

**Submission to the Coordinator General:**

Aquis Resort at the Great Barrier Reef Coordinated Project  
Environmental Impact Statement (June 2014)

**Cairns Regional Council**

5 August 2014

**COMMUNITY STATEMENT**



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## **1 Introduction**

The Submission by Cairns Regional Council (CRC) responds to the public notification of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Integrated Resort Development proposed by the Aquis Resort at the Great Barrier Reef Pty Ltd (Aquis, or the Proponent).

Details of the EIS and related matters can be found at the Proponent's website at <http://aquiscasino.com/> and at the State's Department of State Development Infrastructure and Planning website at <http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/assessments-and-approvals/aquis-resort-at-the-great-barrier-reef-project.html>.

This Community Statement outlines:

- 1.1 The context for the CRC's commitment to the major growth management response required to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development, and at the same time to capture the major benefits for the City and Far North Queensland;
- 1.2 A description of the main components of the proposed development, including some of its features;
- 1.3 A list of the Expert Reports the CRC has commissioned to assist it to assess the EIS;
- 1.4 Examples of important macro and micro impacts of the proposed development;
- 1.5 Strategies to provide housing for the new workforce;
- 1.6 The need for a tripartite Infrastructure Agreement (including bring-forward infrastructure) between the Proponent, the State, and the CRC; an Aquis Local Plan; and a suite of special strategies and management plans, to which the Proponent has committed;
- 1.7 An overview of recommendations to progress the project that should be considered by the Coordinator General (CG) and the Proponent to progress the proposed development beyond the EIS phase.

## **2 Cairns Regional Council's Commitment to Major Growth Management**

The CRC understands that the development process provides for this EIS assessment by both the State and Commonwealth governments, and that, if a favourable evaluation is concluded about the project (with or without conditions) the Proponent is then required to lodge development applications with the CRC for assessment and approval.

It is these subsequent development applications that will provide more specific details of the proposed development, its on-site and off-site impacts, and the management strategies and plans to deal with those impacts. This places a significant responsibility on the CRC to ensure that the construction and operation of the proposed development is undertaken in ways that the many projected benefits can be realised for the Cairns region, its economy, its community and its environment.

There is support for projects that bring significant economic growth and potential to the Cairns (and Far North Queensland) Region. Growth that occurs as a result of the proposed development and the flow on impacts to the region more broadly is a cumulative impact which Council and the State government will need to respond to accordingly.

The CRC notes that the Proponent has nominated strategies to manage its consequential impacts, but consideration should be given to the need to manage the broader risk.

The EIS and its commitments describe those impacts directly linked to the proposed development (i.e. as a direct consequence of the project). To manage the risk of the gap between consequential and cumulative impacts as a result of the development, it is considered that a broader assessment of the cumulative impacts is necessary so as to be able to assess the proposed development's benefits holistically. The CRC wants the community to realise the benefits including a reciprocal and commensurate delivery of all necessary infrastructure and services to manage and support the growing Cairns community. This needs to occur as a tripartite partnership between the Proponent, the State and the CRC, and a commitment from the State to reinvest its gains into the Cairns community.

### **3 A Major Project**

The proposed development is of a size and scale that has not been seen in North Queensland, and perhaps across Australia.

The EIS states ... *Development (is) to be constructed in two stages in 2014-2018 for Stage 1 and 2020-2024 for Stage 2. The elements, capital expenditure and timing for each stage are shown in Table 4-3.*

Table 4-3 Resort Complex Elements for Each Stage

|   | Stage 1   |                            | Stage 2   |                            |
|---|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| <b>Capital Expenditure</b>                      | \$5.05B   |                            | \$3.10B   |                            |
| Operational Staff                               | 11,000    |                            | 9,000     |                            |
| Construction labour                             | 3,750     |                            | 3,500     |                            |
| Timing  | 2014-2018 |                            | 2020-2024 |                            |
| <b>Element</b>                                  | <b>No</b> | <b>GFA (m<sup>2</sup>)</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>GFA (m<sup>2</sup>)</b> |
| Hotel Rooms/Suites configured in 8 towers       | 4,000     | 330,000                    | 3,500     | 295,000                    |
| Casinos   | 1         | 20,000                     | 1         | 20,000                     |
| Convention & Exhibition                         | 1         | 23,000                     |           |                            |
| Theatres  | 1         | 2,500                      | 1         | 2,500                      |
| Retail  |           | 6,100                      |           | 3,900                      |
| Aquarium (architectural feature)                | 1         | 2,250                      |           |                            |
| Rainforest (architectural feature)              |           |                            | 1         | 2,500                      |
| Circulation/shared space/back-of-house/services |           | 230,000                    |           | 120,000                    |
| Guest/staff parking                             | 1,070     | 45,000                     | 330       | 35,000                     |
| Landscaping/lagoons/pools/entry water feature   |           | 110,000                    |           |                            |

Other features of the proposed development which set it apart from more typical resort projects are set out in the EIS. Some of these features are:

- **Architecture:** The representation of the concept of ‘tropical urbanism’ in the imagery displayed in the EIS;
- **Shelter in Place:** *The ground floor or podium level will be constructed to achieve immunity from the Probable Maximum Flood (6.5 m Australian Height Datum). Safe refuge above the level of the PMF, or extreme storm surge event, is provided for guests and staff based on a ‘shelter-in-place’ strategy, supported by emergency power, stores, medical facilities, water supplies and waste storage.*
- **Car Parking:** *Car parking will be provided in the basement of the resort complex (1400 spaces) with an area available in the sports and recreation precinct available to accommodate up to 3000 vehicles for staff parking.*
- **Ownership:** No elements of the resort will be available for sale. All assets and facilities are owned by a single entity. There will be no Body Corporate.

- **Target Market:** The mix of accommodation guests (up to 1,000,000 pa) will be sourced from the following origins: International 74%, Interstate 9%, Intrastate 6%, FNQ Region 11%. The overwhelming majority of guests will access the resort via Cairns Airport (international and domestic terminals) and will transfer to the resort via courtesy coaches.
- **Entertainment Facilities:** The entertainment facilities are anticipated to attract approximately 500,000 visitors annually who will be accommodated elsewhere.
- **24/7 Operation:** The facility will operate on a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week basis, with the accommodation and casino operating continuously.
- **Foreshore Access:** The development of the project will not impede public access to the foreshore. There is no plan to install infrastructure to facilitate Aquis Resort guests access to the public foreshore.

The approximate proposed peak construction workforce of 3,750, the proposed operational workforce of 20,000, and the projected additional 1,000,000 tourists per annum will bring forward the planned population forecast for Cairns from approximately 30 years to 10 years.

#### **4 Council's Detailed Analysis of the EIS**

Expert reports have analysed the EIS in terms of:

- Economics;
- Social Impacts;
- Town Planning;
- Water and Waste Water infrastructure;
- Water & Waste Water, & Soil & Ground Water;
- Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology;
- Flooding and Coastal Processes;
- Transport; and
- Visual and Landscape.

These reports have been a key component considered in preparing Council's submission.

## **5 Important Macro and Micro Impacts**

The new workers and their families, in both the construction and operational phases, and the significant increase in the numbers of tourists, will have direct impacts on Cairns and nearby areas in several ways. These impacts will have social consequences, as well as creating infrastructure issues across transport, water, waste water and other areas that are the responsibility of the CRC and the State.

Council has identified that these matters are to be addressed through the development of mitigation strategies and plans.

## **6 Housing the New Workforce**

A key impact that requires further consideration is that of housing needs of the workforce required to build and then operate the proposed development. How and where this additional population is housed has significant flow-on impacts for the CRC and for the State.

The EIS estimates a construction workforce of up to approximately 3,750 people, while the operational workforce is estimated to be 20,000 people. This latter figure does not take into account the families of those workers, so a conservative estimate would put the total population demanded by the proposed development at around 25-30,000 people (additional to the planned growth of Cairns) – about the size of the city of Gladstone. That population will need to be housed somewhere in the Cairns region, ideally as close to the development as practical. However, it is clear from the CRC's current planning for its draft new planning scheme that there is insufficient land available close to the Proponent's site if the current density, level of service and infrastructure remain unchanged.

## **7 Mitigation Strategies and Plans**

The Proponent has committed to a range of strategies, initiatives and plans that are intended to mitigate the impacts of the project.

The CRC considers these impacts to be manageable and will require:

- A tripartite Infrastructure Agreement between the Proponent, the CRC and the State which will provide for the coordination of, and the timely delivery of, the necessary additional and new infrastructure items and improvements, as well as upgrades to services;

- A development code (described as the Aquis Local Plan within the EIS), which will set the parameters for the land use and development requirements of the proposed development, and be integrated with the Infrastructure Agreement; and
- A suite of special strategies and management plans that will address the specific and particular issues and impacts that the proposed development will create and cause.

CRC maintains a position that the Proponent prepares and implements the management plans at no cost to the State or the CRC, or as otherwise appropriate by agreement. These plans include the following:

1. Community Engagement Plan
2. Workforce Development and Management Plan
3. Local Content Plan
4. Construction Management Plan
5. Strategic Change Management Plan
6. Housing and Accommodation Plan
7. Community Services and Facilities Plan
8. Community Health and Safety Plan
9. Cultural Development Plan
10. Responsible Gaming Plan
11. Cultural Heritage Management Plan
12. An Economic Risk Management Plan

## **8 Recommendations to Progress the Project**

The CRC recommends that:

- 1 The Proponent undertake the following to assist the CG to make a comprehensive and informed decision:
  - a. Confirm the proposed development statistics and conduct additional analysis of social impacts to confirm the projected population growth, workforce and social infrastructure to support the growing community;
  - b. Develop an agreed Housing Strategy;

- c. Commit to providing any necessary temporary workers accommodation facility as a result of the housing strategy that may assist in mitigating any short term impacts on the housing sector, associated social impacts and infrastructure networks;
  - d. Confirm commitments to and plans for appropriate travel management options for employees during both construction and operational phases of the project;
  - e. Commit to an Infrastructure Agreement, and ensure agreement is reached on objectives and principles of such by relevant parties; and
  - f. Commit to a development code (nominally the Aquis Local Plan) to an agreed standard with CRC.
- 2 The CG considers conditions in the evaluation report to:
- a. Prepare and seek agreement on the committed plans and strategies that are necessary to mitigate impacts of the project;
  - b. Undertake the necessary infrastructure improvements to service the project, and as necessary by way of an infrastructure agreement;
  - c. Undertake the development in accordance with the master plan for the project and the relevant development code;
  - d. Mitigate visual impacts and light spill where possible;
  - e. Sequence the staging of development to ensure the casino is constructed during the first stage of development;
  - f. Provide for a bond to manage the risk of any restoration works should they become necessary;
  - g. Prepare an isolation plan to integrate the project (during construction and operation phases) with local disaster management plans;
  - h. Prepare travel management plans to manage impacts of construction and operational workforces and mitigate impacts by infrastructure improvements and housing responses;
  - i. Confirm the details of water and wastewater demand assumptions reached in the EIS, and demonstrate the serviceability of the project; and
  - j. Prepare Environment Management Plans that include details of:
    - i. earthworks staging;
    - ii. acid sulfate soils management;
    - iii. Water quality sampling, objectives and monitoring; and

- iv. lake design and operation; and
  - v. Any other matters that is relevant to the construction or operational phases of the project that require monitoring, management or corrective actioning.
- 3 The CG includes directions in the evaluation report to ensure the Proponent provides the following within subsequent development applications:
- a. Any matter raised in the process of the addressing conditions or outcomes of the CG's evaluation report;
  - b. Demonstration of the concurrent actions under an Infrastructure Agreement to support the development application;
  - c. The Aquis Local Plan, and demonstrated compliance with the local plan; and
  - d. Mapping and analysis which underpins and provides proof of concept of the proposed design and measures to address flooding and coastal processes.

## **9. Conclusion**

The proposed development is of a size and complexity that has not been seen in Far North Queensland, and perhaps across Australia.

The CRC has identified that the proposed development will have a range of impacts on, and benefits for, Cairns and the Far North Queensland region.

The CRC has analysed the available information about the proposed development, and retained experts across a range of pertinent fields to assist with this analysis.

The CRC has detailed the matters which it recommends the CG considers in the evaluation of the EIS. It has also identified matters that need to be addressed as part of the development application to be lodged with the CRC.

The depth and relevance of this analysis and the clear path forward will enable the CG and the Proponent to make significant positive moves immediately, so as to ensure the Proponent's interests and timelines, and those of the State, are assisted.

The CRC will continue to work collaboratively with the State and the Proponent to develop a world class resort, one which delivers significant and long term legacy of benefits to Cairns and the Far North Queensland communities.

The CRC will welcome the opportunity to proactively and responsibly assist the parties to achieve these goals.