



Recognising and upholding excellence in local government

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Destination 2045 Team

Department of Environment, Tourism, Science, and Innovation

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Dear Team

**Subject: Response to Destination 2045: Queensland's Tourism Future Discussion Paper
Destination 2045**

OSCAR appreciates the opportunity to comment on the State Government's Discussion Paper 'Destination 2045: Queensland's Tourism Future'. The limited time available for comments on the paper means that OSCAR's comments are necessarily general in nature. OSCAR would also appreciate the opportunity to offer more detailed comments after the Government has considered comments from the community on this paper.

OSCAR is a non-partisan, not-for-profit umbrella/peak organisation covering resident and community organisations on the Sunshine Coast and Noosa Local Government Areas (LGAs) in South East Queensland. OSCAR currently has over 35 member groups from the Pumicestone Passage to Noosa and from the Coast to the hinterland and ranges. Collectively, these organisations comprise more than several thousand engaged and community minded members.

OSCAR recognises that tourism is a key pillar of the Queensland economy. Tourism provides employment opportunities in the services sector for local business, particularly small-to medium-sized businesses that are the main driver of employment. Tourism also provides the scale necessary for many enterprises whose services are also enjoyed by local residents, eg, restaurants and cafes.

There are, however, clear risks to any untrammelled growth of tourism in this State. If poorly-managed, tourism leads to revolts by local residents against 'over tourism' directed at tourists that we are now seeing in places such as Spain, Italy and Bali. The damage to Queensland's reputation as a safe and friendly destination could be irreparably damaged. We are already seeing a groundswell of opposition in areas such as Noosa to increased tourist numbers. This is not to say that local residents are opposed to tourism; the growing opposition is based on the congestion and environmental despoliation caused by excessive tourist numbers. Just recently, following increasing commentary regarding attacks on people by dingoes on K'gari, some Rangers have already indicated concerns regarding the impact of increasing numbers of tourists.

Accordingly, OSCAR queries the need for a 20-year tourism strategy if its purpose is simply to increase tourist numbers. There needs to be a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to tourism. The many things that will enhance the tourist experience in places such as the Sunshine Coast are things that government at all levels should be doing anyway. Likewise, the many things

that the government at all levels should be doing to ensure that the legacy from the 2032 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games enhances the tourist experience.

These things include:

- Improvement to public transport infrastructure. The tourist experience will not be enhanced if use of private vehicles remains a necessity on the Sunshine Coast, and precious holiday time is consumed by traffic congestion. A failure beyond 2032 to have left a comprehensive, efficient and sustainable public transport and Active Transport network connecting all parts of the Sunshine Coast will stand as a clear failure of public policy.

For example: A current key aspiration of the Coolum Residents Association is to see the Nambour to Coolum Trail constructed as an iconic tourist and resident biking and walking project. The N2C traverses historic cane train territory and provides an outstanding display of the Sunshine Coast's environmental, ecological and indigenous assets. The N2C is an outstanding example of how we might attract visitors and locals away from their cars. It would allow visitors to bring their bikes to Nambour on the train, and then ride for 20 kilometres east to our Region's beautiful beaches. The Trail could also connect to the Olympic Mountain Biking site at Parklands. This is the sort of car-free tourism attraction that the community would love to see our Region and the Government embrace.

- Development sympathetic to and in harmony with the natural environment. Planning and Development Laws that are devised and – crucially – enforced are critical to preserving the differentiating factor the Sunshine Coast believes it enjoys over other destinations such as the Gold Coast and all our major cities. The enduring popularity of Noosa as a tourist destination is a testament to that LGA's commitment to planning laws that complement rather than confront the area's natural beauty.
- Protection of biodiversity, landscape and other environmental values. Again, the unique values of the Sunshine Coast is a differentiating factor from other tourist destinations in Australia. Local residents and tourists alike will benefit from rigorous enforcement of laws designed to protect the areas and sensible management of access to and enjoyment of areas of unique biodiversity.
- Queensland has 3 adjoining UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (Noosa, Great Sandy and Sunshine Coast) to be celebrated. For example the Governing Principle of the Sunshine Coast Biosphere is: *"Balancing the environmental, social, cultural and economic needs of today, without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations."* Being part of the UNESCO International Network of Biospheres has implications for all aspects of life, sustainable living, working and playing. This includes a Tourism Strategy.
- Addressing the need for low-cost accommodation for local workers. There are many occupations that benefit local residents as much as tourists. These include wait staff, chefs, hairdressers and medical and health support workers. The single largest deterrent to younger workers from elsewhere in Australia and international back-packers filling these vital roles on the Sunshine Coast is the cost and availability of rental accommodation. While the focus on low-cost housing is laudable during Australia's current housing crisis, this is not where the focus should be around tourist hot spots on the Sunshine Coast. High property prices in these areas will in any event nullify any attempt at lower-cost housing for permanent residents.

If government at all levels gets these things right, we can look forward to sustaining a strong tourist industry for decades to come, based on repeat tourism and recommendations to others drawn from a genuinely enhanced tourist experience.

The problem with setting in stone a 20-year strategy to do things that all levels of government should be doing anyway is that these sorts of strategies tend to develop a life of their own. This will be divorced from the key things outlined above that government at all levels should be doing anyway for the benefit of both local residents and tourists. Long experience tells us that there will be call for greater taxpayer resources to implement the strategy. There will be consultant fees. There will be new quangos with their own human resources. There will be 'turf battles' over who should be responsible for which areas. There will be exploitation by third parties of differences in stated objectives between those driving the strategy and those areas of government responsible for what government should be doing anyway.

All this will mean a diversion of scarce resources (ie, taxpayer funds) from implementation of the key things outlined above.

Though OSCAR's comments at this stage are necessarily general in nature, there are several points in the paper that are cause for alarm:

- Nothing is said about how short-term accommodation will be expanded to cater for increased tourist numbers. The growth of STAs on the Sunshine Coast is proving divisive, sparking a 'Neighbours Not Strangers' campaign in areas such as Noosa. Longer-term tenants who provide important services in the local community, including volunteer work, are being displaced by short-term tourists accommodated in STAs. This can only increase anti-tourist sentiment, something that no-one wants to see. For example, Sunshine Coast Regional Council following the 2021 Census, identified that Of the 13000 vacant properties on the Sunshine Local Government Area (LGA), 7000 were being used for STA.
- On Page 8 of the discussion Paper Minister Powell in his Introduction states: *"Our approach is twofold: to develop a long-term vision that identifies and leverages growth opportunities and to **unlock the potential of our ecotourism sector, doing so responsibly and sustainably in partnership with those who share our dedication to this land.**"* (OSCAR highlighting). Sometimes the intention and the outcomes are at odds with each other. We encourage the Government to ensure that ecotourism does not have negative impacts on our environment. There are, for example concerns within the community re the establishment of commercial operations in National Parks and the impact of such on the integrity of National Parks.
- Much is made in the document about First Nations cultural experiences. Expectations need to be kept in check on this proposed tourism asset and how much it can contribute. The First Nations custodians of sites that are targeted for tourism growth will need to be a fundamental part of the process of devising if and how access may be granted and how it will be managed. First Nations custodians must never be treated like stage props around areas of cultural significance. It may well be that some areas must in the view of those custodians remain off-limits to tourism. This will need to be accepted in good grace, not overridden by government decree.

OSCAR RECOMMENDATIONS

OSCAR makes the following Recommendations for consideration by the Government if it develops a Tourism strategy.

1. That any strategy is not purely economic based. It must take into account all components of sustainability – Social, Cultural, Environmental and Economic. As suggested in the commentary above, development of such a strategy must be qualitative as well as quantitative.
2. That in any reference to First Nations cultural experiences First Nations Elders and communities must be engaged fully, deeply and meaningfully from the outset – that is

prior to and during the development and implementation and evaluation of any strategy and/or activities relating to the strategy.

3. That a detailed Risk Management matrix and plan must be developed as part of the development of a Tourism strategy and actions, with quotas and regulations being made based on the matrix.
4. That the Tourism Department in conjunction with the other areas of that portfolio investigate issues of "over-tourism" in both Australia and internationally and any actions taken by the relevant country be considered in the development of a Tourism Strategy.
5. That any strategy includes the inclusion of and opportunity for training – for example TAFE and University.
6. That a Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (ME&R) Program be developed in conjunction with the development of a Tourism Strategy. This must be regular and transparent in all components of the program and reported publicly. Such a program should also include inviting feedback from the community as a whole following which any adjustments should be made.
7. That all stages of development of a Tourism strategy must be undertaken in consultation with Local Government and community stakeholders.

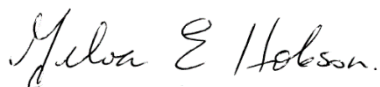
CONCLUSION

Any strategy must have the buy-in not only from industry but importantly the community in where the tourism opportunity ultimately resides within. It is the "host" community that resources the sector with workers, provides the spirit of welcome and ultimately deals with both the positive and negative impacts of what can be very divergent tourist wants and values. Respect for the host community, the natural environment and the area's cultural heritage must be hallmarks for any Strategy's implementation.

These communities can be disadvantaged by the wrong mix or type of tourism. The strategy must, if it to be effective and of value to the State as a whole, recognise and importantly protect the attributes of each of the State's various regions, understand and embrace to benefit of different offerings and build sustainable partnerships across the sector.

International experience demonstrates that tourism for tourism sake, can have detrimental impacts on host communities. We look to our elected representatives to protect and work with these communities to ensure appropriate hard and soft infrastructure is well planned and funded, that communities actually benefit from tourism opportunities, lifestyles are not disadvantaged and the environmental standing of regions are protected.

Yours sincerely,



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President

Organisation Sunshine Coast Association of Residents Inc (OSCAR)

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