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29 June 2020

Committee Secretary
Economics and Governance Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

RE: Call for submissions – Inquiry into the Queensland Government's economic response to COVID-19

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the inquiry into the Queensland Government's economic response to COVID-19.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has presented an unprecedented disruption to residents and business owners in the Whitsunday region.

Although Council has not conducted any formal opinion polling or surveys with the community on the response to COVID-19, the general feedback received is that the community does not distinguish between economic response packages prepared by the State and Commonwealth Government's. This is as a result of mixed messaging, a lack of clarity and inconsistencies across industries with imposed requirements and guidelines. Had more information been provided directly to local governments, the level of government closest to the people it represents, about the mechanisms used to access stimulus packages available and the role of individual State Government Departments in the economic response, Council could have disseminated this to its residents.

Whilst the reopening of businesses has been generally well received, misunderstandings around safe business processes and what is required have been contentious issues. Of greatest concern is that as a result of the uncertainty, there may be businesses in our region who remain closed or are turning away trade when this is no longer necessary.

The reopening of borders is perceived to be of the greatest impact to tourism and hospitality businesses in the Whitsundays, with local Chambers of Commerce having raised that clear guidance and information is essential to assist in the economic recovery of the region. However, there are opposing opinions from our agriculture sector, who have expressed a desire to wait until there is more certainty and security for Queenslanders before borders are reopened.

Council is supportive of the COVID-19 Jobs Support Loans provided by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA), which has assisted businesses and non-profit organisations across the State financially affected by COVID-19 retain employees and maintain their operations. However, Council considers that in the circumstances and given the demand for loans, the scheme should have been extended and further funds committed.

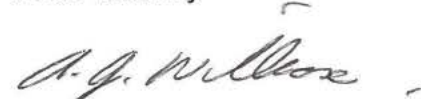
Just as there has been an imbalance on the level of impact across different industries as a result of COVID-19, there has too been an imbalance in the level of support provided by the Queensland Government.

Notably, highlights of the \$27.25M coronavirus aid package provided by the Queensland Government included rebates for marina and jetty fees. However, the rebate on marina charges and passenger levies only extended to Cairns and Green Island. This has had a significant impact on our community and has disadvantaged the Whitsundays.

At present the long-term impacts on the Whitsunday economy are largely unknown. However, we do know that local tourism providers in the Whitsundays who are able to operate are doing so at a loss and this is not sustainable. With school holidays soon approaching, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in visitors to the region, which Council welcomes with open arms. Nonetheless, if local businesses are unable to meet demand due to current restrictions, which are imposed inconsistently depending on the services provided, then the Whitsundays will not be able to entertain and occupy its guests to the best of its ability and demonstrate our vision of natural beauty, global attraction – we have it all.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the invitation to provide comment and look forward to reviewing the outcomes of this inquiry.

Yours faithfully



Cr Andrew Willcox
Mayor

