

ORDINARY MEETING 25 NOVEMBER 2009	9
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CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED ROAD CLOSURE, PART OF MOSSMAN GORGE ROAD MOSSMAN – INDIGENOUS LAND CORPORATION GATEWAY PROJECT – DIV 10

L. Collyer: 15/7/1-08 #2391045

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council uses the information contained in this report, regarding feedback from community consultation, to inform its decision in respect of any Development Application submitted by the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) for the development of The Mossman Gorge Gateway Project and any subsequent request for road closure.

INTRODUCTION:

Mossman Gorge is a site of great significance for locals and visitors to the area. Internationally recognised as a World Heritage site, the Gorge holds significant cultural value to the local Aboriginal community and is an important place for locals to visit and enjoy its pristine waters and rainforest.

In June 2008, the Indigenous Land Corporation through Federal Government funding, acquired an 8.4 ha block of freehold land located 2km from the Gorge on Mossman Gorge Road, which is the site of the proposed Gateway Centre.

The Mossman Gorge Gateway Centre will be a nationally-significant eco-tourism facility designed to provide world class tourism experiences to the hundreds of thousands of people who visit the Gorge annually.

At the Ordinary Meeting of 22 April 2009, Council provided the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) with in-principle support for the temporary closure of Mossman Gorge Road. Conditions of the in-principle support included the undertaking of public consultation on the road closure to be carried out by Council Officers from Community and Cultural Services who would work closely with officers from the ILC.

The findings of this consultation are the subject of this report to Council.

BACKGROUND:

Mossman Gorge is host to over half a million visitors annually (based on 2001-2002 Queensland Government Reporting figures). Locals, combined with national and international tourists, contribute to the visitor numbers. It is one of the most visited natural sites in Australia. A recent study undertaken by James Cook University has projected that the number of visitors to the Gorge may rise to 780,000 annually by 2010.

Approximately 90,000 motor vehicles travel to Mossman Gorge each year - an average of 250 vehicles travelling the Mossman Gorge Road to the Gorge lookout car park per day. There are currently only 30 car parking spaces at the Gorge.

Due to the small number of existing parking spaces, vehicles are currently forced to park on the roadside creating single lane traffic in places along the Gorge Road.

The existing road is narrow and winding with challenging sight distances. To get to the Gorge, traffic goes through the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community and presents a danger to young children and residents in the Gorge community, as well as safety concerns for tourists.

Over a decade ago, initial discussions commenced on developing a holistic approach to addressing both the growing tourism needs of the Mossman Gorge and the needs of the local Aboriginal community. The aspirations of the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community are strongly focused on self-sufficiency and include securing employment opportunities, preserving cultural and environmental sites and attending to health, well-being and public safety issues for visitors and the community itself.

Collaboration between the local Aboriginal community in the Gorge and the ILC saw the development of plans for establishing a nationally significant tourism business at Mossman Gorge. The business plans for the Visitor Centre concept include:

- Visitor Car Park for in excess of 200 vehicles
- Passenger terminal for electric shuttle buses to transport tourists to Mossman Gorge National Park
- Indigenous guided walks
- Indigenous art gallery and gift shop
- Café
- Residential tourism and hospitality training facility for 20 Indigenous trainees per year (for placement in the industry); and
- Event / conference space

After years of discussions and juggling ideas, feasibility studies into the project were completed in 2006/07.

In 2007 the former Douglas Shire Council approved the development for the Passenger Terminal, Interpretative Centre and Car Park. While the approval did not specifically deal with the road closure "application", Council subsequently commissioned Cardno Eppell Olsen to investigate options and recommend a preferred position regarding the road closure.

In March 2008, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, announced that the ILC:

“plans to develop the site to international tourism standards to provide proper car and bus parking away from the environmentally sensitive areas and to build an eco-friendly electric bus transit system to the gorge, an environmental and Indigenous interpretive centre and art gallery and café’ along with guided culture walks. The major eco- tourism plan will deliver significant economic benefits to the Mossman community and will provide training and real jobs in the tourism and hospitality industries to local Indigenous people”.

In June 2008 the ILC acquired an 8.4ha block of freehold land 2km from the Gorge, which is the site of the proposed Gateway Centre.

The ILC has committed sixteen million dollars in-principle funds for the development of the Gateway Project.

At the Ordinary Meeting of Cairns Regional Council held on 22 April 2009, it was resolved that: “Council advise the ILC that it in principle supports the temporary closure, commencing at the boundary of the National Park (L20NPW695) back to the current Gorge car park, subject but not limited to the following:

1. Public consultation

- That ILC provide Council with a fully costed business plan (including implementation timeframes) to inform the public consultation process
- Council undertake a detailed public consultation and that the cost that Council incurs in undertaking the public consultation be met by ILC.
- The outcomes of the consultation shall be subject to further consideration by Council and may require Council to alter its position or impose other conditions.

2. Dependant on one above, Council will pursuant to the *Local Government Act*, then give consideration to, on behalf of ILC, undertaking the road closure, provided that:

(a) A legal agreement being entered into between Council and ILC which will require amongst other things:

- ILC obtaining any and all necessary permits / approvals prior to road closure works commencing.
- Council and ILC negotiating responsibility for the ongoing capital, operational and maintenance costs associated with the closed road, such as changes to road signs, installation of gates or bollards and the like, as well as any other physical changes identified by Council as being necessary.
- Council shall require that access for emergency services, and Council vehicles will be maintained.
- Arrangements shall be established to allow for continued access to the Gorge for people with an authorised disability parking permit.

In March / April 2009, a development application was lodged on behalf of the ILC with Cairns Regional Council for the development of the Mossman Gorge Gateway Project. This application was required as the project had been upgraded from the original plans submitted in 2007 to now incorporate a tourist attraction and training centre.

The construction of the Gateway Project requires the closure of Mossman Gorge Road once the car park and transit terminal have been completed and are fully operational. Plans propose for the new car park and visitor centre to be located approximately 2.2 km from the actual Gorge on Mossman Gorge Road.

It is proposed that a boom gate be erected on Mossman Gorge Road at the site of the visitor centre and car park to restrict vehicle access to the Gorge. Modifications will be made to the existing road to enable the road to be shared by shuttles, pedestrians and bicycles.

COMMENT:

Whilst the Council Resolution of 22 April 2009 requested the ILC provide Council with a fully costed business plan (including implementation timeframes) to inform the public consultation process, after discussions between the ILC and Council's then CEO, it was agreed, that the fully costed business plan was "Commercial in Confidence" and was not relevant to the consultation process.

Consultations regarding the proposed Gateway Project commenced a number of years ago when the Gateway was just a concept well before it had progressed to the stage it is today of being a fully costed and funded development proposal.

The ILC has established a Mossman Gorge Development Steering Committee which is made up of community, industry and government representatives who give their time voluntarily to oversee the project's construction, the development of the business and to provide sound project governance.

The committee is convened by the ILC and is made up of representatives from the following organisations:

- National Australia Bank
- Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Incorporated (BBNI) and members of the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community
- Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation
- Novotel Cairns Oasis Resort
- Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre
- Tourism Tropical North Queensland
- Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management (formerly Environmental Protection Authority)
- Local Business Operators; and
- Far North Queensland Tour Operators Association.

Since 2007, the Mossman Gorge Community has been involved in a number of consultations regarding the project including, but not limited to, discussions about job opportunities, centre design, landscape design and footpath alignment.

Consultation on the project has also occurred through the Mossman Gorge Negotiation Table, which is part of the Australian and Queensland Governments' Local Indigenous Partnership Agreement (LIPA).

Other consultations have included a deputation to Cairns Regional Council in February 2009, meetings with the President of the Mossman Chamber of Commerce and the Far North Queensland Tour Operators Association.

Taking into consideration the number of consultation opportunities that had already occurred in relation to the Gateway Project, it was decided to provide the community with an up-to-date and accurate Information Pack. This pack provides background on the project and also addresses some of the issues that had informally been raised in the community regarding the proposed road closure. The information addresses many of the questions that have been raised throughout the community consultation process to date through a question and answer section and provides a platform for ongoing communication on the project in the future. (A copy of the Information Pack is included as an attachment to this report).

Whilst the consultation requested by Council is in relation to the proposed road closure, it was important the community understand the background to the project and also what it involves and how it will impact on the local community.

The Mossman Gorge Gateway Project Community Information Pack was available to the community from Friday 10 July 2009 via the following outlets:

- Council website
- Council's Customer Service Centre's in Cairns and Mossman
- Council's Mossman Library
- Council's stand at the Mossman Show on 19-20 July 2009
- Council's Information Stand at the Annual NAIDOC Week Parade and Family Fun Day held in George Davis Park Mossman on 31 July 2009
- Distributed through the Community Agency Network (CAN); and
- Distributed to the Douglas Advisory Board.

A media release announcing the launch of the Information Package was released on 16 July, 2009 and notification regarding the availability of the package was included in the Council Corner advertisement appearing in the Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette on 23 July and The Cairns Post on 25 July 2009. A copy of the Media Release and Council Corner advertisements are included as attachments to this report.

The launch of the pack generated interest from the print and electronic media and subsequently a number of articles appeared in the media regarding the Gateway Project.

Council's website received 109 hits on the Mossman Gorge Information Pack Consultation link and the Information Package was also downloaded 96 times.

Council encouraged community participation and feedback on the Information Package and the proposed road closure. Written feedback and comments were to be received by Council by Friday 31 July 2009 via email or post.

During the consultation period a total of 21 written comments were received. These comments were grouped into the following categories with the number of responses per category also included:

• Access issues for local residents	5
• Issues for the Traditional Owners	1
• Issues for Kayakers	3
• Issues for Tour Operators	5
• Request for further clarification on information	2
• General comments	4
• Support from Department Of Environment & Resource Management (DERM)	1
Total Responses	21

A copy of all the comments received by Council were forwarded to the ILC. Council requested a response on how the ILC plan to address the issues that had been raised. After the ILC had discussed some of the matters raised by groups such as the Kayakers and Tourist Operators, a meeting was then held with the ILC to gather their responses and strategies to address the issues raised. These strategies are included in this part of the report.

A summary of the general comments relating to the categories identified and the ILC responses follows:

Access issues for local residents

Many of these issues related to changes in the way locals currently access the site if there was to be a road closure. Some comments received made it clear that the authors had not read the Information Pack that addressed issues around continued capacity to access the Gorge and also the cost of accessing the Gorge shuttle service.

Response

To maintain access to the Gorge by locals, the ILC has offered the following:

All visitors will have free parking at the new Gateway Centre and the option to walk or ride their personal bicycles for free.

People in the geographic area that entitles eligibility for the Daintree River Ferry Concession Travel Card, will also be entitled to unlimited free shuttle bus rides to the Gorge.

Locals will still be able to access the Gorge using their own vehicles when the boom gate and shuttle buses are not operating during the hours of 6.00pm and 6.30am. At this stage the ILC plan for the Gateway Centre to be opened and operational 365 days a year.

Access issues for people with a disability have also been considered in the planning. Accessibility and usability of all buildings, facilities and shuttle buses at the Gateway Centre will be constructed in accordance with the Building Code of Australia, *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992) and Disability Standards for Access to premises (2000).

The ILC acknowledge that many locals enjoy picnics at the Gorge along the banks of the Mossman River and ensure there is space on the shuttle buses for locals to place limited accessories such as their eskies. The ILC is currently investigating the possibility of also providing lockers at the Gorge to enable people to safely house their personal possessions whilst swimming or bushwalking.

Issues for Traditional Owners

The issues presented from a Traditional Owner also focussed around access specifically to places of cultural significance for the purposes of cultural mapping and recording. Access to Traditional Owners who live outside of the former Douglas Shire Local Government Area was also raised.

Response

There will be no restriction to access for Traditional Owners for the purpose of cultural recording and mapping. Traditional Owners in the geographic area entitled to the Daintree River Ferry Concession Travel Card, will be able to park their vehicles at the Gateway car park and travel free of charge on the shuttle buses to the Gorge. Traditional Owners who live outside of the proposed concession travel card area and who are proposing to carry out cultural recording and mapping will be able to access free shuttle transfers during the time of their cultural recording and mapping upon application at the Centre. Equipment such as sound and camera recording equipment can be accommodated on the shuttle service.

Issues for Kayakers

A group of local paddlers access the Gorge to kayak down the Mossman River. This activity generally happens during the wet season (Dec–March). The kayaks are generally 2 to 2.5 metres long and each weigh approximately 20kg. Kayakers generally paddle in groups utilising a trailer to convey their kayaks to the Gorge. The main issues identified by the kayaking group relates to transportation of their kayaks to the Gorge.

Response

The ILC discussed the matter with the kayaking group and have offered to provide the group with access to a Gateway employee upon arrival at the boom gate area. This employee will take up the passenger seat in the car and will be equipped with two-way communications to the shuttle bus drivers. They will guide the kayak trailer driver up to the Gorge for a fee, where the other kayakers who have travelled by shuttle bus will wait, to assist with disembarking the kayaks. The Gateway employee will then travel back down to the Gateway car park with the trailer driver where they can park their vehicle and catch the next shuttle back up to the Gorge to meet with the kayaking group. The ILC have stated that the kayaking group consider this to be an appropriate resolution to the issues they raised.

Issues for Tour Operators

The issues consistently identified by Tour Operators relate to possible delays in their existing tight schedules of their visit to the Gorge. They are concerned about waiting times to transfer passengers from their vehicles to the shuttle buses. The matter of additional costs impacting on their tours with the inclusion of the shuttle bus fares in addition to existing permit costs to DERM to conduct tours in the Gorge was also raised. Timeframes for printing promotional and travel brochures to include the changes to how the Gorge will be accessed and increased tour charges was also a concern for some operators.

Response

The ILC acknowledged the need to build strong relationships with Tour Operators and to ensure there are clear communication channels between the Gateway Project and Tour Operators, particularly in managing the transition phase of the project.

Concerns regarding waiting for available shuttle buses and possible delays to existing tight tour schedules have been addressed by the ILC. Tour operators will be able to book dedicated shuttle buses for set times prior to visiting the Gateway Centre. The shuttle bus will be waiting at that time and be for the sole use of the tour operator.

Tour Operators are represented on the Mossman Gorge Development Steering Committee by the Far North Queensland Tour Operators Association (FNQTOA) and Tourism Tropical North Queensland.

Through FNQTOA, it has been identified that operators in the International Inbound Tourism Market would be adversely affected if they were unable to continue to take their vehicles to the existing car park area of the Gorge up until the period of March 2011.

Products such as the Gorge being marketed to the International Tourism Market have already been locked in place with International market clients for the period up until March 2011.

Discussions between FNQTOA and the ILC have occurred. ILC supports that the four identified International Inbound Tourism Market operators, who account for 10-12 vehicles per day being mostly Coaster buses, will be granted access to the existing car park until March 2011. Logistics of how this will be managed safely are to be developed by the ILC.

The ILC are offering a 20% discount on the shuttle bus fares for persons travelling in tour groups. The proposed fare is \$3.20 per person return as opposed to the standard adult fare of \$4.00 per person return.

Some operators claim in their submissions they are already paying for permits to DERM (the former EPA) to take their customers to the Gorge and that paying for the shuttle bus will mean they are paying twice. It is the Officers understanding that the permits granted by DERM to tour operators for the Gorge is not a cost to access the Gorge but a permit to run guided walks in the Gorge. Therefore tourists on existing tour groups are currently not being charged to actually enter the Gorge but the Operator is paying for a permit to conduct their business of guided walks in the location.

Request for further clarification on information

These requests related to staffing issues at the centre, retail outlets operating from the centre and a request to know which local business operators are involved with the Steering Committee (none of these issues related to the proposed road closure).

Another matter was raised highlighting the need to ensure that local young people who, due to their age, may not be the holder in their household of the Concession Ferry Card, will be able to use other forms of ID such as school ID to ensure they can travel free on the shuttle.

Response

These requests were submitted to the ILC and the matter of appropriate ID for young local people accessing free shuttle bus services will be addressed by the ILC.

General comments

The feedback received categorised as general comments included general support for the project, ideas regarding availability of bikes or scooters for hire from the centre, and a yearly review involving community stakeholders to enable locals to raise concerns and put forward ideas.

A few comments related to the need to maintain the natural beauty of the Gorge and the need to reduce environmental degradation of the area.

Some feedback received displayed resistance by some locals to embrace a new way of accessing the Gorge.

Some comments related to what some considered as a short consultation period regarding the proposed road closure.

A couple of responses mentioned impacts on Aboriginal burial sites in the local area. Whilst this matter is not directly related to the proposed road closure it was considered important to investigate. Division 10 Councillor Cr Leu and Council Officers from the Mossman Administration Office, accompanied Traditional Owners to the site of the Aboriginal cemetery at Mossman Gorge. The Traditional Owners present were satisfied that the actual location of the proposed Gateway Project is not on the land area of the existing cemetery and the cemetery is not accessible from the land owned by the ILC for the development of the proposed Gateway Project.

Response

The consultation period of 21 days is consistent with government planning and development consultation timeframe processes.

Support from DERM

A letter of support for the proposed road closure was received from the Associate Director - General of DERM. The support was extended on the basis that local residents are provided with access to the proposed shuttle bus service free of charge.

Response

Free access to the shuttle bus by local residents is included as part of the ILC proposal.

CONSIDERATIONS:**Corporate and Operational Plans:**

The consultation around the proposed road closure for the development of the Mossman Gorge Gateway Proposal links to following Goals and Objectives of Council:

Goal 1: Caring for the Environment – To ensure that the natural and built environments are managed and protected in a sustainable manner.

Goal 2: Building Vibrant Communities – To build more creative, innovative and self reliant communities where participation in community life is enabled and encouraged.

Goal 3: Delivering Integrated Planning – To take an integrated approach to development that creates a sustainable region reflective of our uniqueness and tropical lifestyle.

Goal 5: Creating a Prosperous Region – To increase the region's capacity for long-term economic growth by supporting opportunities for local businesses and local employment.

Statutory:

It is proposed that the provisions of the *Local Government Act* will be used in this instance should the road closure proceed.

Policy:

This Report was prepared in accordance with Council's adopted Community Engagement Policy 1:05:01.

Financial and Risk:

Costs involved in the consultation process were insignificant and related to printing and stationary costs. These costs have been absorbed in the existing operational budget.

The full cost of the project is yet to be determined but the full costs of the road closure, its construction and the ongoing operation of the boom gate, are to the responsibility of the ILC. Council is yet to be provided with a copy of the completed Business Plan for the project from the ILC. Council's recently appointed Economic Development Officer will now be liaising with the ILC regarding the business plan issues.

Sustainability:

The Mossman Gorge Gateway Project will provide significant employment opportunities to members of the local Indigenous community. It is anticipated that once open, the Gateway will provide 40 full-time jobs in the low season increasing to approximately 70 full-time positions in the high season.

To date there have been over 85 applications for positions at the Gateway Centre. Of the 85, 30 are from Mossman Gorge residents and 55 are from the general Indigenous population. These applicants have had or will have a skills assessment and an individually tailored Job Training Program developed. Applicants have started job training and are currently being interviewed for "Job Guarantee" positions. Successful applicants will be given a "Job Guarantee". These positions will be formally announced in February 2010.

CONSULTATION:

As the purpose of this report is to provide feedback on consultation undertaken in relation to the proposed road closure of Mossman Gorge Road, the consultation strategy including how the community was consulted is included previously in this Report under the title of comments.

OPTIONS:

The information provided in this report is considered in Council's decision regarding the proposed road closure and planning application for the Gateway Project.

CONCLUSION:

That Council concur with the recommendation of this report.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Mossman Gorge Gateway Project – Community Information Pack #2157865

Attachment 2: Letter of support from Department of Environment and Resource Management #2185081

Liz Collyer

Team Leader – Community Development - Douglas

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A/q Manager – Sport, Recreation & Community Development

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General Manager - Community and Cultural Services

ATTACHMENT 1: Mossman Gorge Gateway Project – Community Information Pack

Mossman Gorge
Gateway Project

Community Consultation
Information Pack

Developed by:
Indigenous Land Corporation
and
Cairns Regional Council

July 2009

 Cairns
Regional
COUNCIL

 Australian Government
Indigenous Land Corporation

MOSSMAN GORGE GATEWAY PROJECT

COMMUNITY INFORMATION PACK

Introduction

Mossman Gorge is a site of great significance for locals and visitors to the area. Internationally recognised as a World Heritage site, the Gorge holds significant cultural value to the local Aboriginal community and is an important place for locals to visit and enjoy its pristine waters and rainforest.

The current plans to improve the amenity of its surrounds and enhance and better manage access to the site present the opportunity to outline to the community both the background and proposed future plans for the Gorge.

This Mossman Gorge Gateway Project Information Pack has been developed to provide the community with accurate information. It has been put together as a collaborative undertaking by the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC), an Australian Government statutory authority, and Cairns Regional Council. This Information Pack is part of an extensive community consultation strategy that has been operational for a number of years.

It is anticipated this Information Pack will provide not only the background to the proposed Gateway Project, but also the most up to date details concerning the project. This information addresses many of the questions that have been raised throughout the community consultation process to date and provides a platform for ongoing communication on the project in the future.

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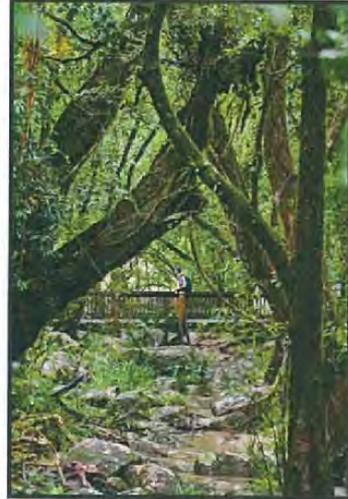
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Mossman Gorge at a glance...

Location

Mossman Gorge is located approximately 80km north of Cairns, 25km from Port Douglas and 3km west of the town of Mossman.

The Gorge itself is located on Mossman Gorge Road. It abuts the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community. The Gorge is part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Daintree National Park which was proclaimed in 1988. It formed about 400 million years ago when Australia was part of the great super-continent Gondwana and is bound by the Mossman River.



Today many plants and animals found throughout the park have undergone little evolutionary change from the ice-age survivors, which expanded from refuges millions of years ago. More than 50 animal species are unique to this area. In 1967, the Mossman Gorge section of the Daintree National Park was declared.

Traditional Owners

The Kuku Yalanji people are the Traditional Owners of the Mossman Gorge area. Their traditional country extends from south of Mossman to up near Cooktown and west to the Palmer River. The Traditional Owners have a history dating back 50,000 years to the earliest human occupation of the continent.

Site

In addition to enormous cultural significance for the Kuku Yalanji people, Mossman Gorge is an internationally recognised tourist attraction. The Gorge's combination of rainforest, swimming areas and walking trails

contribute to the location being the most frequently visited site in the Daintree National Park.

Visitors

Mossman Gorge is host to over half a million visitors annually (based on 2001-2002 Queensland Government Reporting figures). Locals, combined with national and international tourists, contribute to the visitor numbers. It is one of the most visited natural sites in Australia.

A recent study undertaken by James Cook University has projected that the number of visitors to the Gorge may rise to 780,000 annually by 2010.



Approximately 90,000 motor vehicles travel to Mossman Gorge each year - an average of 250 vehicles travelling the Mossman Gorge Road to the Gorge lookout car park per day.

Community

Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community is home to approximately 200 people. It is located on land that is a combination of Aboriginal Reserve (26.983 ha) and a freehold lot (3.887 ha), within the Cairns Regional Council Local Government Area.

Current dwellings are a combination of Department of Housing properties and freehold properties. The community has a Health and Well-Being Centre, access to a Health Clinic including services provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Division of General Practitioners and the Douglas Shire Multi-Purpose Health Service located at Mossman Hospital.

Children from the Gorge Community attend Mossman State School and Mossman State High.

Background

Over a decade ago, initial discussions commenced on developing a holistic approach to addressing both the growing tourism needs of the Mossman Gorge and the needs of the local Aboriginal community. The aspirations of the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community are strongly focused on self-sufficiency and include securing employment opportunities, preserving cultural and environmental sites and attending to health, well-being and public safety issues for visitors and the community itself.

A collaboration between the local Aboriginal community in the Gorge and the ILC saw the development of plans for establishing a nationally significant tourism business at Mossman Gorge. The business plans for the Visitor Centre concept include:

- Visitor Car Park for in excess of 200 vehicles
- Passenger terminal for electric shuttle buses to transport tourists to Mossman Gorge National Park
- Indigenous guided walks
- Indigenous art gallery and gift shop
- Café
- Residential tourism and hospitality training facility for 20 Indigenous trainees per year (for placement in the industry) and
- Event / conference space

After years of discussions and juggling ideas, feasibility studies into the project were completed in 2006/07.

In 2007 the former Douglas Shire Council approved the development for the Passenger Terminal, Interpretative Centre and Car Park. While the approval did not specifically deal with the road closure "application", Council subsequently commissioned Cardno Eppell Olsen to investigate options and recommend a preferred position regarding the road closure.

In March 2008, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, announced that the ILC:

"plans to develop the site to international tourism standards to provide proper car and bus parking away from the environmentally sensitive areas and to build an eco-friendly electric bus transit system to the gorge, an environmental and Indigenous interpretive centre and art gallery and café' along with guided culture walks. The major eco-tourism plan will deliver significant economic benefits to the Mossman community and will provide training and real jobs in the tourism and hospitality industries to local Indigenous people".

In June 2008 the ILC acquired an 8.4ha block of freehold land 2km from the Gorge, which is the site of the proposed Gateway centre.

The ILC has committed sixteen million dollars in-principle funds for the development of the Gateway Project.

In April 2009, Cairns Regional Council provided the ILC with in-principle support for the temporary closure of Mossman Gorge Road, subject to but not limited to, a number of conditions that appear further in this document under the title of Council Resolution.

In March / April 2009, a development application was lodged on behalf of the ILC with Cairns Regional Council for the development of the Mossman Gorge Gateway project. This application was required as the project had been upgraded from the original plans submitted in 2007 to now incorporate a tourist attraction and training centre.

Mossman Gorge Gateway Project

The Mossman Gorge Gateway Project will be a nationally-significant eco-tourism facility designed to provide world class tourism experiences to the hundreds of thousands of people who visit the Gorge annually.

It is a sixteen million dollar investment in the future of the Cairns region and the Far North Queensland tourism industry. It will generate 40 new local jobs immediately when the centre opens for business and up to 70 new jobs in the peak tourism season.

The project involves the construction of a modern visitor centre that will provide safe parking for 200 vehicles, specialised bays for tourist coaches, a café, art gallery and gift shop, cultural displays, guided walks and a venue that can be hired out for conferences and functions.

Thirteen million dollars of the project budget has been allocated to the design and construction of the centre, with a focus on the provision of local jobs in the design and construction processes.

It will be a hub for electric shuttle buses that will safely take visitors into the heart of the World Heritage listed rainforest area. The zero emission electric shuttle buses will help address the serious traffic and safety concerns which currently choke access and future development at Mossman Gorge.

As stated, there is currently in excess of 90,000 vehicles travelling to the Gorge each year. This averages approximately 250 vehicles per day, but there have been numerous days when 750 vehicles have travelled to the Gorge. There are currently only 30 car parking spaces at the Gorge.

Due to the small number of existing parking spaces, vehicles are currently forced to park on the roadside creating single lane traffic in places along the Gorge Road.

The existing road is narrow and winding with challenging sight distances. To get to the Gorge, traffic goes through the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community and represents a danger to young children and residents in the Gorge community, as well as safety concerns for tourists.

The Gateway will provide visitors with:

- World class, efficiently managed, tourist attractions
- Free, easy to access parking
- Opportunity to take a 16 minute return ride by electric shuttle bus to the Gorge for just \$4.00 return/adult
- Safer accessible journey through the road to the Gorge
- Access to a fully serviced café
- Opportunity to purchase gifts, souvenirs and quality Aboriginal artefacts
- Quality venue for conference and function hire complete with qualified and trained personnel
- Central point for the commencement and completion of guided walks of the Gorge led by Aboriginal Guides (includes storytelling).

The Gateway will provide locals with:

- Numerous employment opportunities in the design and construction of the facility.
- A tourism and hospitality training facility
- Approximately 40 full-time positions for local workers in the low season increasing to approximately 70 positions in the high season.
- Improved traffic management
- Free, easy access to parking
- Free use of the electric shuttle bus
- Continued free access to visit World Heritage Rainforest and Mossman Gorge

Council Resolution

The construction of the Gateway Project requires the temporary closure of Mossman Gorge Road. Plans propose for the new car park and visitor centre to be located approximately 2.2 km from the actual Gorge on Mossman Gorge Road. (See site plan below).

It is proposed that a boom gate be erected on Mossman Gorge Road at the site of the visitor centre and car park to restrict vehicle access to the Gorge. Modifications will be made to the existing road to enable the road to be shared by shuttles, pedestrians and bicycles.

A development application for The Gateway Project has been submitted to Cairns Regional Council on behalf of the ILC.

At the Ordinary Meeting of Cairns Regional Council held on 22 April 2009, it was resolved that:

"Council advise the ILC that it in principle supports the temporary closure, commencing at the boundary of the National Park (L20NPW695) back to the current Gorge car park, subject but not limited to the following:

- 1 *Public consultation*
 - *That ILC provide Council with a fully costed business plan (including implementation timeframes) to inform the public consultation process*
 - *Council undertake a detailed public consultation and that the cost that Council incurs in undertaking the public consultation be met by ILC.*
 - *The outcomes of the consultation shall be subject to further consideration by Council and may require Council to alter its position or impose other conditions.*

2 *Dependant on one above, Council will pursuant to the Local Government Act, then give consideration to, on behalf of ILC, undertaking the road closure, provided that:*

- (a) *A legal agreement being entered into between Council and ILC which will require amongst other things:*
- *ILC obtaining any and all necessary permits / approvals prior to road closure works commencing.*
 - *Council and ILC negotiating responsibility for the ongoing capital, operational and maintenance costs associated with the closed road, such as changes to road signs, installation of gates or bollards and the like, as well as any other physical changes identified by Council as being necessary.*
 - *Council shall require that access for emergency services, and Council vehicles will be maintained*
 - *Arrangements shall be established to allow for continued access to the gorge for people with an authorised disability parking permit."*

Consultation Process

Consultations regarding the proposed Gateway Project commenced a number of years ago when the Gateway was just a concept, before it had progressed the stage it is today of being a fully costed and funded development proposal.

The ILC has established a Mossman Gorge Development Steering Committee which is made up of industry and Government specialists who give their time voluntarily to oversee the project's construction, the development of the business and to provide sound project governance.

The committee is convened by the ILC and is made up of representatives from the following organisations:

- National Australia Bank
- Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Incorporated (BBNI), representing the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community
- Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation
- Novotel Cairns Oasis resort
- Cairns Indigenous Coordination Centre
- Tourism Tropical north Queensland
- Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management (formerly Environmental Protection Authority)
- Local Business Operators
- Far North Queensland Tour Operators Association
- GPT Group

Since late 2008, the Mossman Gorge Community has been involved in a number of consultations regarding the project including, but not limited to, discussions about job opportunities, centre designs, landscape design and footpath alignment.

Consultation on the project has also occurred through the Mossman Gorge Negotiation Table, which is part of the Australian and Queensland Governments' Local Indigenous Partnership Agreement.

Other consultations have included a deputation to Cairns Regional Council in February 2009, meetings with the Mossman Chamber of Commerce, and presentations to and a number of meetings with the Far North Queensland Tour Operators Association.

The consultation and engagement strategy will continue to provide the local community with accurate and up to date information regarding the Gateway project and, through these processes, identify issues that may impact on the project or that may need further consideration and consultation.

This information and awareness package is an important tool in providing accurate information to the community and other stakeholders.

Challenges and Opportunities

An informative Questions and Answers Fact Sheet has been developed to address a number of the questions and issues that have been raised by the community through the consultation processes to date.

It is anticipated that this Fact Sheet will provide information on issues that have been raised as potential challenges to the project and also explore opportunities for project enhancements.

Timeframe

Dependent upon the successful lodgement and approval of application processes, it is envisaged that construction of the Gateway project could commence in the second half of 2009 and be operational approximately twelve months after works begin.

Participation

Cairns Regional Council and the ILC warmly welcome your participation and feedback on the Gateway project.

You can register your feedback via the following mechanisms:

Web: www.cairns.qld.gov.au

Letter: **Chief Executive Officer**
Cairns Regional Council
PO Box 359 Cairns
QLD 4870
Attention: Liz Collyer

Email: gorge.consultation@cairns.qld.gov.au

Deadline for Feedback

Written feedback and comments on this Information Package are to be received by Friday 31 July 2009 to the email or postal addresses listed above.

Contacts for further information

Tammy Hunter at the Indigenous Land Corporation

Freecall: 1800 818 490 or (07) 3854 4600

or

Liz Collyer at Cairns Regional Council – Mossman Office on (07) 4099 9410

Question and Answer Fact Sheet

Q Who is the Indigenous Land Corporation?

A The Indigenous Land Corporation is an independent Australian Government statutory authority established to provide economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders by assisting in the acquisition of land and management of Indigenous-held land.

The seven person Board of the ILC is appointed by the Minister for Families and Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and is chaired by Ms Shirley McPherson, a respected Indigenous business woman from Perth.

The Indigenous Land Corporation operates 18 agricultural and tourism commercial businesses around Australia in collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders and in accordance with sound business principles. Examples of ILC businesses include Crocodile/Welcome Station in Cape York, Home Valley Station in the Kimberley, WA, and the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence in Redfern, Sydney.

Since inception in 1989, the Indigenous Land Corporation has acquired 221 properties, comprising of over 5.9 million hectares, at a cost of \$216 million.

Further information on ILC businesses can be found at:

<http://www.ncie.org.au/>

<http://homevalley.com.au/>

Q Who will own and operate the Gateway project?

A The Gateway Centre will be owned and operated by the Indigenous Land Corporation, in collaboration with the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal Community.

Q How will people with a disability be catered for at the new facility?

A The ILC appreciates the importance of Mossman Gorge to all visitors including the aged and those with a disability. Accessibility and usability of all buildings, facilities and shuttle buses at the Gateway Centre will be constructed in accordance with the Building Code of Australia, *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992) and Disability Standards for Access to Premises (2000).

Q Will locals have to pay to visit the Gorge?

A All visitors will have free parking at the new Gateway Centre and the option to walk or ride their personal bicycles for free.

People in the geographic area that entitles eligibility for the Daintree River Ferry Concessional Travel Card, will also be entitled to free unlimited shuttle bus rides to the Gorge. An appropriate concession card mechanism will be developed between the ILC and Cairns Regional Council.

Those that live outside the eligibility area of the free concession card, but are within the boundaries of Cairns Regional Council area, will be able to either purchase shuttle tickets individually (prices noted below) or purchase an annual passport for unlimited shuttle bus rides.

Q How much will the return trip cost (for non-locals)

A \$4.00 for adults
 \$2.90 for Pensioners and students
 \$2.00 for children 16 years and under
 \$3.20 per person on tour groups
 Children under 4 years of age will travel free.

Q What are the operating hours for the shuttles and the boom gate?

A The shuttle buses will operate from 7am to 6pm daily, every day throughout the year. The boom gate will be open from 6pm each evening until 6.30am the following morning.

Q Will I still be able to ride my push bike up to the Gorge?

A Yes, visitors will be able to ride their personal bicycles up to the Gorge for free or alternatively, bicycles will be available for hire from the new Gateway Centre.

Q If I want to park my car and walk up to the Gorge how much will this cost?

A It will be free to park your car and walk up to the Gorge on designated bicycle/foot paths.

ATTACHMENT 2: Letter of support from Department of Environment and Resource Management



Ref BNE2009/7046

Department of
Environment and
Resource Management

Chief Executive Officer
Cairns Regional Council
PO Box 359
CAIRNS QLD 4870
Attn: Ms Liz Collyer

Dear Ms Collyer

I am writing to advise Council of my support for the proposed road closure in Mossman Gorge.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) has a significant interest in the road closure proposal as major land managers in the area.

As you would be aware, the Mossman Gorge Section of the Daintree National Park is a very popular tourist destination with an estimated annual visitation rate of approximately 500,000 people.

With access to the Park only through the centre of the Mossman Gorge community and an average of 250 vehicles travelling the road daily, restricting the number of cars travelling in and out will contribute positively to the preservation of this World Heritage area as well as addressing the public safety concerns of community members.

This project will not only provide the local community with a new tourism and hospitality training facility, but also the added benefit of up to 70 new jobs. Additionally, as Government Champion of the Mossman Gorge community, I recognise the long-term cultural, economic and employment benefits that the success of the Mossman Gorge Tourism Project would bring to the local community and surrounding region.

I extend this support on the basis that local residents be provided with access to the proposed shuttle bus system free of charge if the road is closed.

Yours sincerely

Terry Wall
Associate Director-General

Level 17, 160 Ann Street Brisbane
Queensland 4000 Australia
PO Box 15155 City East
Queensland 4002 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3227 8827
Facsimile +61 7 3227 6485
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