

Inquiry into the economic and regulatory frameworks for Queensland island resorts

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Submitted by:



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No Recommendations

Submission to the QLD Transport and Resources Parliamentary Committee Inquiry

Economic and Regulatory Frameworks for Queensland Island Resorts

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a proud Yuwibara man from Mackay, QLD. Through my great grandmother, [REDACTED], my family group are recognised as one the Traditional Owners groups of Yuwibara land and sea country formalised by Native Title Determination in February 2020.

Yuwibara Country is bordered by Midge Point to the North, Cape Palmerston to the South. Although we believe it extends to 200km offshore, the Native Title Determination only covers 10 nautical miles offshore.

My people and I are very committed and passionate about caring for country to ensure the bounty of our land and sea country is there for future generations of all Australians. Yuwibara continue to have a strong spiritual connection to country.

I am a representative of the Reef Catchments Traditional Owner Reference Group (TORG) that includes representatives from Yuwibara, Koinmerburra, Barada Barna, Wiri, Ngaro, and Gia and Juru peoples within the boundaries of the Reef Catchments Mackay Whitsunday Isaac region.

Our group meets on a regular basis to provide our representatives the opportunity to work together with stakeholders and the broader community to improve knowledge of cultural heritage values and reef management issues within the region. The group provides guidance on projects which they consider important for funding.

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 successive 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.

This lack of agency denies Traditional Owners the right to:

- be proactive leaders in cultural heritage and environmental management
- the opportunity to deliver cultural heritage environmental management programs, community communication, and education programs on Country
- the mechanism to share culture, hand down knowledge so that everyone can appreciate and respect the culture of my ancestors

Throughout the last few years, my family and I have discussed the various media reports about the deplorable state that many island resorts and developments are in. These media reports not only highlight the mismanagement of land and sea by various developers. It also shines a light on the abject failure of all levels of government to hold developers to account for breaches of agreements, regulations, obligations, and responsibilities. Brampton Island is a prime example of these failings.

A comparison, if I were to rent a house, not live in it and then leave it to deteriorate for more than a decade, the homeowner would start proceedings to remove me from the house. Why has this never happened on Brampton Island.

I think about the negative impact to the marine and land environment that is exacted because of structures, infrastructure, plastics etc breaking down over time and I am disheartened to think that governments can allow this to continue to occur.

Millions of taxpayers' dollars are thrown at protecting Great Barrier Reef environment. Yet our governments let developers off the hook by not enforcing any measures to guarantee the protection of these National Parks and World Heritage areas.

The elected representatives charged with ensuring compliance, discard the validity of images and video that have been broadcast to the public. The sad state of Queensland's islands is very real and is evidence of the ongoing destruction of habitat that is vital for the continued existence of land and sea species on and around island environments.

Local, State and Federal governments and their regulatory authorities conduct an inspection of these breaches but fail to address the breaches with punitive measures and remediation ordered.

I am very concerned about developer activity that is undertaken without proper consultation with Traditional Owners and the community at large. Such as the excavation of beach dunes on Basil Bay, Keswick Island. I am greatly saddened by the destruction of the nesting habitats of threatened species such as turtles because of this destruction. Although turtles do not nest on every beach, we reduce the opportunity for the species to thrive, when we destroy their breeding and nesting habitat.

I note through video footage well -viewed on Youtube, the continued silt run off onto coral reefs due to the developer creating boat and trailer parking from the side of a hill along the beach foreshore. Has anyone considered the ongoing damage to the seagrass meadows in this area where dugong actively feed?

As a representative of the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac Reef Catchment TORG, I am curious to know why Mackay Regional Council and the State Government did not reach out to have our representation during inspections that were conducted on Keswick Island. There weren't even any Traditional Owners from the Yuwibara people consulted. This demonstrates, 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 and other failed island developments, are examples 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. We also have an undeniable connection to Country as evidenced by the Native Title Determination.

The Yuwibara people have historical knowledge of the activities of our ancestors in these areas. We continue to learn more as we research and visit sites of significance to our ancestors. With limited access to the islands in recent times, we have been unable to continue this work to identify learn more of our cultural heritage.

I am sure many people have referenced various Clauses, Conditions and Regulations in all of the documents that make up the Regulatory Framework underpinning these developments. On paper it appears that preservation of Aboriginal culture and heritage through active consultation should occur. This would ensure Traditional Owners would pay a more prominent role in developments on Country.

However, action speak louder than words or statements on paper. 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 fact Native Title Determination was only formalised in February 2020 and Keswick Island lays beyond the Native Title area, no formal consultation at the commencement of this development was undertaken.

In the life of the development, no 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 and provide further information.

Submitted by:

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