



QUEENSLAND
TOURISM INDUSTRY
COUNCIL

RESPONSE TO *NOOSA* *AREA DRAFT* *MANAGEMENT PLAN*

JULY 2021

t 07 3236 1445 | e info@qtic.com.au

w www.qtic.com.au |    

Level 5, 189 Grey Street SOUTH BRISBANE QLD 4101

PO Box 13162, George Street BRISBANE QLD 4000

ABN 75 095 706 095

© 2021 Queensland Tourism Industry Council

Acknowledgement of Country

Australia's First Nations peoples are one of the oldest living cultures on earth, connecting with Country for tens of thousands of years. QTIC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples.

Disclaimers and Acknowledgements

This work is copyright. All other use, copying or reproduction of any part of this document is prohibited except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Without limiting the foregoing, no part of this work may be reproduced. While all reasonable care has been taken in the preparation of the material contained in this work, the Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) does not warrant the accuracy, completeness, or adequacy of the information. The information is by way of general commentary only, subject to change without notice, and does not constitute the giving of advice. To the extent permitted by law, QTIC, its employees, and agents disclaim liability (including liability by reason of negligence) to any person for any loss, damage, cost, or expense incurred or arising as a result of any information, whether by reason of any error, omission, the currency or misrepresentation in the information or for any action taken by any person in reliance upon the information contain within this work.

CONTENTS

QTIC OVERVIEW	1
SUBMISSION OVERVIEW	1
TOURISM IN QUEENSLAND	2
ECOTOURISM	3
FIRST NATIONS TOURISM	4
RESPONSE TO PLAN	5
VISITOR MANAGEMENT	5
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS	6
CLOSING REMARKS	7

QTIC OVERVIEW

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC)¹ is a not-for-profit, private sector, membership-based organisation representing the interests of Queensland's tourism and hospitality industry. QTIC works in partnership with government agencies and industry bodies at a local, state, and national level to strengthen the voice of tourism in all relevant policy forums. Membership comprises more than 1,000 tourism businesses across the state, and we also work alongside 13 Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) which collectively represent more than 3,000 regional businesses and 18 industry sector associations. QTIC has an extensive reach, with a mailing list sent out to 7,000 people and a collective social media following of more than 22,000 people across four different platforms. QTIC is proud of its members² and the work they do to provide excellent experiences for visitors to Queensland.

QTIC's efforts are aimed squarely at helping the tourism industry to drive sustainable business and product development, stimulate business attraction and investment, develop workforce skills, and support tourism jobs and business. QTIC aims to provide an independent conduit to bring key stakeholders (including consumers, the tourism industry, and all levels of government) together to clearly identify challenges and opportunities and provide recommendations for consideration. QTIC is also a member of the Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC).

SUBMISSION OVERVIEW

QTIC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Noosa Area Draft Management Plan* put forward by the Queensland Government Department of Environment and Science (DES). As the peak body for tourism in Queensland, QTIC recognises and values the importance of strong management plans to support the management and protection of natural assets. These unique ecological features give Queensland a competitive advantage in the tourism sector – it is critical that these are effectively managed to ensure their significance is preserved in the immediate and long-term future.

¹ <https://www.qtic.com.au/>

² <https://www.qtic.com.au/membership/member-directory/>

QTIC commends several key aspects of the plan, including a demonstrated commitment to ongoing consultation and co-stewardship with the Kabi Kabi Traditional Owners, consideration for the possibilities offered by ecotourism³, and recognition of the need to foster community partnerships.

As part of this submission, QTIC offers commentary on the state of tourism in Queensland more broadly, including critical developments in the sector relating to ecotourism and First Nations tourism. QTIC also provides a response to specific aspects of the plan and associated strategic management directions, including the overall Noosa Headland experience; visitor management; and community, partnerships, and other interests.

TOURISM IN QUEENSLAND

In 2019-20, tourism in Queensland was a \$27.3 billion industry and major employer, with an estimated 202,6000 people in the state workforce supported by the sector⁴. Although the intervening period has seen the tourism industry acutely impacted by the effects of COVID-19, recovery points towards visitor demand for domestic travel. Latest statistics provided by *Tourism Research Australia* indicate that Australians are taking more overnight, intrastate trips and spending more in the process⁵.

Queensland's natural features are highly lucrative and have become one of its unique marketing aspects. National parks offer a low-cost domestic travel opportunity in a time of higher unemployment and reduced income for many Australians⁶. However, these environments are sensitive to increased uptake in visitation levels or noncompliant visitor behaviour. It is critical to find a balance between environmental protections for future generations and capitalising on this in the interest of long-term economic development. In responding to the plan, QTIC highlights that these concerns can be addressed through careful planning and consultation.

³ *Noosa Area Draft Resource Information*, p. 7.

⁴ <https://www.tra.gov.au/data-and-research/reports/state-tourism-satellite-account-2019-20/queensland-tourism-summary>

⁵ <https://www.tra.gov.au/domestic/monthly-snapshot>

⁶ <https://www.tra.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/185/Moving-Forward-2020.pdf.aspx>

ECOTOURISM

The Noosa Headland is one of the most utilised national parks in South East Queensland, with substantial visitor numbers enhancing the overall economic value of the region. QTIC also notes its status as a UNESCO Biosphere⁷. There is an overall need to manage these overlapping interests while developing sustainable tourism in the long-term. QTIC considers that partnering with the private sector, local councils and Traditional Owners to promote our stunning national parks is the best way to create sustainable experiences from our treasured natural assets.

QTIC also recommends state-wide adoption of business accreditation frameworks as a workable model for encouraging ecotourism and sector-wide consideration environmental sustainability and management practices. Accreditation assists tourism operators with accessing relevant resource and with adherence to industry standards and codes of practice, compliance with regulations, development and implementation of business and marketing plans, and assessing and improving overall business quality and public confidence. Accreditation is increasingly becoming a necessity for businesses operating in the tourism industry. It is valued by operators, government, industry bodies and consumers alike.

The *Quality Tourism Framework (QTF)*, owned and operated by the Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC), is a national business development program that is suitable for tourism businesses of all shapes and sizes. It provides businesses with the necessary tools and resources to ensure best practice management, customer confidence and the ongoing sustainability. The *Quality Tourism Accreditation* and *Star Ratings* system are also encompassed within the broader QTF structure.

QTIC also draws attention to relevant international agreements that Australia has either endorsed or is a signatory to, including the *Global Sustainable Development Goals*⁸ (SDGs) and the highly topical United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) *Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy*⁹ report should be considered as relevant reference points for Australia's strategic direction in relation to these aspirations.

⁷ <https://noosabiosphere.org.au/>

⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁹ https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2021-05/210504-Recommendations-for-the-Transition-to-a-Green-Travel-and-Tourism-Economy.pdf?wiwmhIGgXT4zwXles_Q8ycdITGIQfaMt

FIRST NATIONS TOURISM

Australia's First Nations peoples are the oldest living cultures on earth, connecting with country for tens of thousands of years. Although the *Draft Management Plan* demonstrates extensive engagement with Kabi Kabi Traditional Owners and their ongoing care for Country, QTIC draws attention to tourism-specific initiatives led by First Nations peoples. The *QLD First Nations Tourism Plan*¹⁰, developed by QTIC following extensive consultation with First Nations peoples, tourism industry stakeholders, and key government departments offers a considered guide for future action. The plan sets a framework to leverage cultural heritage and stewardship of country, together with regions' distinctive mix of tourism product offerings, to inspire the development of a thriving First Nations' tourism sector that offers diverse, authentic and engaging, sustainable tourism experiences and promotes greater engagement of First Nations peoples in tourism¹¹.

A summary of recommendations from the plan are as follows:

1. **Recognition and respect:** Promote recognition and respect for First Nations culture, stories, and connection to country.
2. **Training, skills development, and jobs:** Ensure the First Nations sector is driven by a skilled workforce engaged in quality employment.
3. **Engagement and partnerships:** Encourage the creation of mutually beneficial and strategic partnerships to grow the First Nations tourism sector.
4. **Marketing and awareness:** Position and promote First Nations experiences as a must-do experience while visiting QLD.
5. **Strategic coordination and structure:** Create an entity that gives voice to the First Nations tourism sector and provides advocacy and support.
6. **Authentic product development:** Develop and deliver authentic, quality First Nations products which are export-ready and meet market demand.

Further to the recommendations set out by the *First Nations Tourism Plan*, QTIC encourages DES to keep abreast of developments relating to the proposed Queensland First Nations Tourism Council.

¹⁰ <https://qticazure.blob.core.windows.net/crmblobcontainer/Version%206%20-%20FNTF%20Final%20Version%20-%20High%20res%20Web.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.qtic.com.au/industry-development/indigenous-programs/champions-network/>

RESPONSE TO PLAN

VISITOR MANAGEMENT

The plan identifies increased usage-related conflict (including crowding, track widening, diverting, and short-cutting) and visitor promotion of non-compliant behaviours as two primary threats to both overall visitor experience, aesthetics, and sensitive ecological zones¹². In its current state, the plan points towards “improving compliance and increasing ranger presence”¹³. This approach highlights the difference that is sometimes present between ‘conceptual’ and ‘operational’ understandings of national park usage¹⁴, in addition to the wider disconnect that can exist between planning approaches at various levels of government, commercial interests, community needs, and visitor sentiment.

While it is critical to seek out a balance between welcoming visitors and mitigating environmental impact, this discourse should extend beyond potentially reductive understandings of ‘overtourism’ and consider the root cause of non-compliant behaviours via a holistic, consultative approach that involves all relevant stakeholders¹⁵. This applies to policy and planning settings and to very practical, on-the-ground measures such as dedicated park rangers acting as welcoming guides, rather than compliance-focused enforcement agents. Determining place-based values could assist in developing alternative approaches that better align conservation priorities with the need for outstanding visitor experiences, as indicated by current research on visitor management:

...eliciting park users' beliefs is a requisite to understand their behaviour and to manage for impact reduction through persuasive communication targeting beliefs instead of imposing management action¹⁶.

¹² Noosa Area Draft Management Plan, p. 17.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ D Archer and S Wearing, ‘Interpretation and marketing as management tools in national parks: Insights from Australia’, *Journal of Retail & Leisure Property*, 2(1):29-39.

¹⁵ C Aall and K Koens, ‘The discourse on sustainable urban tourism: The need for discussing more than overtourism’, *Sustainability*, 2019, 11:4228; O Høegh-Guldberg, S Seeler and D Eide, ‘Sustainable visitor management to mitigate overtourism: What, who and how’, in A Anukrati and A Hassan (eds), *Overtourism as destination risk*, Emerald Publishing, Bingley, 2021.

¹⁶ L Muñoz, V Hausner, G Brown, C Runge and P Fauchald, ‘Identifying spatial overlap in the values of locals, domestic and international tourists to protected areas’, *Tourism Management*, 2019, 71:259-71.

Understanding visitor behaviour could be done by initiating a site-specific visitor survey (or similar). In the interim, the Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) *Social Indicators Survey*¹⁷ is a valuable but underused resource that can offer some preliminary information. Developing such a repository of data could further contribute to more effective visitor awareness regarding the impact of noncompliant behaviours. Peer and consumer education is critical and will contribute to the long-term implementation of any regulatory measures.

Potential avenues for implementing visitor education – and by extension, also increasing the deliverable capacities of commercial tourism operators – could include the following measures:

- Offsite education via a collaborative approach to online marketing between regional tourism stakeholders and the DES.
- Mechanisms for visitors to engage in guided walks with approved commercial operator-educators, or alternatively, implementing signage with integrative links for visitor self-education about ecological impacts and critical heritage of the region.
- Consider implementing benchmarking models to determine environmental impacts for commercial tourism operators¹⁷.

Collaborative stewardship and education are key – QTIC points towards the tourism industry as ideally placed to contribute to 'future proofing' both economy and environment.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The plan indicates future commitments to more extensive community engagement and collaborative partnerships:

...the agency is committed to working with the community and its partners to ensure activities and infrastructure are ecologically sustainable and continue to benefit Queensland's economic and social wellbeing as outlined in Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's Master Plan (QPWS, 2014). Permitted activities are administered in accordance with the requirements of the NCA and other relevant legislation.¹⁸

¹⁷ R Taplin and S Moore, 'Benchmarking for visitor management in parks' [conference proceedings], *6th International Conference on Monitoring and Management of Visitors in Recreational and Protected Areas*, Stockholm 21-24 August 2012, accessed 13 July 2021.

¹⁸ *Noosa Area Draft Management Plan*, p. 24.

A key identified management direction of the plan in this regard is to “improve engagement with community organisations through developing more formalised programs”. It is unclear what improving engagement in this context entails – more specific direction in this area could provide clarity for peak bodies and tourism operators. Clear management plans for existing commercial operators and potential tourism investors are needed to provide a sense of certainty and avoid red tape where possible.

The tourism sector is a natural ally for the DES in developing such programs. Research indicates that tourism can “mobilise resources and skills, stimulate innovation, boost conservation initiatives, and improve visitor experience”, as some examples¹⁹. QTIC draws attention to the overlapping interests of several regional stakeholders, including *Visit Noosa* and *Visit Sunshine Coast* who should have input into the long-term environmental management of the Noosa area.

CLOSING REMARKS

QTIC hopes to continue having a positive, collaborative working relationship with DES, considering that topics such as ecotourism are within our remit and broad scope of interests. QTIC welcomes the development of a strategic and long-term plan for the sustainable management of the Noosa area. For any further questions or clarification, contact QTIC via email at policy@qtic.com.au or phone on (07) 3236 1445.

¹⁹ SL Pfueller, D Lee and J Laing, ‘Tourism partnerships in protected areas: Exploring contributions to sustainability’, *Environmental Management*, 2011, 48:734-49.