

# Cooloola Great Walk consultation activities

August 2020

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# Introduction

In October 2018, the Hon Kate Jones MP, Minister for State Development, Tourism and Innovation and Minister for Cross River Rail announced the commencement of an Expression of Interest process for the Cooloola Great Walk – an existing 102-kilometre walking and camping experience that links Noosa North Shore with Rainbow Beach on the Sunshine Coast.

The project is being delivered by the Department of State Development, Tourism and Innovation (DSDTI) in partnership with the Department of Environment and Science, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships, and the Traditional Owners of the country on which the trail traverses. The trail is expected to deliver new local jobs to the region, showcase Queensland's natural beauty and increase an understanding of Indigenous culture.

DSDTI is committed to delivering its projects with transparency and integrity. Throughout the project lifecycle, there has been extensive engagement with the local community, tourism industry, councils and regional organisations and conservation interest groups. The Cooloola Great Walk Project Team maintains a project website ([www.ditid.qld.gov.au/our-work/qld-ecotourism-trails/cooloola-great-walk](http://www.ditid.qld.gov.au/our-work/qld-ecotourism-trails/cooloola-great-walk)), e-newsletter and social media pages which are updated regularly with any and all project updates.

This document has been prepared to supplement the suite of requisite environmental and development approvals applications to be lodged for the Cooloola Great Walk.

It is not intended to give an overview of detailed technical activities to date on the project but rather to provide an account of the various community and stakeholder engagement activities at and across the project. Importantly, this report articulates how the project has responded dynamically to the Traditional Owners, expert advice and market feedback.

A summary of these activities and outcomes is provided at Appendix A with a detailed account of each phase provided within this report.

## Queensland Ecotourism Trails feasibility

In 2018, the Department of Innovation and Tourism Industry Development, the Department of Environment and Science and Tourism and Events Queensland was requested to deliver adventure and ecotourism experiences at iconic Queensland destinations, including within or adjacent to national parks.

Proposed locations were considered against three key criteria of site attributes; environmental, social and cultural attributes; and market factors and commercial viability. A further eighteen sub-criteria were also used to assess sites. The criteria were developed to assist with the identification of destinations that may be suitable for ecotourism developments in iconic natural landscapes.

The criteria used in the site selection process were based on the *Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2016-2020*, the *Ecotourism Implementation Framework* and the *Best Practice Ecotourism Development Guidelines*, as well as initial market sounding.

The opportunity to enhance the Cooloola Great Walk scored highly across all criteria, with the only concern relating to existing funding programs and government investment.

## Social PinPoint

A key activity undertaken in 2019 was consultation with the community in which the Project Team asked the community to share their ideas and knowledge about the Cooloola Great Walk to assist with new ecotourism offerings. The formal community consultation period was held from 31 May 2019 to 22 August 2019 using the online platform, Social PinPoint. To advise the community that the community consultation was underway, advertisements appeared in local newspapers, digital ads were created for online news outlets and Facebook advertising was utilised.

A summary of engagement processes and outcomes is outlined below:

- 4,180 total visits to Social PinPoint
- 37 comments from 17 individuals
- 100% of respondents were from Queensland
- 11,800+ people reached through Facebook
- All comments were monitored daily and added to a comment tracker and remained private on Social Pinpoint

Comments and questions were addressed in accordance with the Queensland Ecotourism Trail Program's Terms and Conditions provided on the Social PinPoint site, which sets out the instances where Tourism Development Projects Division responds directly.

## Conservation engagement

Throughout the project lifecycle, the project team has engaged with conservation interest groups through structured processes and via correspondence. To date, dealings have largely been with the National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) and Noosa Parks Association (NPA).

Whilst these groups are generally supportive of the establishment of the enhanced Cooloola Great Walk, a number of concerns have been raised and are noted below:

- Transparency on decision making processes
- Eco-accommodation sites and facilities should not be permitted within National Park tenure
- The State has not provided approvals documentation for public comment

The Project Team has responded to all correspondence for the Cooloola Great Walk and continues to engage with conservation groups. A register of correspondence received and issued in this regard is provided at Appendix B. It is important to note this register accounts only for formally submitted pieces of correspondence and does not include the regular informal discussions held between conservation groups and members of the Project Team and Tourism Development Projects Division's Projects Chief Executive.

## Noosa Shire Council and Gympie Regional Council

The Project Team commenced discussions with Noosa Shire Council and Gympie Regional Council when the project commenced. A summary is included below:

**Table 1 – Council Engagement Register**

Date	Council	Meeting purpose
31/07/2019	Gympie Regional Council	Discuss Cooloola Great Walk and renewal of Commercial Activity Permits for existing operators
10/10/2019	Noosa Shire Council	Update on Cooloola Great Walk
04/11/2019	Gympie Regional Council	Update on market process
23/01/2020	Noosa Shire Council	Update on Cooloola Great Walk
24/02/2020	Gympie Regional Council	Project update
21/05/2020	Noosa Shire Council	Update of Cooloola Great Walk

## Traditional Owner engagement

A key objective of the Queensland Ecotourism Trails (QET) Program is to secure long-term job and business opportunities for Traditional Owners. Through the QET Program, the Queensland Government has been conducting meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners who have a native title claim or assert a native title interest in relation to trail area.

For the Cooloola Great Walk, the Queensland Government is engaging with the Kabi Kabi People.

Engagement with the Traditional Owner Group is ongoing and paramount to the successful delivery of the enhanced Cooloola Great Walk. Traditional Owners will be involved throughout all stages of the project – particularly during the procurement process for the eco-accommodation operator.

**Table 2 – Traditional Owners Engagement Register**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting purpose</b>
14/03 – 15/03/2019	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
12/06 – 14/06/2019	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
13/08 – 15/08/2019	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
04/09/2019	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
05/09/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
05/09/2019	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
20/09/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
14/10/2019	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
24/10/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
30/10/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
08/11/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
21/11/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
29/11/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
17/12/2019	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
23/01/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
28/01/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
29/01/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
24/02 – 27/02/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
04/03/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
10/03/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
19/03 – 20/03/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
23/03 – 26/03/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
24/03/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
26/03/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
31/03/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
02/04/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
02/04/2020	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
12/05 – 14/05/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
21/06 – 22/06/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
12/08 – 13/08/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
17/08/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)
30/11 – 2/12/2020	Site visit (Kabi Kabi and Government)

08/04/2021	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)
19/05 – 20/05/2021	Project meeting (Kabi Kabi and Government)

## Market engagement

In October 2018, Minister for State Development, Tourism and Innovation, The Honourable Kate Jones MP, announced that Expressions of Interest had commenced on the Cooloola Great Walk. This announcement kick-started the process for the Project Team to commence market engagement. The Market Engagement period was held between October and November 2018 in which the Project Team worked with Tourism Operators who wish to be considered, including demonstrated track record in delivering world-class, ecotourism experiences

The market indicated, amongst other items, a strong desire for the State to retain the management and maintenance of any public walking trails and public camping areas.

As one of the foundational objectives for the enhanced Cooloola Great Walk is to minimise the project's impacts on Protected Areas, evident in the value engineering exercises completed to this point. Utilising the existing trail and infrastructure wherever possible minimises any additional impacts on the protected areas.

## Interstate Engagement and Project Benchmarking

In August 2019, the project team attended a hosted study tour to the Grampians National Park with Parks Victoria to discuss their project experience with the Grampians Peak Trail and seek advice on the proposed Cooloola Great Walk delivery framework.

The study tour was extremely beneficial – validating the proposed delivery framework for the Cooloola Great Walk – whilst also offering the following learnings:

- Engagement with Traditional Owner Groups during early design development is critical
- Important to specify design standards and infrastructure before tendering works contracts
- Consistent and constant engagement with the market is necessary to test product and maintain interest and readiness
- Transparency with approvals processes and interest groups is paramount.

## Engagement by CABN

CABN have been committed to conducting their own engagement to understand key stakeholders and work closely with them to deliver the project.

This has included:

- Meeting with Noosa Parks Association to discuss project plans, product designs and site locations;
- Regular discussions and meetings with the Kabi Kabi People;
- Meeting with representatives from Visit Sunshine Coast, the Regional Tourism Organisation, to discuss the local market and opportunities;
- Meeting with representatives from Gympie Regional Council and Noosa Shire Council to discuss local stakeholder opportunities and broader benefits for the region.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Project Lifecycle Engagement Activities Summary

PHASE	ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	STATUS	OUTCOME
CONCEPT	Canvas industry appetite	Completed	Industry support secured
	Secure government support	Completed	Project concept endorsed by government and adopted
	Engage with Traditional Owners	Completed	Agreement executed with Traditional Owners
EXPRESSION OF INTEREST	Engage core project stakeholders	Completed	Project Control Group established
	Test the project feasibility	Completed	Environmental and cultural heritage advisors engaged
	Benchmark against best practices	Completed	Project delivery framework determined as best practice and nation-leading
	Liaise with industry through a formal process	Completed	Market appetite secured and EOI responses submitted
	Consult with the community	Completed	Community engaged through a formal process (Social PinPoint)
	Consult with interest groups	Completed	Interest groups engaged and project framework clarified
	Engage community	Completed	Community updated on status of approvals and upcoming project activities
REQUEST FOR DETAILED PROPOSALS	Assess project submissions	Completed	Private sector engaged through the formal process
APPROVALS	Lodge documentation with assessment authorities	Underway	Pre-lodgement meetings and clarification processes have assisted refinement of project documentation and delivery framework
	Continued engagement with interest groups	Underway	Continue engagement with interest groups underway to further clarify project delivery framework and upcoming consultation activities
	Continued engagement with the community	Underway	Continue to provide project updates
	Continue partnership with Traditional Owners	Underway	Finalisation of Indigenous Land Use Agreements underway
DELIVERY	Continued engagement with interest groups	Underway	Continue engagement with interest groups underway to further clarify project delivery framework and upcoming consultation activities
	Continued engagement with the community	Underway	Continue to provide project updates
	Continue partnership with Traditional Owners	Underway	Finalisation of Indigenous Land Use Agreements underway

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## Appendix B: Interest Groups Correspondence Register

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND (NPAQ)				
Date	From	To	Subject	Summary
23/10/2018	NPAQ	Minister Jones	NPAQ response to eco-tourism EOI	Concerns regarding impacts of ecotourism in national parks and seeking clarification on project process
19/03/2019	NPAQ	DDG Ecotourism	Ecotourism in National Parks Expression of Interest - Participatory Process	Concerns regarding process, consultation and transparency
22/08/2019	NPAQ	DDG Ecotourism	NPAQ Submission - Cooloolool Great Walk	Concerns regarding impacts of ecotourism along Cooloolool Great Walk
21/10/2019	DDG Ecotourism	NPAQ	RE: NPAQ Submission - Cooloolool Great Walk	Responding to concerns raised
NOOSA PARKS ASSOCIATION (NPA)				
Date	From	To	Subject	Summary
22/08/2019	NPA	DDG Ecotourism	Cooloolool Great Walk Proposal Submission	Concerns regarding impacts of ecotourism along Cooloolool Great Walk
03/10/2019	DDG Ecotourism	NPA	RE: Cooloolool Great Walk Proposal Submission	Responding to concerns raised
SUNSHINE COAST ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL (SCEC)				
Date	From	To	Subject	Summary
24/09/2019	SCEC	DDG Ecotourism	Cooloolool Great Walk-Eco Trail submission	Concerns regarding impacts of ecotourism along Cooloolool Great Walk
17/10/2019	DDG Ecotourism	SCEC	RE: Cooloolool Great Walk-Eco Trail submission	Responding to concerns raised
WIDE BAY BURNETT ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL (WBEC)				
Date	From	To	Subject	Summary
28/11/2019	WBEC	Minister Jones	Transparency for eco-tourism proposals	Concerns regarding impacts of ecotourism along Cooloolool Great Walk and lack of publicly available information
15/01/2020	Minister Jones	WBEC	RE: Transparency for eco-tourism proposal	Responding to concerns raised

