



Amanda Camm MP

Member for Whitsunday

Transport and Resources Committee Submission

INQUIRY INTO THE ECONOMIC AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS FOR QUEENSLAND'S ISLAND RESORTS

Thursday 7 April 2022

Dear Committee,

I am writing to you regarding the inquiry into the economic and regulatory frameworks for Queensland's Island Resorts.

As the Member for Whitsunday, I draw the committee's attention to the opportunities and challenge of islands and island resorts in my electorate and encourage the committee to visit the Whitsundays to engage meaningfully with proponents, operators, residents and stakeholders.

The Whitsunday electorate includes 241 marine islands, of which 135 of these islands are named. Previously, many of these islands operated tourist destination experiences including at Brampton Island, Lindeman Island, St Bees Island and Keswick Island.

It has been highlighted in the media the ongoing issues pertaining to Keswick Island. Keswick Island is an island located in the southern half of the Whitsunday Islands group, situated 34 kilometres north-east of Mackay. Keswick Island forms part of the Cumberland Islands and are protected by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Keswick Island falls under the Mackay Regional Council in local government jurisdiction and the Whitsunday Electorate in Queensland and has engagement with various State Government departments. I encourage the Committee to be briefed by these relevant stakeholders.

As the Committee is tasked with examining and reporting on current regulatory frameworks that exist for Great Barrier Reef Island Resorts, these resorts present a competitive advantage for the tourism sector and contribute to Queensland's tourism economy and regional liveability of local communities. The following points of reference covering the existing regulatory constraints on island resorts are critical for the committee to understand.

- **Role of island resorts in attracting new and return visitors to Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef**

Island accessibility for Keswick Island is currently not affordable for residents and there are significant conditions within the Head Lease regarding jetty access which has not yet been developed in line with approvals.



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The intersection of State Government Head Lease Conditions, Local Government Development Approvals and Conditions, Cultural and Environmental Management and Social Responsibility all need to be addressed, using Keswick Island as an example.

The lack of streamlined conditions and communication in regard to cross departmental and cross governmental levels is inhibiting the ability for islands to reach their full potential.

For example, previously, the air strip was serviced by multiple commercial operators and a charter company ran two vessels. Tidal constraints mean current visitors have to be transported to the coral beach shore via a rubber dinghy boat. A new public all-tide jetty was meant to have been built by the Head Lease holder. This has not occurred in time with development approvals.

- **Historical operational status and existing constraints that impact economic development opportunities for island resorts**

The island attracted significant interest from investors when initial land packages were released back in 2000. Twenty-three private homes have been constructed on Keswick Island, costing triple the price of an equivalent property on the mainland of Mackay. The constraints of examples of non-compliance from the Head Lease holder and lack of enforcement from the relevant authorities has caused negative economic impacts. Closures to the barge ramp, Basil Bay access, and private plane access, island businesses and campgrounds caused by the Head Lessee has caused severe damage to the local economy.

- **How the determination of native title and the aspirations of traditional owners have been incorporated into operations.**

There is little facilitation or a known liaison to support any aspiration of Traditional Owner Groups across the region in regard to the Whitsunday Islands. This is not without community or industry desire. Governments could play a more active role in supporting Traditional Owner Groups in environmental management, cultural heritage, tourism and economic development opportunities and the facilitation of Native Title determination where appropriate.

- **Infrastructure access arrangements and other challenges for lease holders to develop or redevelop islands for tourist, residential and public purposes**

Cost constraints, transport and supply chain issues are major challenges. Environmental approvals and lack of integration in Local, State and Federal Legislation need to be further investigated and addressed. Hamilton Island is a high standard operation and an example of infrastructure investment and access that has delivered successful outcomes that strikes the right balance.



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- **Co-existence with the protected area estate both onshore and within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Area**

Co-existence occurs on many of our islands very successfully as there is a clear benefit for operators to protect the natural environment. Enhancement of National Parks resources and management would support the work of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Management. Currently, resources across the Whitsundays are stretched. Tourism operators and island operators are embarking on citizen science conservation projects and this needs to be further encouraged, supported and funded.

- **Enable appropriate development that supports strong social, environmental, economic, and cultural outcomes**

In regard to Keswick Island, (prior to recent on-island management changes that occurred in early 2021) works undertaken by the current Head Lease holder fail to deliver the appropriate social, environmental, economic and cultural outcomes from their actions. Failures to engage with the local community and sublease holders by the Head Lease holder stifled the productive opportunities for appropriate development.

Furthermore, the Queensland Government has comprehensively failed to uphold the compliance through development plans and associated approvals. This is also a responsibility of Local Government. This needs to be further looked, including the examples of Lindeman and Brampton Island. These islands have had development approvals extended at times without the knowledge of Local Government elected officials and little to no community consultation.

These assets are sitting in abeyance not supporting any of the above outcomes. I urge the committee to be briefed on these islands and the history of assessment, approval, extension and level of consultation.

- **Allow for open and transparent dispute resolution as well as supporting an appropriate process and service standard for transfer of interests in leases and sub leases.**

A framework that is transparent for disputes needs to be developed in consultation with all levels of government, proponents and island communities. This should also incorporate a transparent due diligence process first and foremost in assessing a lease and sub-lease arrangement as many unintended consequences have resulted in the example of Keswick island.

I applaud the advocacy efforts and ongoing negotiations that have been advanced over the past years by the residents and local community of Keswick Island. I ask the committee to consider these points in detail and I support the submission by the Keswick Island Progress Association (KIPA) in highlighting their ongoing challenges that need to be rectified.



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I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this submission to the inquiry and hope that positive and pragmatic actions will be delivered following the relevant hearings and findings.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Amanda", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Amanda Camm MP
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