

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

23 March 2020

Re: National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef, Reef HQ

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the committee inquiring into the National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef.

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 more than 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 \$27.3 billion to Queensland's Gross State Product (GSP), representing 7.8% of total GSP¹ and generated \$7.5 billion in exports in the year ending June 2018², making it one of the state's largest export industries. The tourism industry consists of over 57,000 businesses across Queensland; nine out of ten of these businesses are small to medium enterprises. In Townsville, there are over 1,100 tourism businesses employing more than 1,600 residents³.

There were over 1.49million visitors to Townsville year ending September 2019⁴. These visitors spent an estimated \$8.7billion in the region, this was a 7.7% decline on the previous year. The start of 2020 has been challenging to say the least for regions across Queensland, and the globe.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) identifies that based on the size and dynamics of the global travel market, current travel disruptions, the geographic spread of the COVID-19 and its potential economic impact, international tourist arrivals could decline by 1% to 3% in 2020 globally, down from a 3% to 4% growth estimated in early January. This would translate into an estimated loss of 30 to 50 billion USD in international visitor spending in destinations (international tourism receipts). As of early March, Asia and the Pacific is expected to

¹ Tourism Research Australia, *State Tourism Satellite Accounts 2017-2018*

² Tourism Research Australia - *State Tourism Satellite Accounts 2017-18*, Queensland Government Office of Economic and Statistical Research - Overseas exports of goods by industry.

³ Tourism and Transport Forum. 2015/16. Business Count and Employment Atlas. <https://www.ttf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Business-Count-and-Employment-Atlas.pdf>

⁴ Brisbane Regional Snapshot. Sept 2017. Tourism and Events Queensland.

be the most affected region with a decrease of 9% to 12% in international tourist arrivals in 2020, down from 5% to 6% forecasted growth in early January.

Given the rising challenges that the tourism industry is currently facing, QTIC strongly supports the upgrades to the National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef and sees this as the ideal time to action upgrades.

One of the key priority product and experience development areas for the regions as outlined in Townsville's *Product and Experience Development Plan* is the Reef HQ Great Barrier Reef Aquarium Redevelopment. Reef HQ is home to the world's largest living coral reef exhibit and natural resource and receives approximately 140,000 visitors annually. The facilities presented at Reef HQ are considered outdated and are not presenting the world class experience that meet the expectations of the high value travellers that the region is trying to attract.

It is critical that as tourism rebounds from adversity the industry is positioned to capitalise on the market that emerges, whatever that may look like. Completing upgrades during this time to ensure market readiness when the time come is strong strategic planning and will position Townsville and the National Education Centre for the future. It is recommended that the timeframe is brought forward from 2021 and that the works are completed as soon as possible.

Reef HQ has a strong track record for implementing innovative solutions to reduce the climate footprint of the premise. Climate change for tourism businesses and community is both a risk and an opportunity too big to ignore. Increasing costs of extreme weather events, changes to natural resources, and the transition towards a decarbonised global economy are all highly relevant to tourism and the community and must be a critical consideration in every step of this redevelopment. Changes to weather patterns will result in a number of challenges for Queensland, including heat islands, changes in tidal flows and the increase in severity of storm events. The adaptability of infrastructure and development that considers the increasingly harsh conditions in Queensland is critical to ensuring the sustainable future of any redevelopment.

It is also important to acknowledge the important contribution that the investment in this facility plays to global development goals. Specifically, contributing to Goal 14 (Life Underwater) and Goal 4 (Quality Education) of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

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



Daniel Gschwind
Chief Executive

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