

Inquiry into the economic and regulatory frameworks for Queensland island resorts

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Submission to the QLD Transport and Resources Parliamentary Committee Inquiry

Economic and Regulatory Frameworks for Queensland Island Resorts

I am a Yuiwbara man living in Mackay, QLD. My family group are recognised as one of the Traditional Owners groups of Yuwibara land and sea country in a Native Title Determination in February 2020.

My connection is through my Great Grandmother Molly Bargo Tonga. Yuwibara boundary is from Midge Point to Cape Palmerston and 10 nautical miles offshore. My people are very passionate about preserving our land and sea country for future generations. Yuwibara continue to have a strong spiritual connection to country, despite colonisation and its impacts.

My interest in this inquiry is driven by many concerns.

I am concerned for the future of our traditional land and sea country, the lack of respect afforded to Traditional Owners of all island and mainland areas and the failure of State and Local governments to insist that developers demonstrate active consultation and ongoing engagement with Traditional Owners to ensure our perspectives, values and aspirations are incorporated with development plans and activities.

There have been well-documented media reports throughout 2020 to current times that clearly demonstrate the mismanagement of land and sea country by various developers up and down the coast of Queensland and the failure of all levels of government to hold developers to account for mismanagement and environmental vandalism.

The impact on country cannot be underestimated. The images that have been broadcast around the world of the state of Queensland's islands are very real and are testament to the ongoing destruction of habitat that is vital for the continued existence of land and sea species on and around island environments.

It is also a sad indictment of local, State and Federal governments and their regulatory authorities that these breaches are not acted upon with punitive measures exacted and remediation ordered.

Among other things I have seen the excavation of beach dunes on Basil Bay, Keswick Island and despair at the destruction of the nesting habitats of bird and sea life as a result of this. I note through videos footage, the continued silt run off onto coral reefs due to the developer cutting into island hillsides to form "boat and trailer parking".

I question why, when Council and State Government have conducted inspections of these infringements on Keswick Island, there were no Traditional Owners invited. Not even representatives from the Traditional Owner Reference Group of Mackay Whitsunday and Isaac Reef Catchments were included in the inspection.

This demonstrates to me, that not only are developers disregarding Traditional Owner knowledge and input. All levels of government are guilty of the same behaviour.

The development activity of Keswick Island, the current state of the Brampton Island resort and activities on St Bees Island are an example of developers and governments failing to consult with **APPROPRIATE** Traditional Owners who have the cultural authority to ensure the identification, protection and preservation of cultural heritage sites and artefacts.

The Yuwibara people have extended historical knowledge of the activities of our ancestors in these areas. With limited access to the islands, we have been unable to identify sites and artefacts of significance.

I refer to the head lease between China Bloom (Hong Kong) Ltd and the State Government. Condition 7 of the head lease states that “*head lease holders have a responsibility for a duty of care to take all reasonable and practicable measures to sustainably manage the leased land by conserving the physical, biological, productive and cultural values of the lease land, or in areas affected by the management of the leased land*”.

The development of Keswick Island was approved in 1996. The legal documents that make up the regulatory framework of this development make clear reference to the Traditional Owner engagement. To the best of my knowledge, this has never occurred.

Notwithstanding that Native Title Determination was only formalised in February 2020 and Keswick Island lying beyond the Native Title area, no formal consultation or engagement with Traditional Owners has ever been undertaken.

Economic Opportunities

The stagnation of QLDs island resorts is a missed economic opportunity for those mainland communities located near island developments. More importantly, it is a missed opportunity for economic development within First Nations communities.

If these developments were successful, there is the potential for making the best use of the opportunities provided by Native Title to land and sea through, land and sea ranger programs, tourism initiatives and small business operations.

By collaborating with Indigenous leaders and communities, all stake holders can provide better opportunities for Indigenous Australians to engage in the economy and increase employment prospects and bring a rich, cultural perspective to the island community.

Governments should be writing into contracts and leases, the requirement for an Indigenous Engagement & Employment strategy and also encourage developers to demonstrate the application of Indigenous Procurement Policy principles within their development plans.

It is no secret that Traditional Owners have been disenfranchised since colonisation. However, we are determined to have a seat at the table to explore opportunities that these developments present. The huge challenge we face is leveraging land and sea assets for the economic and social advancement of our communities.

The challenge to all levels of QLD government is to ensure government departments have in place protocols and mechanisms to guarantee Traditional Owner engagement to assist us in our endeavours.

Cultural and Social Values

I applaud the residential community on Keswick Island for standing up for the island. They have reached out to our community to make sure that the Yuwibara perspectives are included in their Parliamentary Committee Inquiry submission and acknowledge they cannot speak on our behalf.

This is the most respect and level of engagement we have had with any stakeholder group associated with our country.

We are now exploring opportunities to visit Keswick Island, take Yuiwbara people back on country, introduce our young people to this beautiful environment and help the residential community better understand the traditional and cultural history of Keswick Island and Yuiwbara people.

The benefit of engaging directly with the residents means that the success of these aspirational ventures are not dependent on governments to sanction and insist on this activity. It is purely the goodwill and mutual respect of the people involved.

The views of this submission are mine as an individual of the Yuwibara community.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with the Parliamentary Committee to expand on my submission.

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