

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Primary Industries
and Regional Services
Parliament House
CANBERRA Act 2600

Attention: Mr Ian Dundas

Dear Sir

RE: CARDWELL SHIRE
TULLY GORGE/TABLELANDS/'H' ROAD TOURISM POTENTIAL

The Cardwell Shire has approximately 70% of its land either World Heritage National Parks or State-Controlled land.

When the case for World Heritage and Wet Tropics was being pushed, tourism, eco and other was touted as the panacea to compensate for the unemployment brought about by the dismantling and subsequent closure of the logging and timber industries. Not so. Since the proclamation of World Heritage, we have a "Hinchinbrook Island Study" running for six or more years and is still on the table. A moratorium on tourist permits for the Hinchinbrook Channel – no new permits being issued.

For the last seven or eight years we have a "Tully Gorge Visitor Impact Study" being carried out. Completion was to be two or more years ago. Until this study is completed, all new tourism activity in the Gorge (rafting and Eco Tours) has been put on hold or more aptly, put in limbo.

The Tully Gorge (as a tourist asset) would have to be one of Australia's best kept secrets.

If only we could let our tourists appreciate its attributes:

KAREEYA POWER STATION is unique, yes it is a Hydro Station, 'Clean and Green', however,

1. It also allows a controlled flow into the Tully Gorge to give the best white-water rafting facility in Australia;

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Cardwell Shire – Tully Gorge/Tablelands/'H' Road Tourism Potential

2. It has a cable car facility that travels 1.2km and rises ½ km to give access between the station and the Koombaloo catchment and dam. From the cable car the views of the Gorge are breathtaking and in its own way the views of the mountain rainforest and canopy surpass Skyrail in Cairns.

The car is a single 1 x 5 passengers but the cable way was built, I believe, with the capability of expanding it to two cars with a capacity of 1 x 9 passengers each. What a wonderful way to inspect a Hydro Station from catchment to turbines and take in some beautiful scenery.

Engineers estimate \$1.5-2M for the duplication/upgrade or \$50-100,000 could see a new car and the cable way open for limited tourist use.

The Koombaloo Eco Plan has a figure of \$9M. There is no need to duplicate Skyrail!!!

It is not beyond Stanwell's capability to run a cable car as a Commercial venture.

3. There is also a connection road from the Gorge to Ravenshoe known as the 'H' Road. During the 1940's and early 50's all logging roads in the Tully Valley were named by the alphabet; A B C, etc., eg. B Road was the Tea Plantation road and C Road is the Army Battle School road.

'H' Road was built in the early 50's as an access road between Koombaloo Dam and Kareeya Power Station. It played an integral part in the building of the Transmission Line to Innisfail. The road is still used to access Transmission towers by Powerlink. In the 60's – 80's it was also used in the upper and lower sections as a logging access road. Over this period it was accessible by mini minors, Holdens and light buses and trucks.

Documented evidence supports the statements that into the 80's this road was used by workers travelling from the Tablelands to work in the cane and cattle industries in Tully and surrounds. Herberton Shire's unemployment rate in 1997 was 15%+ as compared to Cardwell Shire's unemployment rate of 2%. Tully Banana growers could not get enough workers.

In 1986, Cyclone Winifred washed some culverts out and with the advent of World Heritage, the road was locked away from the public. It is 4WD only now and in 1990 Cyclone Joy caused a rock slide that partially blocked the road and scoured some culverts.

Cardwell Shire – Tully Gorge/Tablelands/'H' Road Tourism Potential

The road has a locked gate on the eastern end but there is quite a bit of remedial work currently being carried out by Powerlink and I've been told that they intend to bring the road up to a standard that will last for the next decade. There is talk that within ten years the Transmission Line from Kareeya to Innisfail will no longer be in service.

The road is repaired yearly after each 'Wet' to give access for Transmission Line maintenance. Wet Tropics insist that after each maintenance period the road must be made impassable to vehicular traffic. How ludicrous!!!!

Bureaucracy wants to deny the existence of this road as a dry weather link to the Tablelands. However, the history of this road tells another story.

What an excellent tourist draw card to:

1. Travel the Tully Gorge, enjoy the drive along the river and view the best white-water rafting in Queensland/Australia.
2. Inspect the Hydro-Power Station and receive briefing on the workings of Queensland's electricity grid and generation system.
3. Ride the cable car and experience the breathtaking views of the Gorge and Wet Tropics area. After viewing the Tully Gorge, visitors have said that they were cheated when shown other 'Wet Tropics' areas.
4. Travel to Koombaloo Dam and gain an insight into how water is stored and managed.
5. A tour through Ravenshoe and Herberton. Ride a steam train, visit the Herberton Heritage Museum.
6. Travel down the 'H' Road to experience World Heritage rainforest at close quarters. Beautiful one day, breathtaking the next. Then on to picturesque, Coachable Plateau and return to Kareeya Power Station.

Cardwell Shire – Tully Gorge/Tablelands/'H' Road Tourism Potential

This magnificent tourist potential is only a dream because of three factors;

1. A Visitor Impact Study that has been bogged in red tape and bureaucracy.
2. The reluctance to open a government facility for public hire.
3. The trend for Wet Tropics and World Heritage areas to be locked away from the public.

My own perception of World Heritage is that it be held in trust so that present and future generations can experience and enjoy it firsthand.

The views that I have expressed above will not only generate development but would also create employment and prevent the drift of young people away from our towns.

It is estimated that annually, 25,000 (non-rafting) visitors access the Tully Gorge State Forest. These tourists are potential pioneer users of the 'H' Road and/or the cable car and many others would follow.

It would be an added bonus for these visitors to have access to Koombaloo, Ravenshoe and the Atherton Tablelands whilst in the area. Some may go on to spend several extra nights touring.

These linkages; ie. cable car/H' Road/Kirrama between the coast and tablelands would generate tourist flows both ways and realise benefits, particularly to the small local governments of Cardwell, Herberton, Atherton and Eacham.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY:

- The Cable Car operation and Power Station tour be managed by Stanwell (the cable way is currently and always will be, an integral part of Stanwell's operations any way).
- The operation be staged as requirements dictate, ie.
 - Stage 1 Upgrade existing Gondola
 - Stage 2 Add a second Gondola

Cardwell Shire – Tully Gorge/Tablelands/'H' Road Tourism Potential

- Tours to Koombooloomba Dam, Ravenshoe/Tablelands and the 'H' Road could be handled by commercial operators.

THE 'H' ROAD:

- This road has been in existence for over 40 years.
- The road is approximately 20km in length from gate to gate.
- It currently has to be maintained to enable service access to Power Transmission Lines.
- It is ideally suited to a Wet Tropics/Rainforest Presentation road with access to walking tracks.
- It links the Tully Gorge to the Atherton Tablelands.

SUMMARY:

That public and commercial access be made available for the period that Powerlink has a need for the road.

Within this period, a study be undertaken as to whether or not the road should be kept open or the guidelines for its use be altered after Powerlink has no further use for the road.

PROPOSED CRITERIA:

1. The road be under Wet Tropics control.
2. The road be managed by DNR (closures/permits, etc.)
3. The road be maintained in its original state by Powerlink and Cardwell Shire.
4. Seasonal closure.
5. Commercial access by permit only.
6. Public access – no permit required (4WD or high clearance vehicle access only, no caravans).

Cardwell Shire – Tully Gorge/Tablelands/'H' Road Tourism Potential

CONCLUSION:

Our Shires have been badly bruised economically throughout several years from falling prices for sugar, cattle, bananas, removal of the timber industry, poor tourism seasons, etc. but our people have the determination to survive and prosper. That prosperity can come for this region and also add substantially to Queensland and the Nation through job creation and spending power.

The Cardwell Shire supports the principle of the Koombooloomba Draft Plan and desires to stimulate tourism on the dam and generally on the whole Tablelands through linkages to the coast.

There will be major benefits to at least four (4) local government areas and the thousands of tourists who will experience an Australian showpiece will spend more dollars at home.

Mr Minister, we are not looking for 'hand-outs' but rather just a hand to assist in achieving what we believe is a logical way forward in the interest of many.

Yours faithfully

ROYCE D FITZGERALD
MAYOR