



DMC Submission to Daintree Ferry Service Invitation

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This response to the Daintree Ferry Service contract invitation is on behalf of the Daintree Marketing Co-operative (DMC). We thank Council for the opportunity to contribute to the ferry tender process, and look forward to future discussions.

DMC is a local tourism group comprising over 60 members operating more than 80 tourism businesses located both on north and south sides of the Daintree ferry crossing. Our objectives are to:

- enable businesses with an interest in marketing the Daintree brand to work together; identify, create and facilitate marketing opportunities to promote the Daintree region as a whole; and
- increase visitation to the Greater Daintree Region.

We are supported by and work with Tourism Port Douglas and Daintree to this end. While we do not represent the broader community as such, it is worth noting that more than 90% of the community north of the Daintree depends on tourism, and that most of our members live here and depend on an efficient ferry service.

The ferry is a unique gateway to this part of the Daintree Rainforest. It is a crucial part of the region's tourism business. The ferry is also **the** lifeline for residents.

Every aspect of the ferry's operations has major implications for businesses and the community living north of the River.

Unfortunately, long ferry queues during peak periods are a major deterrent to visitation in the Daintree and will continue to undermine the economic and social sustainability of local businesses and the community.

The DMC believes that an efficient ferry service is paramount to benefiting the overall interests of the community and businesses north of the River, and that the ferry contract needs to reflect a number of broad and measurable objectives.



These objectives should include:

- optimising visitor numbers north of the River
- creating an outstanding traveller experience
- optimising longer overnight stays north of the River
- helping the north River community via family, health and schooling travel
- minimising wait time and the frustrations and negative impact on business and community
- streamlining queuing, boarding and ticketing
- providing helpful travel information in conjunction with DMC
- providing safety advice during blockages and emergencies .
- clear KPIs for the operator to follow regarding load times, speed of ferry and ticketing.

We also believe that the contract should run for no more than ten years.

Many of these points were reflected in the joint DMC/Daintree Community Council submission forwarded in May 2016 in response to the Daintree Gateway Concept Plan. *Copy is attached.*

We recognise that given the speed of technology change, it would be difficult for the contract to anticipate all potential technology changes over a ten year period. Therefore, Council may need to take on the responsibility for any tender shortfalls or improvements during the course of the contract.

DMC Recommendations

Ferry Operations

It seems clear that considerable business has been lost to north and south River communities because of the single ferry, its operational limitations, and the increasing size of traveller 'rigs' travelling to and through the area. These together have led to unsatisfactory wait times in peak periods of up to two hours when the majority of businesses have a short window of opportunity for profitability. Furthermore, the push for the sealing of the Bloomfield Track with broad bi-partisan Federal support may not be what some in the community want, but needs to be considered when deciding on what will be provided for the next ten years.

The answer is not to restrict travel through such suggestions as banning or limiting two person vehicles, banning larger trailers and caravans, or providing a bus service. These would not increase the quality of visitor experience or promote longer stays. They would also be a negative impact on business and council revenue.



Ferry Size

We assume that the current ferry alone would not last a further ten years, but it may become a useful second ferry.

A larger and more modern ferry would certainly lead to overall improvements, in association with other changes.

An increase of size by say 25%, together with improved design such as wider ramps and automated loading gates operated by the ferry “pilot”, would lead to significant improvements to speed and safety, and hence traffic flow and reduced travel frustration.

Safety devices.

In a current emergency, passengers are required to hold onto the sides of the ferry rafts. Modern inflatable devices in which passengers could sit should be installed as part of the new ferry contract. This could provide the added benefit of negating the need for fuel and gas trucks from having to travel alone without any other vehicles (which can be a significant cause for exacerbating delays).

Second ferry

It is understood that during the tender process in 2005/06 for the current contract one of the criteria for a complying tenders was for the provision of a second ferry; however, when the contract was signed, this provision was removed from the contract. This new tender process must contain provision for a second ferry, and its provision enshrined in the new contract. With a new contract to be let in 2021, it would be hoped that a new ferry would be commissioned. An option would therefore be that a new ferry would allow the existing ferry to be used as a secondary ferry for peak times and emergencies – obviously this would require some negotiation with the existing owner/operator, but it should form part of Council’s thinking.

Provision of a second ferry would have a number of benefits. It would:

- Obviate the need for the Reserve Fund to be maintained at \$4 million, thereby freeing up Reserve Fund money for infrastructure improvements – indeed, some of the fund could be used to fund the acquisition of a second ferry
- Not require the ferry operations to be closed during inspection or maintenance
- While it would require further infrastructure and road-widening on the north and south sides, such works could involve a reconfiguring of the landside infrastructure to provide significantly safer and more efficient operations.



Gas/Fuel safety issues

Improved safety (ie improved life rafts) would allow negotiations to take place with Cairns Harbourmaster to permit gas and fuel trucks to travel at the same time as normal traffic.

In the meantime, a requirement to require gas and fuel traffic to avoid peak times should be implemented.

Ferry Speed and tracking system

The ferry speed is often slowed down, presumably to optimise ticketing when: the booth is closed or busy; during difficult tides; or by people travelling from the north needing ticketing. The ferry should have rules built into the Service Agreement to manage better ferry speed. Unnecessarily slow speeds should not penalise travellers or businesses, especially during busy periods.

Some form of tracking or other system to record ferry speed, trip time etc should be installed on the ferry on an ongoing basis, similar to those in delivery vans many years ago, just as financial control and wheel counting devices have been installed.

Ferry Closures and Ramp Access

The ferry inspection closure earlier in 2018 exposed a number of major fault-lines in the present arrangements – including the flawed contingency plan (QSolutions Report), 5 day closure of ferry service with no effective alternatives, blocked ramp access, and consequential prevention of an alternative ferry or barge service.

The Council decision to minimise contractor and Council costs by using and therefore closing the ramp access had huge consequences for businesses, the community, visitors and “The Brand”.

Other than a natural disaster event, it is not acceptable that the ferry be shut down for 5 days due to inspection or at the contractor’s discretion. A ramp must remain open for emergencies and ongoing travel operations.

Given that the future inspection regime is to some extent uncertain, a solution may require:

- both contractor and Council be bound to providing a service for 365 days per year (other than “force majeure”)
- inspections should not stop the ferry services (that is, be carried out elsewhere)
- relocation costs be met by Council/Contractor
- a new specific Contingency plan be proposed by Contractor, including reality-tested options
- a more rigorous maintenance regime, with penalties for breakdowns and service outages.



Emergency and Breakdown response

Ferry breakdowns and stoppages are not just minor nuisances. People need to get to booked appointments such as doctors for treatment, transport schoolchildren to school activities, carry perishable goods, and delays may be uncomfortable or unhealthy. The current contract does not appear to contain an effective procedure for emergency stoppages.

Tenderers should be required to present their plan to inform relevant authorities and the community, as well as the travelling public, with indications of time delays and how to deal with perishables and other issues.

Ticketing and e-Ticketing

A comprehensive e-ticketing system needs to be implemented as soon as possible. This should be designed both as a financial management and control tool, and also as a device to enable such things as:

- advance ticketing
- bookable timeslots to manage the traffic flow and help unbooked travellers when necessary
- real time advice on length of delay times
- tourism and destination advice in conjunction with DMC
- safety and emergency advice, where required
- incentives to encourage visitors to travel outside peak times
- links to our Destinationdaintree.com website

Land Operations

Boom gate

Provision of a boom gate to allow pre-booked travel and Cardholders to access quickly and effectively.

Ticket Booth

The southside ferry booth should be re-located further southwards. This should at least allow one complete ferry load to pass beyond the booth prior to the ferry's arrival to facilitate efficient loading. If re-located to the Western Precinct, it may enhance visitor experience through toilet/ information/River cruise options/ amenities, and Council should be enabling at least mobile catering options at that site as currently there are no refreshments available and tap water is not potable at the site.



Council must plan for a ticket booth on the Northside – it is understood that Council in fact has a reserve along the current road alignment, and that Wet Tropics do not see expansion of lanes to be an issue. Planning needs to occur today so that infrastructure can be built for 2021 to provide a modern, safe and efficient transport corridor.

Northside priority lane

There needs to be a priority lane, extending to Forest Creek Road, again with boom gate.

Other safety measures also need to be addressed by traffic engineers. Too often, traffic exits the ferry at unsafe speeds trying to make up time for the long wait on the south side; and tour buses servicing cruises take extreme and illegal manoeuvres in shuffling between the ferry and Forest Creek Road.

Boom Gates

Consideration should be given to installing boom gates for both northbound and southbound travel on the south side of the river to minimize staffing costs and optimize efficiency.

SinBin

A sin-bin drive-off for slow/difficult travellers needs to be installed alongside ticket booth.

Community radio

The joint Discovery Centre/DMC community radio concept needs to be supported through provision of free space, antenna and electricity at booth site.

Wifi

Better Wifi access to allow visitors to book tours, access the community radio, book ferry tickets and download information such as maps; Destination Daintree website; Bloomfield Track Experience Guide e-book.

Signage

Gantry signage to be incorporated:

- before the turn-off to the River as a major Welcome and Farewell/Safety message on reverse side
- closer to booth directing traffic either to ticketing booth or to priority boom gate and any other instruction



Any signage improvements or alignments, including those at the “ticket” booth, need to be professionally designed and presented, readable and attractive in tune with the natural environment.

Hours of operation

Some operators have expressed a wish for an earlier (ie 5am start), to allow early workers and early passenger air departures to stay longer in the Daintree.

Visitor Experience

The contractor will need to demonstrate how to use technology; efficiency; community and business linkages; etc to optimise traveller experience via such matters as

- satisfaction levels,
- vastly reduced waiting time especially in peak season,
- promotion of tourism and ferry as a tourism business, as outlined in this submission
- increase ferry efficiency,
- provision of timely safety and emergency responses
- waste disposal
- food and beverage facilitation

Quality Assurance – Training and Complaints procedures

The ferry is a travel business operating on behalf of a tourism-based economy.

The ferry operator needs to present and provide a system to ensure that both its exemplary procedures and contractor staff provide the very best tourist experience, and satisfy safety and emergency issues.

This would involve, among other things:

- a training program,
- ongoing monitoring and re-inforcement
- encouragement of the Contractor to be actively engaged with the tourism industry – at present there is little or no direct or indirect involvement with the industry, so the operator sees itself purely as a service provider and not an industry player

There should be a Complaints Procedure which would be primarily dealt with by the contractor with provisions for escalation to Council if no satisfactory resolution. The complaints procedure should be in line with current technology – e.g. online and easily accessible. It would be promulgated through clear signage, e-Ticketing system and any related opportunities. Council would be copied on each complaint,



including outcomes. Numbers and resolution of complaints would be part of performance compliance within the contract, and data would be provided publicly in line with current best practice.

Service Level Agreement

While we are not privy to the current Service Level Agreement (if indeed there is one), we would hope that final tender documentation should include considerable detail of expectations and measures, including incentives and penalties, in the next Service Level Agreement.

We understand that the consultation process has been amended to include further community engagement and a workshop prior to any final decisions are made by Council. DMC is keen to be involved in this process, and would welcome the opportunity for DMC members to hold a meeting with Council to address our industry's specific needs.

Kind regards



ABI RALPH

Abi Ralph

Director

Daintree Marketing Co-operative

On behalf of the DMC Directors and Members