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Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia
Committee Secretariat
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: jscna@aph.gov.au

Submission: Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia

Cook Shire Council would like to make the following submission to assist the Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia. Cook Shire covers 80% of Cape York with an area of 106,000 square kilometres, with a population base of less than 4500. Our main industries are agriculture and tourism and therefore we rely heavily on the tourism industry as a valuable economic resource.

1. Domestic and international tourism

Current trends, tourism products and markets for Cook Shire and our surrounding Indigenous Shires include:

- Indigenous, cultural and environmental tourism products
- Drive market
- 4WD and adventure travellers
- Fishing
- Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) market
- Families

The domestic market is dominant for this area and has been for many years. As international visitors start to look for more authentic and adventurous products and places, the international market will continue to become an emerging visitor market for our region. The focus should be on high end international visitors especially those from China, as there are significant links to Chinese history throughout our wider region.

There are commonalities across Cooktown, Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal which has the potential to be developed into a new tourism marketing brand that is recognisable to visitors. This could include packaging quality tourism products that can be marketed together to strengthen our region as a tourism destination of choice.

There is a strong need for Council, the Regional Tourism Organisation and individual tourism businesses to increase awareness of the regional and remote areas outside of Cairns to be able to distribute tourists throughout the entire region. For example, the National Trust of Australia (Queensland branch) is currently promoting the Currumbin

to Cooktown drive route incorporating each of the National Trust properties along the route as well as highlighting the general tourist attractions in each town.

There is a strong need for tourism organisations to promote, protect and enhance the unique product we already have in the Cooktown and Cape York region to be able to place us at the forefront of visitors minds.

It has been identified that work ready training, specifically for the tourism industry, in remote areas is a must in the immediate future; otherwise the regional and remote areas will not be ready for the increase in visitors that is currently forecast.

2. Role of peak bodies, local communities and all levels of government

The peak tourism bodies for our region are Tourism and Events Queensland and Tourism Tropical North Queensland. We will continue to work with these peak bodies to get the best possible outcome for the Cooktown and Cape York region.

As the local government body for Cook Shire we must look at the Local Tourism Organisation (LTO) structure for our region. The current model and structure of the LTO, Tourism Cape York, doesn't fit the size, capacity and capability of the Cooktown and Cape York region. The region is far too big an area to cover from one centrally located office in Cairns. To be able to effectively promote this important tourism region, it has been suggested that there is a need to establish a more suitable LTO structure for Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Cooktown to better promote our region as a tourist destination.

3. Communication and transport infrastructure

Road access into Cooktown and Cape York has greatly improved in recent years. However, there is a need for continued local, state and national funding for road development and improvements in order to meet the increased demand on the road network if it is to remain safe and adequate for all road users including cars, caravans, motorhomes and heavy vehicles.

Some potential transport and access opportunities that need to be considered include sealing the Bloomfield Track between Cape Tribulation and Wujal Wujal to allow all purpose access for a variety of vehicle types. This will develop a tourism drive loop between Cairns, Port Douglas, Mossman, Daintree, Wujal Wujal, Cooktown, Lakeland, Mount Molloy, Mareeba and Kuranda.

The proposed Cooktown airport upgrade will greatly assist to facilitate and grow tourism in the region including scenic plane and helicopter flights, charter flights, on sight flight training schools and aircraft maintenance hubs. The aviation industry is a key emerging industry sector for Cook Shire which has direct links to the tourism industry. This increase in capacity will make Cooktown airport the central airport for the region. There is a demand for increased services and airport development which will in turn create job opportunities for the region.

There is an underestimated opportunity available for sea transport in Cooktown; however there is a major need for the harbour to be dredged on a regular basis to allow the large ships to safely enter and exit the harbour. The dredging needs to be a priority for the all levels of government if access is to improve in the immediate future. This will result in greater use of the harbour and its infrastructure and increase the economic potential for the region.

Connectivity across the Cape York region needs to be significantly improved especially broadband internet access and technology and mobile phone coverage in outlying regions. Unreliable or non-existent internet access in remote areas is hampering tourism businesses to be able to improve and expand their business through online promotions and booking systems that so many visitors expect in a world of technology.

The lack of technology and communication infrastructure in Cape York also portrays a negative message that the Cape is not a safe place for visitors. This needs to be addressed and reinforced through positive promotions that regional towns and areas are safe to visit and encourage visitors to be prepared.

There is a huge opportunity to showcase Cook Shire and the greater part of Northern Australia to the world, providing the basic infrastructure and networks are maintained, increased and improved to meet the standards that people expect when they travel. This requires a commitment to the aims of the Northern Australia White Paper and the national 'Closing the Gap' targets.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this enquiry. Should you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Regards

Peter Scott
Mayor