2014). 228-244