



Research Director
Finance and Administration Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
By email fac@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Comments on the Draft North Stradbroke Island Economic Transition Strategy (ETS) and Worker's Assistance Scheme.

I have been directed by the State Council of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (Wildlife Queensland) to write to the Finance and Administration Committee to offer comment for consideration on this proposed draft strategy and worker's assistance scheme. I have also been instructed to inform the Committee that Wildlife Queensland did forward a submission on the draft strategy to the Queensland Department of State Development when comments were called for.

Wildlife Queensland is one of the longest established and most respected wildlife-focused conservation groups in Queensland. With over 6500 supporters spread across branches throughout the State with supporters interstate and overseas, Wildlife Queensland is a strong voice for our wildlife and its habitat. Wildlife Queensland is apolitical. Our aims include preserving the flora and fauna of Australia by all lawful means, educating the community in an understanding of the principles of conservation and preservation of the natural environment and encouraging rational land use, proper land planning and the use of the natural environment and its management.

Wildlife Queensland appreciates this opportunity to provide comment on the strategy. Wildlife Queensland's expertise is firmly embedded in the environment and wildlife fields but welcomes the draft economic transition strategy. Wildlife Queensland appreciates the desirable requirement to balance the needs of the community, with the transition from sand mining and the protection and rehabilitation of the environment.

Some general comments or broad observations will be offered for consideration. This will be followed by comments on particular aspects outlined in the strategy. Failure to comment on certain aspects of the strategy should not necessarily be construed as support for or opposition to such matters. Also there are aspects that other organisations are more qualified to comment on in detail.

In particular Wildlife Queensland has no right to comment on behalf of the Quandamooka peoples but our organisation strongly supports their aims and aspirations.

Wildlife Queensland did not comment previously on the specifics of the economics involved as there are other organisations more qualified to do so. Wildlife Queensland is of the view that the impact of job losses and the resulting economic outcome from mining ceasing in 2019 requires close scrutiny. Some claims appear to be over inflated especially when consideration is given to statements by Sibelco during the public hearings held on 8th March 2016. Island residents employed by Sibelco are about 69 not the hundreds suggested by other sources. Furthermore it is an established fact that mining has been winding down of its own accord in recent years and the island community has been adapting. This draft strategy, when implemented, will assist immensely in providing more certainty and a planned direction for a positive future for the island community. Also Wildlife Queensland appreciates that jobs associated with the required rehabilitation will continue beyond 2019 should Parliament enact the Palaszczuk legislation that Wildlife Queensland strongly supports. While positions should be awarded to the best applicants people that live on the island should be given some priority.

Wildlife Queensland recognises that North Stradbroke Island or Minjerribah as it is known by the Traditional Owners is highly regarded by many people and is already a popular destination for tourists. No doubt its natural and cultural heritage and ready access from the mainland contribute to its popularity.

With the recent recognition of native title for the Quandamooka people, there has been a growing appreciation of the island's rich cultural heritage which spans 20,000 years. The recent success of the Quandamooka Festival is a case in point. Tourists are looking for genuine indigenous cultural experiences, and Stradbroke is perfectly placed to develop this industry. We are pleased the ETS supports the Quandamooka people to pursue their aspirations and goals. We acknowledge Straddie Camping is already a successful indigenous business on the island.

Wildlife Queensland praises the government for honouring its commitment to substantially phase out mining by 2019 by repealing the Newman government amendments. This will allow country that has been locked up by mining leases to become accessible to the public and be part of the island's nature-based tourism asset. The Bill restores justice to the Quandamooka People allowing them to withdraw their High Court Case over the Newman Government amendments. Restoration of justice, provision of certainty and stability allows the community to move forward.

The island has a rich biodiversity given it is in the cross-over zone between temperate and subtropical biomes. The island is home to many endangered species including koalas, acid frogs and swamp orchids. It has seven major vegetation types, including tidal wetlands, wildflower rich heathlands and rainforest. It's part of the Moreton Bay RAMSAR area, with many beautiful lakes and lagoons and productive tidal flats. It's surrounded by the Moreton Bay Marine Park. The island is an ideal research laboratory and already has the prestigious Moreton Bay Research Station.

The establishment of the Naree Budjong Djara National Park in 2011, jointly managed with the Quandamooka people, has been another milestone in securing a nature-based future for the island.

Given this background, our organisation strongly supports the key themes identified for growth on the island, sustainable tourism, education and training and local business development and growth.

There is strong support for many key initiatives identified for growth.

Wildlife Queensland applauds the Government's \$28.87 million economic package, including a \$5 million assistance scheme to support affected sand mining workers transition to alternative employment.

The island is considered the best land-based whale watching site in Queensland. The granting of a boat whale watching licence is welcome and will complement the nature-focused economy.

To remain true to the goal of building a sustainable economy, Wildlife Queensland encourages careful planning and evaluation of any new developments or infrastructure to ensure they are sensitive to the environment, indigenous culture and heritage and local community. This means consultation with the Quandamooka people at every step and a full appreciation and understanding of the needs of the environment. These principles are especially important in light of how much of the island's environment and cultural heritage has been damaged by mining and other changes. With knowledge and commitment, it's possible to have economic success and maintain the island's values.

Certain specific comments are provided for consideration.

Minjerrabah Cultural Centre

Initiatives such as the Minjerrabah Cultural Centre are applauded, and the Government is encouraged to fast-track its construction. Not only will it be important for the Quandamooka people, it will value add to the tourist and education experience on the island. It will be especially valuable for the township of Dunwich.

Looking after the Environment

Whilst tourism has been a successful economic driver on Fraser Island, it has also damaged parts of the environment. Stradbroke could learn from the Fraser Island experience and avoid some of the pitfalls. For example, the inappropriate siting of sand tracks for 4WDs leading to erosion, eutrophication of lakes, introduction of weeds.

Like Fraser Island, North Stradbroke Island's ecology is one of low nutrients and the lakes are acidic. Any activity or built structure that adds nutrients to the environment can radically alter the flora and fauna and lead to infestation by feral animals and invasive weeds. It is recommended any construction is evaluated carefully for its impact on the island's natural chemistry and ecology.

Looking after the hydrology of the island, ensuring natural flow and percolation is not tampered with, is critical.

Visitor Experience

Research shows one of the most powerful ways to deliver on visitor satisfaction is for people to make an emotional connection to the island. Good service, authentic experiences and

connecting with the locals are the ingredients for success. There is also a growing tourist market for people seeking places where people genuinely care for their environment and local community. Stradbroke could be one of those destinations.

Wildlife Queensland argues for low-key tourist developments that are sensitive to the environment and indigenous values. One of Stradbroke's most endearing qualities has been its low-key village lifestyle where people live alongside nature. This is to be nurtured and not swamped by inappropriate tourism.

Bike paths and Quad bikes

There is need for careful consideration of the location for bicycle paths, and not to repeat the unfortunate mistakes of the past where roads and tracks have been sited too close to swamps and streams. It would be difficult now, if not impossible, to locate a bike path along the main road route from Dunwich to Amity and Point Lookout without encroaching on the wetlands. Most of the island's threatened plant species are associated with wetlands. The road heading out of Dunwich sits right alongside one of the most important swamp orchid sites in the State and nearby is the endemic swamp daisy. Consideration of options that have the least negative impact on the natural assets should be mandatory. As with any development on the island, careful assessment of cultural heritage impacts is an imperative.

As a general principle Wildlife Queensland would caution against development of quad bike paths on the island both for safety reasons and damage to the environment. Trail bikes may also cut up the sandy tracks.

National Park infrastructure and Expansion of National Park Estate

Sensitive location of walking trails and viewing areas will add to visitor experience.

Additions to the Naree Budjong Djara National Park are supported. There are a number of areas worthy of inclusion into the park and more details could be provided if required.

Rehabilitation of mine sites

It is essential the mining company meets its obligations to fulfil rehabilitation criteria and that all the cost is born by the company. Funds for rehabilitation should not be sourced from the economic transition package.

Maximising benefit from the Economic Transition Strategy funding

The government needs to spend the \$20 million to maximise on-the-ground outcomes, keeping consultants' fees to a minimum. Wildlife Queensland is aware there has already been extensive consultation and planning documents written for the island. It is also highly desirable for the Government to ensure infrastructure and services that should be provided by local council are indeed funded by local council and not drawn from the ETS funding.

Toondah Harbour

It is unfortunate the Toondah Harbour development was included as part of the Economic Transition Strategy for North Stradbroke Island. Whilst our organisation recognises the importance of a port upgrade at Cleveland, Wildlife Queensland is opposed to the massive development now planned and the implications for the Moreton Bay Marine Park and the

Ramsar site. The impact of the necessary dredging for this development to occur and disastrous impacts of sediment loads on the coral reefs is not what is expected from a caring Government. Wildlife Queensland strongly recommend that Toondah Harbour is separated from the Stradbroke ETS. It is appreciated that it does not appear that funding is being redirected from the ETS and simply clouds the ETS.

We look forward to the implementation of the sustainable and well planned aspects of the ETS and welcome further opportunities to make a contribution.

Yours faithfully

Des Boyland, Policy and Campaigns Manager

5th April 2016