

Rockhampton Regional Council

# **Submission to the Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia**

IMPEDIMENTS AND CHALLENGES TO STIMULATING  
THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA



*Rockhampton  
Region*



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## Executive Summary

The Rockhampton Region is located 620 kilometres North of Brisbane, 720 kilometres South of Townsville and 1,530 kilometres East of the Northern Territory Boarder. With a region of 88,000 residents Rockhampton is the gateway to Northern Australia as major transport connections north, south, east and west connect.

Rockhampton Regional Council is united and focused on leading the push of the Rockhampton Region through the initiatives of Advance Rockhampton and Destination Rockhampton, focusing on initiatives that lead directly back to State and Federal Government strategies.

Council has assumed a greater role in tourism, and is working collaboratively with businesses to enhance the overall tourism economy and experience in the Region.

Council's Economic Development Action Plan identifies Tourism as one of the economic enablers for the region, and the interconnection of tourism with supporting infrastructure, roads, capacity building initiatives and economic growth is vital to the future of our Region.

## INTRODUCTION

The Rockhampton Region is centrally located in Queensland and enjoys over 300 days of sunshine a year. The laid back lifestyle boasts top class sporting facilities, some of Australia's most prestigious education centres, gourmet restaurants and signature events. Along with some of the best health care services in the State and major developments reinventing city centre living, there is no better time to consider visiting Rockhampton than now.

The Rockhampton Region as part of Northern Australia has a number of challenges and impediments that restrict the tourism industry. As such Rockhampton Regional Council puts forward the following submission in response to the Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia inquiry into *Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia*.

## IMPEDIMENTS AND CHALLENGES TO STIMULATING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA.

### 1. Domestic and international tourism comprising: recreational, environmental, cultural, educational and industrial tourism

Rockhampton flourished in a burgeoning Queensland, with pioneers flocking to the port city on the mighty Fitzroy River. With its spectacular riverside setting, it was by the 1890s, one of Queensland's greatest inland cities. Many of the heritage buildings of that era survive, giving our region a continuing sense of grandeur and great tourism assets. Heritage tourism is one opportunity for the Rockhampton Region.

#### **Challenge One:**

***Aging infrastructure, assets and experiences, and the cost of compliance for building upgrades.***

Technical requirements for the design and construction of buildings have evolved over time within Australia. As such existing buildings may not be building and disabled compliant with current legislation. Legislation identifies that if substantial work is undertaken on buildings, then building must be compliant with relevant legislation and standards. Therefore most businesses and government bodies cannot afford the upgrading of facilities due to costs associated with complying with stringent legislation.

Tourism assets within the Region that are impacted by these challenges include:

- Rockhampton Heritage Village
- Mount Archer Rail Museum
- Mount Morgan Railway Museum
- Mt Hay Gemstone Tourist Park
- Dreamtime Cultural Centre
- Customs House Rockhampton
- Mount Archer National Park
- Bouldercombe Falls
- Limestone Creek
- Heritage listed buildings in CBD
- Ageing accommodation facilities

Potential opportunities to support the challenges in this area include:

- Best practice guidelines for development of heritage tourism initiatives based on Federal Government priorities and heritage registers. Extending this further into training and support for heritage attractions on a regular basis.

- Ongoing grants and initiatives for upgrades to buildings and infrastructure specific for Northern Australia, small to medium enterprises and heritage listed buildings.
- Improved or relaxed regulatory environments where applicable to Northern Australia specific to building upgrades and compliance.
- Potential scalability of regulatory requirements based on business size.
- Investment and priority in maintenance and development of existing and new infrastructure at National Parks.

## **2. The role of peak bodies, local communities, and all levels of government in developing and promoting tourism opportunities nationally and internationally, including regulations and workforce issues that may inhibit tourism development.**

While peak bodies, local communities and all levels of government have a role in developing and promoting tourism opportunities, Rockhampton Regional Council's main role in tourism is to be responsive to needs, interests and aspirations of residents; creating an environment and a community that people want to visit.

### **Challenge Two:**

#### ***Declining or stagnant population numbers and business within regional areas.***

A thriving community attracts tourism, and tourism helps create a thriving community. Each go hand in hand. Council recognises Tourism as a major economic enabler, incorporating it into the stabilisation of the regional economy to drive authenticity in visitor experiences. Developing and supporting local businesses and focusing on population growth has lasting positive impacts on the tourism environment within a region.

Potential opportunities to support the challenges in this area include:

- Funding streams direct to local government to support improvements to infrastructure and assets to meet changing traveller expectations.
- Investment in direct local support for capacity building relating to conceptual and newly established SME's and tourism assets, focusing on digital integration, upskilling and succession planning.
- Investment in hospitality training and staff development.
- Access to Australian Government Grants for the development of new tourism businesses.
- Building job opportunities for the attraction of residents to the region. Increasing the local population, driving further growth through the VFR market.
- De-centralisation of Federal Government departments with re-location of one agency to Rockhampton. This would drive economic development, job

opportunities, real estate market and the potential of increased business tourism.

**Challenge Three:**

***Taxation on Working Holiday Visas and dispersion of visitors across state***

Working holiday makers have been on the decline since 2012-2013 as a consequence of external factors such as exchange rate variations and economic changes in countries that are our biggest import areas.

The current Federal Government has recognised the importance of the working holiday maker on Australia's \$43.4 billion tourism industry.

The Federal Government set a new tax rate for working holiday markers at 19% on earnings up to \$37,000 rather than the announced 32.5% in the 2015-2016 Budget.

Federal Government is seeking to book arrivals of working holiday markers, and the key will be how these are dispersed across Northern Australia.

Potential opportunities to support the challenges in this area include:

- Tax incentive for backpackers with working visas working in Northern Australia

**3. Communication and transport infrastructure (particularly air, sea, road and rail transport) which may facilitate and grow tourism**

Rockhampton is uniquely positioned as the gateway to Northern Australia on the junction of major road and rail networks. Direct aviation links and driving routes make Rockhampton a key hub connecting north and south Australia.

**Challenge Four:**

***Poor timing of transport connections within Northern Australia***

Potential opportunities to support the challenges in this area include:

- Development of a Multimodal transport and accommodation infrastructure interconnection.
- Better timing of inter/intra regional connections for transport and logistics. Improve Air | Bus | Road | Train | Ferry connections to reduce waiting time for the time poor traveller, especially from Asian markets.
- 'Start at the Centre' of Queensland focus as main port of entry with improved flight schedules for the Asian Market.

- Conversion of Rockhampton to a full international airport to encourage landing and return points in Northern Australia (i.e. can land in Cairns and leave from Rockhampton).

**Challenge Five:**

***Fluctuating fuel prices in regional locations.***

Potential opportunities to support the challenges in this area include:

- Drive tourism very important for Northern Australia
- Development of clear regulations for the industry, and potential discount/subsidy scheme for Northern Australia petrol buys.

## **Conclusion**

There are a number of impediments and challenges that affect the implementation and growth of the visitor economy within Northern Australia. With strong policies, engagement and planning from all levels of government, local organisations and working parties the potential to work together to drive tourism is massive. Rockhampton Regional Council is committed to working with key stakeholders to drive change and implement key initiatives the drive domestic and international tourism within Northern Australia.



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