

19 June 2006

**SUBJECT: SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS
AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

DUE DATE: FRIDAY 16TH JUNE 2006

PREPARED BY: MIRANI SHIRE COUNCIL

Background

Mirani Shire contains the Eungella National Park within its boundaries.

This park is one of the largest rainforest parks in Queensland and contains huge areas of State Forest which are administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS).

Council has constantly engaged with QPWS since the late 1990's over the management and condition of the Eungella National Park, particularly the day visitation areas of Broken River (Eungella) and the Finch Hatton Gorge.

Tourism in the Mirani Shire centres heavily on these National Park areas which are well known internationally with large numbers of visitors being attracted on an ongoing basis.

These visitors contribute significantly to the economy of the whole Mackay Region.

Council has been successful in having QPWS commit to a plan to upgrade these National Park visitation areas since 2000 subject to available funding. This plan is being gradually implemented.

Discussion

Within these parameters, Council has established a good working relationship with the local QPWS staff. The major concern however, is the lack of adequate resources to support the QPWS staff in their efforts to maintain and upgrade the facilities as required.

Council believes that within the senior levels of the QPWS there is a reluctance to embrace tourism as a legitimate function of its service delivery and that park visitors simply intrude in their core work.

Council has recently actively contributed to the project being facilitated through

Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation in conjunction with Tourism Queensland which seeks to demonstrate a Whole of Government approach to tourism development in Queensland for the next 10 years.

The most recent experience in Mirani Shire has been the closure of the information kiosk at Broken River, the closure of camping groups, barbeque sites and walking tracks within the National Park areas.

A positive initiative has been the establishment of the Great Walk between Eungella and Homevale Station in the adjoining Nebo Shire however, this facility will undoubtedly attract additional visitors to the area who would be looking for such things as information kiosks with usual amenities as well as camping / barbeque areas.

Summary

In summary, Council is vitally interested in the future promotion and ecological sustainability of the National Parks in the Shire as areas of visitation, education and an experience of nature based activities whilst preserving the integrity of the Park for future generations.

To allow this to happen, Council submits that the following problems must be addressed now:

1. provision of vitally needed resources to adequately develop and maintain the Park areas;
2. drive a culture change within relevant Government Agencies to embrace tourism as an integral legitimate function of their service delivery;
3. provide ongoing public education on the preservation of the natural environment through greater exposure to this environment via tourist trails, information centres and camping grounds within National Parks;
4. fully investigating all funding options for 1, 2 & 3 above through Government, user pays and opportunities for government/private/community partnerships.

Thank you for providing Council with the opportunity to contribute to your inquiry.

Further information can be obtained through contact with Council’s Manager of Community and Environmental Services, Neil Ischenko on telephone 074959 1101.

Yours faithfully

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Neil Ischenko

MANAGER COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES