

# Daintree Ferry Contract

## Community Engagement Findings

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Enquiries: Gaye Scott  
Direct: (07) 4099 9414 Mob: 0418 793 009  
E: [gaye.scott@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:gaye.scott@douglas.qld.gov.au)



*Engaging, Planning, Partnering*  
*Muruku Kirraji - Eastern Kuku Yalanji*  
*Nganyji pina ngunda-lum ... Ma:lnyjirri-yngku - Yirrganydji*

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## Executive Summary

Prior to preparing tender documents for a new ferry contract, feedback was sought from all stakeholders with regard to any enhancements they would like Council to consider.

Engagement activities attracted 117 responses to the online survey, 10 submissions via email and 40 residents attended the forums. Visitor attitudes were gleaned from 370 TripAdvisor reviews over the past 3 years as well as from anecdotal evidence provided by residents and those who work in the tourism industry.

This report presents the feedback received without offering an opinion on any comments or viewpoints, with the exception of providing context where required.

In terms of satisfaction, the survey responses indicate over half the respondents were satisfied with current services with 47% were dissatisfied. Looking at TripAdvisor, 76% rated their ferry experience as Very Good or Excellent and 24% rated their experience average, poor or terrible.

A reduction in waiting times was by far the main area for improvement. It was the most commonly mentioned reason for dissatisfaction. For visitors, waiting time was less of an issue. A total of 19 out of 370 reviewers [5.1%] complained about the waiting time.

The impacts of long waiting times on residents included:

- School students unable to access after school activities in Mossman; some do not enrol children in after school activities due to the south bound queue; others take their kids out of school early. A teacher north of the river felt her students were disadvantaged.
- Unsafe driving practices as some people crossed double white lines to either access the priority lane on the southern side, or to enter/exit Forest Creek Road.

The impacts of long waiting times in terms of the tourism industry were as follows:

- Damage to the Daintree brand. Wait times of up two hours or more, impact on visitor experience; respondents have seen people turn around.
- Travellers miss scheduled flights or tour departure times.
- It's a really bad look for the region to have people waiting in the queue in the heat for over an hour. With no pre-warning, no refreshments available. No shade.
- A two-ferry system whereby continual flow of traffic instead of building bottle necks would alleviate pedestrian dangers and improve the wait times, whilst still delivering the experience of entering the very special Daintree national park
- Inadequate and inefficient ticketing and queuing system on both sides of the river wastes the time of residents and offers visitors an appalling introduction to the region.
- The queuing and wait times for both tourists and residents presents traffic dangers and poor customer experience
- Peak season queues are unacceptable - up to 2 hours, impacts on visitor experience and missing tours - leads to loss of income and ultimately fewer jobs.

Several respondents suggested communications around waiting time could be improved by having a website with live queue lengths/waiting time to help people choose a better time to travel.

THE MOST COMMONLY mentioned solution proposed by respondents [38.4%] to address waiting times was to have a second ferry. Apart from increasing capacity, a second ferry would serve as a back-up for planned maintenance closures [the five-closure earlier this year is still very much top of mind] as well as unscheduled break downs. It would also help when fuel and gas trucks cross alone and traffic gets backed up.

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THE SECOND MOST COMMONLY mentioned improvement requested by residents [31.3%] was to create a priority lane on the northern side. As mentioned under waiting times, the absence of a priority lane means residents, who have no choice but to travel south during the afternoon peak time, are forced to either abandon planned activities during the peak tourist season, or face long waiting times every day they travel.

Should a change be implemented to the road configuration on the northern side, several respondents had ideas for facilities on the north side, such as playground, visitor information and ticket booth. Improvements to the area where tour buses pick up and drop off passengers from river cruises was also frequently mentioned. Solutions included having designated and timed parking areas for coaches and cars and perhaps a limit on bus size.

Any road reconfiguration should factor in how residents can safely and legally, exit or enter Forest Creek Road when vehicles queue well past this intersection as well as how to accommodate tour buses travelling south to drop off passengers for river cruises leaving from the north side. Vehicles have been observed travelling south on the wrong side of the double yellow lines in order to get passengers to their croc tours.

Facilities and/or road configuration also need to consider the safety of pedestrians in this area. People do get out of their cars and walk along the road perhaps to the amenities on the riverbank. At times, tour guides will walk passengers to the river and visitors have been observed walking right to the water's edge.

THE THIRD MOST COMMON improvement suggested [24.1%] was to extend the access to the priority lane on the southern side to enable those with concession cards to access the lane when traffic is queued back past the start of the double lanes and to install clearer signs for visitors.

This would also accommodate the relocation of the ticket booth to allow for a full load to be queued which was suggested by many. The current operator did however, confirm the usual practice during peak season was for the ticket booth attendant to walk up the lane and ticket vehicles to ensure the ferry is fully loaded at all times.

ONLINE TICKETING was seen as a must by 15.2% of survey respondents, as well as those at the forums and was mentioned in most of the individual submissions. One of the main reasons given was that it would speed up crossing time, however another key benefit of online ticketing is that it would open up many management opportunities. It could facilitate the ability to sell tickets off site at other locations such as Wonga Beach Servo, book a time slot and/or provide access to the priority lane by those who have booked online, or who have pre-booked accommodation and may also reduce those wanting to pay fares via EFTPOS.

Many suggested a boom gate could be installed for pre-purchased tickets. There would be a few factors to consider including reliability of equipment. Ticket scanning has been tried and tested in the past causing delays due to equipment failure. Stopping at a boom gate, swiping, gate opening and then closing will take longer than a person who checks and card/ticket and waves through, but then again, boom gate timing would be irrelevant if queue holds whole ferry of vehicles. If the current range of ticket prices is retained, tickets would need to be checked to ensure the correct ticket has been purchased. The online system needs to ensure purchasers either print or download their ticket at the time of purchase. If left until they arrive at the ferry, visitors may have poor or no mobile coverage depending on which mobile provider they have.

Finally, any form of automation by its very definition, will reduce employee numbers. One of the positives of the ferry identified at one of the forums is the employment opportunities. With 18 employees working either full time or part time, the ferry is one of the largest employers in the Daintree.

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Several submitters suggested an expansion of OPERATING TIMES. An earlier start would allow people to have a job in Mossman or Port Douglas starting at 6am, so would have the potential to change the employment profile of the community living north of the river. A few residents requested normal hours on Christmas Day and a few reviewers on TripAdvisor lamented about the changed scheduled on Christmas Day.

In terms of PRICING AND REVENUE, the concession cards providing free travel for residents was an aspect people wanted to retain, but some felt the cost was too high for visitors. Some felt the ferry should be operated at cost and in contrast, some suggested a levy could raise funds to be used exclusively for environmental protection and infrastructure north of the river. It was also pointed out at the forums that ferry revenue is an important income stream for Council. Looking at TripAdvisor, around 11% of reviewers thought the price was too high. One in four people mentioned the cost. Of these people, 59% said the fare was reasonable; 41% thought it was too expensive.

Several suggested pricing could be used as a means to spread out traffic from the middle of the day, discounting fares during off peak times, or substantially increasing it in peak times.

A few people wanted PERFORMANCE MONITORING and/or KPIs related to speed of operations included in the contract. Any performance monitoring would need to take into account factors outside the operator's control which could include on board vehicle breakdowns, tourists having difficulty operating hire cars or unruly and intoxicated passengers ignoring safety directions, all which impact operations. In addition, tour boats and private vessels have right of way depending on the direction of travel and the ferry must stop and give way.

A few residents felt the ferry area (WESTERN PRECINCT) could be improved, one describing the precinct as a mess and unsightly and there should be some waste disposal facilities. Others wanted a return of the Croc Shop, or limited (pre-packaged) food and beverage sales as well as an information centre. Signs were frequently mentioned as being unprofessional and needing an overhaul.

There were a multitude of other areas for improvement which are covered in the main body of this report.

In terms of what's working now, the ferry personnel were viewed favourably and employment opportunities offered by ferry operator were valued. It was also acknowledged that apart from the five-day closure, which is very much still top of mind among residents, the ferry is very reliable.

Very few people [5%] proposed the ferry be replaced with a bridge and half of these said a bridge should only be an option if the ferry operations could not be improved.

The five-day ferry closure which occurred earlier this year is still very much in the minds of residents. The full report includes all these comments related to this so they may be taken into consideration when specifying what arrangements need to be in place for mandatory AMSA inspections.

A few residents commented on the community engagement, both in regards to the ferry contract and ongoing communications. A few felt an edited copy of the current contract would have been useful. The online survey was successful in generating a significant amount of data but a few felt it was too simplistic and while all individual comments have been kept confidential, some residents weren't entirely sure this would be the case.

Further feedback, particularly if not covered by comments received thus far, is welcome up until such time as the tender documentation is finalised which is expected to be March 2019.

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## Section One: Background

### New Ferry Contract

The current Daintree ferry contract is due to expire 30 June 2021.

Douglas Shire Council is planning to issue tenders for a new contract no later than 30 June 2019 with the aim of awarding a contract by 31 December 2019. This would allow 18 months for the successful tenderer to prepare for a seamless transition into the new contract.

Before preparing tender documents, feedback was sought from all stakeholders with regard to any enhancements to the ferry service they would like Council to consider.

### Engagement Methodology

A Community Engagement Plan was prepared and approved at the Council meeting held on 28 August 2018.

Engagement activities occurred throughout September, October and early November, and were designed to reach a wide range of ferry users and hence employed multiple communication channels which included:

- Email to database of Daintree stakeholders [168]
- Email to Daintree Joint Management Group members, Tourism Port Douglas Daintree, Daintree Marketing Cooperative and Douglas Shire Sustainability Group
- Face to face meeting with ferry operators
- Letters mailed to all shire residents living north of the Daintree River [250]
- Facebook posts
- Online survey of residents [117 responses]
- Handouts at the ferry [600 notices distributed]
- Poster on the Daintree Ferry notice board
- Editorial in Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette and Newport; [212 clicks on media release posted on Council's website.]
- Alert on Council's Have Your Say Page – [166 clicks on page]

Feedback from ferry users could be provided either directly by email or via the online survey. Residents were invited to do both.

Two forums were held in early November in Cape Tribulation and Cow Bay to present preliminary findings and invite further comment. The forums were promoted by notices handed out at the ferry, via the media, email to database of Daintree stakeholders and via Daintree Marketing Cooperative which distributed the notice throughout its network.

To glean visitor attitudes, the rating score from 370 TripAdvisor reviewers since May 2015 was looked at. An analysis of the 100 most recent comments was done to ascertain reasons behind ratings given. In addition, there was an analysis of the comments posted by all 89 (24% of the 370 reviewers) who rated the service as average, poor or terrible.

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## Structure of Report on Feedback

The feedback received from all engagement activities has been combined into this one report.

- Section One – Background
- Section Two - Satisfaction with the current service
- Section Three - Areas for improvement or enhancement
- Section Four – What’s working now
- Section Five – Five-day ferry closure comments
- Section Six – Comments on Community Engagement process

In Section Three, comments have been grouped together under different headings. A summary of the feedback is provided within the body of the report and all comments in their entirety, (de-identified) have been included in the Appendices.

Three organisations, Daintree Marketing Cooperative, Douglas Shire Sustainability Group and Tourism Port Douglas Daintree, provided quite detailed and well-articulated submissions. While key points made have been included within the body of this report where relevant, there is value in making their submissions available in their entirety. With their permission, all three submissions are shown in Appendix Twelve.



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## Section Two: Satisfaction with Current Services

To ascertain the satisfaction with current services, two indicators were looked at. The first is how the service is rated by residents and the second how the service is rated by visitors.

### Online Survey – Residents

The online survey for Shire residents asked people to rate the service. Over half were satisfied with current services, and 47% were dissatisfied.

Rating	No.	%	
Excellent	35	30%	53%
Good	27	23%	
Unsatisfactory	41	35%	47%
Very Unsatisfactory	14	12%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>100%</b>	

The bulk of respondents, (83%) lived over the river, 11% lived elsewhere in the shire and one respondent was from outside the shire.

Suburb	No.	%	
Cow Bay	30	26%	83%
Cape Tribulation	22	19%	
Diwan	22	19%	
Forest Creek	14	12%	
Cape Kimberley	5	4%	
Bloomfield & Ayton	4	3%	
Other Shire	13	11%	
Outside Shire	1	1%	
No Response	6	5%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

### Visitors - TripAdvisor

An analysis has been done of Trip Advisor comments about the Daintree Ferry provide an insight into how visitors rate the service. Looking at the 370 TripAdvisor's ratings since May 2015, 76% rated their ferry experience Very Good or Excellent and 24% rated their experience average, poor or terrible.

Rating	No.	%	
Excellent	161	44%	76%
Very Good	120	32%	
Average	66	18%	24%
Poor	15	4%	
Terrible	8	2%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>100%</b>	

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## Section Three: Improvements

### Queuing / Waiting Times

A reduction in waiting times to cross the river was the main improvement. It was the most common complaint from residents with over one third of respondents to the online survey mentioning long queues and or waiting times during the peak tourism season. It was the most commonly mentioned reason for dissatisfaction. The impacts of long waiting times included:

- School students unable to access after school activities in Mossman; some do not enrol children in after school activities due to the south bound queue at after school time; others take their kids out of school early. A teacher north of the river felt her students were disadvantaged.
- Unsafe driving practices as some people crossed double white lines to either access the priority lane on the southern side, or to enter/exit Forest Creek Road.

For visitors, waiting time was less of an issue. A total of 19 people complained about the waiting time which is 5.1% of the 370 reviews.

The impacts of long waiting times in terms of the tourism industry were as follows:

- Damage to the Daintree brand. Wait times of up two hours or more, impact on visitor experience; respondents have seen people turn around.
- Travellers miss scheduled flights or tour departure times.
- It's a really bad look for the region to have people waiting in the queue in the heat for over an hour. With no pre-warning, no refreshments available. No shade.
- A two-ferry system whereby continual flow of traffic instead of building bottle necks would alleviate pedestrian dangers and improve the wait times, whilst still delivering the experience of entering the very special Daintree national park
- Inadequate and inefficient ticketing and queuing system on both sides of the river wastes the time of residents and offers visitors an appalling introduction to the region.
- The queuing and wait times for both tourists and residents presents traffic dangers and poor customer experience
- Peak season queues are unacceptable - up to 2 hours, impacts on visitor experience and missing tours - leads to loss of income and ultimately fewer jobs.

Several respondents suggested communications around waiting time could be improved by having a website with live queue lengths/waiting time to help people choose a better time.

The comments in full are shown in [Appendix One - Waiting Time](#)

### Second Ferry

The most commonly mentioned solution proposed by respondents [38.4%] to address waiting times was to have a second ferry. Apart from increasing capacity, a second ferry would serve as a back-up for planned maintenance closures [the five-closure earlier this year is still very much top of mind] as well as unscheduled break downs. It would also help when fuel and gas trucks cross on the ferry alone and traffic get backed up.

The comments in full are shown in [Appendix Two - Two Ferries](#)

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## Priority Lane on Northern Side

The second most commonly mentioned improvement requested by residents [31.3%] was to create a priority lane on the northern side. As mentioned under waiting times, the absence of a priority lane means residents, who have no choice but to travel south during the afternoon peak time, are forced to either abandon planned activities during the peak tourist season, or face long waiting times every day they travel.

Should a change be implemented to the road configuration on the northern side, several respondents had ideas for facilities on the north side including a ticket booth, play area, seating and improvements to the area where tour buses pick up and drop off passengers from river cruises. Solutions included having designated and timed parking areas for coaches and cars and perhaps a limit on bus size. The picture below indicates there is little room left for cars to park.

Any road reconfiguration should factor in how residents can safely and legally, exit or enter Forest Creek Road when vehicles queue well past this intersection as well as how to accommodate tour buses travelling south to drop off passengers for river cruises leaving from the north side. Vehicles have been observed travelling south on the wrong side of the double yellow lines in order to get passengers to their croc tours.

Facilities and/or road configuration also need to consider the safety of pedestrians in this area. People do get out of out of their cars and walk along the road perhaps to the amenities on the riverbank. Some visitors have been observed walking right to the water's edge.

At times, tour guides will walk passengers to the river. One coach operator said it would be advantageous to have a solution to allow coaches to access the ferry to allow passengers to disembark without sitting in a line-up of cars and was confident resolving this issue would be a great help to many operators.

Comments in full are shown in [Appendix Three - Northern Priority Lane](#).



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## Extension to Priority Lane on South Side

The third most common improvement suggested [24.1%] was to extend access to the priority lane on the southern side to enable those with concession cards to access the lane when traffic is queued back past the start of the double lanes.

This would also accommodate the relocation of the ticket booth to allow for a full load to be queued which was suggested by many. The current operator did however, confirm the usual practice during peak season was for the ticket booth attendant to walk up the lane and ticket vehicles to ensure the ferry is fully loaded at all times.

In terms of operating times, the priority lane operates between 9am and 4.30pm from the first Sunday in June through to end of October each year. At times, it has been opened over Easter. One suggestion emerging at one of the forums was for the priority lane to be demand driven, in that the operator had the ability to open and/or close the priority lane without Council approval. 2018 Priority Lane was open 27/12/18 to 02/01/19 based on demand during the same period in 2017, however was not fully used due to inclement weather Dec 18/Jan 19.

A few residents are conscious of visitors having to wait longer, suggesting that maybe every second ferry just load tourists, arguing locals should know peak times and plan, although clearly not everyone has the flexibility to avoid peak times. The current operator advised they do make a judgement call and will stop loading vehicles from the priority lane to allow visitors waiting for two ferries in a row, to load on the third ferry but, this practice is not favourable with some locals.

In terms of visitor attitudes towards the priority lane, the analysis of comments on TripAdvisor indicates that while a few visitors are resentful about the locals getting preference, it is not widespread with just 4% of reviewers complaining about the priority lane. There are also visitors on the tour buses who also have access to the priority lane “the queue was very, very long for the ferry...but to our surprise we were driven down a priority lane and ended up the second vehicle on the next ferry so were over in not time.”

Full comments are shown in [Appendix Four – Extension to Southside Priority Lane](#).

## On Line Ticketing

Online ticketing was seen as a must by 15.2% of survey respondents, as well as those at the forums and was mentioned by most of the individual submissions. One of the main reasons given was that it would speed up crossing time, however another key benefit of online ticketing is that it would open up many management opportunities. It could facilitate the ability to sell tickets off site at other locations such as Wonga Beach Servo, book a time slot and/or provide access to the priority lane by those who have booked online, or who have pre-booked accommodation.

If tickets could be pre-booked, all visitors without pre-booked tickets would be directed through the Western Precinct to purchase tickets, access visitor information and be exposed to the river cruise operators. Those with pre-booked tickets and concession card holders would by-pass the Western Precinct, perhaps enter through an automated boom gate.

It may also reduce those wanting to pay fares via EFTPOS. Currently EFTPOS is advertised to be “*available at all times the ferry is operating*,” however there is evidence this does not always occur. The operators report that EFTPOS does “drop out” on the ferry so it is not always a case of “tap and go” and it may take one or two minutes to process a transaction. The ferry can cross in 3-4 minutes, which means the time taken to process two or more transactions could exceed the crossing time and cause delays. All EFTPOS transaction are processed at the ticket booth

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during ticket booth operations hours i.e. if a vehicle travelling north to south requires EFTPOS they are directed to the ticket booth to process the transaction after travelling to avoid unnecessary hold ups on board. All EFTPOS transactions are processed on the ferry outside ticket booth operating hours.

Many suggested a boom gate could be installed for pre-purchased tickets. The issues which need to be carefully considered include:

- If a boom gate system is to be used for people to scan their ticket, the equipment must be reliable. Ticket scanning has been tried and tested in the past causing delays due to equipment failure. Equipment needs to withstand the extreme weather, rain and humidity.
- There are nine different categories of vehicles with return tickets ranging \$11 return to \$94. If the current price structure is retained, tickets will still need to be checked they are correct – e.g. bus may have 11 seats where cost is \$30 one way but purchase a ticket for <seats which is \$17 one way.
- The online system needs to be designed to ensure purchasers either print or download their ticket at the time of purchase. If left until they arrive at the ferry, visitors may have poor or no mobile coverage depending on which mobile provider they have.
- Stopping at a boom gate, swiping, gate opening and then closing will take longer than a person who checks and card/ticket and waves through, but boom gate timing would be irrelevant if queue holds whole ferry of vehicles.
- One of the positives of the ferry identified at one of the forums was the employment opportunities. With 18 employees working either full time or part time, the ferry is one of the largest employers in the Daintree. The local community valued the job opportunities created and feared any automation may reduce number of employees required.

Full comments may be found in [Appendix Five – Ticketing](#)

## Operating Times

The current contract requires the ferry service to operate 18 hours per day every day of the year except Christmas Day where traditionally there has been a break in the middle of the day. [In January 2019, starting time was brought forward to 5am for a six month trial.] The Douglas Shire Sustainability Group stressed that six hours of no traffic on the road prevented the death of a lot of wildlife.

Several submitters suggested an expansion of operating days and times. An earlier start, 5am for example, would have the potential to change the employment profile of the community living north of the river.

A few reviewers on TripAdvisor lamented about the changed schedule on Christmas Day, and a few residents requested the ferry operate normal hours, another said no lunch break on Christmas Day and others said it was difficult to communicate the operating hours to free and independent travellers. From Christmas 2018, operating hours will be 7:30am to 5pm, with no break during the day.

Full comments may be found in [Appendix Six – Operating Times](#)

## Pricing and Revenue

All eligible shire residents can, for \$16, purchase a concession card which gives them free ferry travel. There were no complaints about this system, indeed it was one of the aspects those at the forum identified as something residents appreciated and wanted to keep. One survey respondent felt all residents of Wujal Wujal should also be eligible to purchase a ferry pass,



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since they have so many family connections to Mossman. Under the current arrangement, Wujal Wujal residents can purchase a concession card for \$38, giving them free ferry travel.

Some residents thought the cost was too high for visitors, and felt the ferry should not be revenue centre for Council and should be operated at cost i.e. cost neutral. It was mentioned at one of the forums that ferry revenue was an important income stream for Council and the Douglas Shire Sustainability Group and a few others suggested a levy could provide funds which could be used exclusively for environmental protection and infrastructure north of the river.

Looking at Trip Advisor, one in four people mentioned the cost. Of these people, 59% said the fare was reasonable and 41% thought it was too expensive.

Several suggested pricing could be used as a means to spread out traffic from the middle of the day suggesting discounted fares during off peak times. Others said the fare should be substantially increased in congestion periods to encourage improved visitation patterns that are better suited to ecotourism advances north of the ferry.

Full comments may be found in [Appendix Seven – Pricing](#)

## **Performance Monitoring of Ferry Operations**

A few people wanted to include performance monitoring related to speed of operations.

- GPS speed monitoring, incentives for operator to move cars quickly
- Incentives for volume/time and penalties for slow operations - ferry should have a tracking recorder at all times and average speeds to be monitored.
- Transparency around KPIs and Service Level Agreement e.g. turnaround times, wait times, crossing times; open data.
- There must be a service Level Agreement – KPIs which the operator needs to achieve, or be subject to some sort of penalty (financial or otherwise). A device to record speed must be attached to each ferry and penalties for slow crossings enacted.
- Ferry speed must be monitored, and mandated, as the operator may choose to go slower to save fuel, thus making people wait even longer.
- The ferry appears to run at many different speeds, and some in the community are concerned that there is no incentive for the operator to move people quickly. This needs to be given careful consideration prior to the next tender process.
- Ferry speed is often an issue (tides, ticketing, fuel efficiency). It has recently been improved, but needs a ferry speed monitor and KPIs. The current enthusiasm won't last another 10 years.

The current operators advise it is necessary to slow down the speed when ticketing large volumes of vehicles travelling north to south. The addition of an extra traffic controller introduced in August 2018, did result in faster crossing times.

Any performance monitoring would need to take into account factors outside the operator's control which could include on board vehicle breakdowns, tourists having difficulty operating hire cars or unruly and intoxicated passengers ignoring safety directions, all which impact operations. In addition, tour boats and private vessels have right of way depending on the direction of travel and the ferry must stop and give way.

## **Enhancing the Ferry Area (Western Precinct)**

A few residents felt the ferry area could be improved, one describing the precinct as a mess and unsightly. Other requests for the Western Precinct included waste disposal facilities, a return of Croc Shop, café / kiosk with limited (pre-packaged) food and beverage sales.

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Signage in the area was also mentioned by several people who said they were unprofessional, could be clearer. Others suggested signs should include information about swimming and crocodiles. Another suggested there should be signs in different languages but did not specify which.

Tourism Port Douglas Daintree wanted the Western Precinct to incorporate some additional visitor information facilities which could be either separate to or included with ferry ticketing, but would include information/e-book downloads (requires Wi-Fi but no internet), a map, either virtual or physical) to include National Parks Walks and visitor facilities north of the Daintree River, brochure stands and possibly Wi-Fi hotspot for tour information and booking.

Comments in full may be found at [Appendix Eight – Ferry Precinct](#)

## Faster Ferry

Several people suggested a faster ferry.

- Speed up crossing time in busy season
- The Ferry speed limit needs to be abolished. Faster ferry = less time waiting.
- The ferry is old and slow – new ferry needs to incorporate a way to save fuel and travel faster by using newer technology
- Second smaller faster ferry for peak times and quieter times. e.g. night and early mornings

According to the operator, there is no speed limit as such. The limiting factor is the need to slow down and stop a 300 tonne loaded vessel safely when it reaches the opposite river bank. The momentum of the vessel is the primary limiting factor.

## Visitor Passes

Residents who live north of the river may purchase a book of 55 Visitor Tickets for \$16. These are for their family and friends to visit, and to give to tradespeople coming to provide services. Comments from residents were:

- Not very good cooperation with the use of visitor passes.
- Loss of ferry tickets for friends and visitors and services.
- Ticketing should be available online for pre-purchase, and locals should be able to log in to an account to issue a visitor ticket for short notice visitors or tradies attending to repairs.
- Consistency with visitor passes – can users use priority lane (technically no but used to until complaints of too many people in priority lane so now it's just concession card holders.)

## Allow People Out of Their Cars

Based on TripAdvisor reviews, many travellers comment on the beautiful crossing with spectacular views: *“lovely view while cruising on the river”*. This is however, is not the case if you are sitting in the middle lane with a truck or large coach parked either side. A number of TripAdvisor reviewers wrote about being disappointed that they could not get out of the car during the crossing.

There were 89 reviewers out of a total of 370 who scored their ferry experience average, poor or terrible and of these 89, thirteen complained about not being allowed to get out of the car to enjoy the view. One person suggested building a viewing platform on the south side of the river.

The operator provided the following comments about this aspect:

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- Apart from pedestrians crossing, under the current contract, people travelling over by car are not allowed to exit their vehicle while on the ferry. There are several reasons as to why this is the case, safety being the main one. An extract from Coroner McFadden's Report: *"I further recommend warning notices be erected advising motorists and passengers that for their own safety they should remain in their vehicles whilst the ferry is in operation."* Further to this, traffic controllers are unable to control or manage people under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, so they are safer in their vehicles.
  - Another is to prevent vehicle damage. During previous contracts when the rule was not in force, there were many incidents of car doors being damaged or ripped off.
  - A third reason is that it will slow down operations. Several people, including the ferry operators, believed making sure everyone was back in their vehicle prior to unloading would take time.

## Fuel Trucks

A few people lamented about the requirement for fuel and gas trucks to cross solo. Some believed it was a Council requirement, others thought it was somehow related to the type of life raft carried on the ferry.

According to the operator, neither is true, rather it is an Australian Maritime Services Australia (AMSA) requirement related to dangerous goods. Dangerous goods carriage is regulated by the International Maritime Dangerous Goods code and National Standard for Commercial Vessels (NSCV) C4 specifically chapter 15. In short segregation of Dangerous Goods cargo (fuel/LPG trucks) is required, especially from passenger areas. The current procedure for Dangerous Goods is as follows:

1. Vehicles displaying the IMDG code must travel on the ferry alone at all times.
2. Regular ferry users are aware of this requirement and have been advised of the preferable times of travel as directed by Douglas Shire Council in order to minimise delays and disruption to other ferry users. The times are as follows:

South to North	North to South
Between 0600 and 0900	Between 0600 and 1400
Between 1400 and Midnight	Between 1800 and Midnight

At one of the forums, mention was made that the ferry was fuelled up during operating hours – in the early morning. This has never been raised before. The ferry contractor confirmed this has been the arrangement for 12 years, and with the impact being up to 15 minute wait every fortnight prior between 6am and 7am. The ferry operator has spoken to the fuel supplier and moving forward the ferry will not be fuelled during operating hours.

Comments in full may be found at [Appendix Nine – Dangerous Goods](#)

## Improvement of Loading

Comments around loading were generally that it was too slow.

- The loading of the ferry is slow, and there is often not enough staff to ensure that the ferry is loaded fully or quickly.
- It takes too long to load and unload the ferry.
- Ensure that there is sufficient staff on board to allow effective loading during busy time. Liaise with local business to determine when extra staff is needed.



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Some residents thought the loading process could be improved by the addition of another lane on both sides, and another suggested traffic lights on each ferry lane and clear instructions for motorists.

The actual crossing can take between 3 and 4 minutes. In comparison, the loading and unloading of vehicles at peak times, can take 7-12 minutes—longer if drivers are slow off the mark. This suggests there is more opportunity to increase capacity by improving loading and unloading times rather than trying to speed up the vessel. . The loading/unloading process is conditional upon vehicle type, size with regard to vessel stability, ferry driver visibility and also Coroner recommendations and operator procedures for safe loading/unloading.

Coach operators reported that during low tide conditions, the angle created between the ferry and the designated landing point becomes fairly steep making it difficult to safely enter/exit. One coach operator confirmed it had to limit the size of its vehicles travelling across the ferry as extensive damage had been incurred on larger vehicles costing thousands of dollars in repairs. The coach operator also confirmed it was suffering a loss in trade due to the inability to use larger coaches safely.

The ferry operator advised the loading ramps have been modified and extended but as companies are purchasing longer buses, with an extremely low profile, it can still be an issue.

## **Environment**

There were only a few comments received which related to the environment. They came under two areas. One was the environmental impacts of the ferry operations; the second was the impact visitors and traffic have on the natural environment north of the river

### **Ferry Operations**

Three people mentioned environmental impacts of ferry operations.

One suggested solar power would be preferable to diesel. Another said the ferry needed to have a capture system to collect oil and grease from the deck and ferry machinery and believed copious amounts ended up in the river. The ferry operator confirmed there is a capture system which prevents any oil or grease entering the water.

Another said with the long queues, idling cars waiting in queues equals pollution.

### **Impact of Visitor Numbers**

At the forums, the subject of limiting visitor numbers into the area was raised and whether there were any avenues to explore which would determine what an acceptable level of visitors looked like.

It was also pointed out there was an important distinction between limiting the number of visitors as opposed to limiting the number of cars. Cars needed to be separate from people in determining capacity. Douglas Shire Sustainability Group proposed a shuttle service from the north side of the ferry to Cape Tribulation should be considered and/or tour boats could offer a passenger service or simply leave people on the North side to meet a shuttle which was suggested in the 1996 Planning Scheme.

It was also pointed out at the forums, that visitor numbers in Port Douglas and Cairns had increased by 100% over 10 years, and in comparison, there had only been a 10% increase in visitors over the river.

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It has been suggested that the road north of the river is at capacity. One respondent said this was nonsensical, and does not consider that traffic is slowed when it is busy, making the road safer for wildlife.

## **Daintree Ferry is in Tourism Not Transport**

A number of comments indicate that people view the Daintree Ferry as a tour operator, as much, if not more, as a transport provider.

- The Daintree Ferry needs to move into the modern world. It should be on Facebook and Twitter with some staff appointed to update its status, so the latest info is available. The Ferry should advertise in tandem with local tourism organisations, another way of informing visitors in a positive manner about how it operates. It is already an attraction, and this could be formalised for very little cost.
- There is nothing tangible provided by the ferry to visitors other than the journey, and the community finds it very surprising that it is taking so long to develop some sort of information pack at this artificial bottleneck. This is a missed opportunity that needs to be part of the selection criteria when DSC goes to tender for the ferry service.
- It would be nice if ferry operator was a member of the Daintree Marketing Cooperative.
- The new contract needs to position the ferry and the contractor as a part of the local tourism industry, not just as essential service and a Milch [sic] cow.

## **Bridge**

Very few people [5%] proposed the ferry be replaced with a bridge and half of these said a bridge should only be an option if the ferry operations could not be improved. DSSG believes locals should have priority access to the ferry on both sides as there is no better way to upset locals or hasten the push for a bridge and forcing locals to queue.

Full comments are shown in [Appendix Ten - Bridge](#)

## **Staff**

Based on the residents' survey, TripAdvisor reviews and comments at the two forums, the ferry personnel were viewed favourably.

Only a few residents mentioned issues with one or two staff, and just four (1%) of the TripAdvisor reviewers were critical of staff.

Full comments are shown in [Appendix Eleven - Staff](#)

## **Requirement to turn off engine**

A few people complained that in the summer months, crossing the ferry with engine turned off and no air-con was uncomfortably hot. The operator said the requirement to remain in the vehicle stems from the Coroner's report and the requirement for engines to be turned off and handbrakes engaged, is their own WH&S policy. The operator's risk assessment and safety policy was developed following a number of near miss incidents involving deck staff being at risk of being struck by vehicles and damage to other vehicles when engines remain on and drivers accidentally leave their vehicles in gear, take their foot off the brake, etc. One person suggested a roof on the ferry, which is possible, but would increase operating costs.

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## Concession Cards

Residents offered suggestions with regard to the operation of concession cards including being able to purchase ferry cards at the ferry booth on weekends not just at council offices during working hours.

Several people offered suggestions to make it easier and save time for ferry staff to identify most pass holders either by having stickers on car window (like old rego stickers) for residents, digital recognition of concession card holders and/or automated boom gate. The ferry operators report that frequently some current ferry concession card holders abuse the current system by giving cards to people not eligible to obtain ferry concession card so any automated system would need to factor this in.

## Traffic Study

Residents are keen for a traffic study to be done, although one respondent was sceptical.

“There already seems to be a good deal of negativity flowing down the chain of command, I have recently been told that EFTPOS on the ferry can’t work’ and there have been other small messages passed on the hint of the status quo being maintained. One only needs to look at the DSC website to see that a new ‘vessel’ in the singular is proposed. Once again, if the research leads us to an outcome already decided by council staff that is simply the status quo, there will be a long battle with the community.

All of a sudden, the existing ferry has sped up substantially; I am not sure why or who made that decision, but it does seem crazy/suspicious that as soon as a study is hinted at the ferry speeds up. Any recording of trip times now will be inaccurate as a result.

The current consultation timeline, with no research carried out in the busiest months on July and August is ridiculous. There is now no chance of surveying tourist lined up for hours in the sun, with no chance of refreshment, no information on likely wait times, and Wi-Fi or radio to divert them. This makes me think that there is not and never has been any intention to carry out robust research into a better system

DSC appears to have completely dropped the ball on any research into what will be needed for the next contract. Instead of budgeting for research, the aim appears to have been to get a grant. Now that has failed, we have not only lost the ability to survey the busiest months, but it is not even clear if any research will be done. Guy Chester, who authored the 2004 study, could have refreshed his for much less than \$100K, but I suspect that his conclusions do not fit what DSC has already decided to do, and thus this option won’t be explored. The chances of poor decisions that don’t serve the community are very likely.”

**AUTHOR’S NOTE:** Council did announce in September 2018 that an engineering traffic analysis at the Daintree River Ferry crossing would be completed to determine the most appropriate traffic management approach in line with industry standards. Engineering modelling will be used to test various upgrade options and other demand management controls that could relieve congestion. It will quantify the delays, road carrying capacity, peak hour demand and duration of the peak will be accurately determined. The assessment aims to detail current congestion issues and model high level solutions, such as a second ferry, bridge or other travel demand initiatives.

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In response to that announcement, one resident responded that now that Council is doing “scientific” analysis outside peak time, the need for infrastructure will become apparent and Council needs to plan and commit money on infrastructure and technology as soon as feasible.

Others stressed the importance of taking into consideration the potential sealing of the Bloomfield Track.

- 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.
- There appears to be no consideration given the recent bi-partisan committee on northern tourism that recommended the sealing of the Bloomfield Track. The Wujal Community, along with Cook MUST be consulted and any traffic studies MUST consider the increased traffic generated by the Bloomfield Track.

## Radio Antenna on Ticket Booth

Daintree Marketing Cooperative wanted the joint Discovery Centre/DMC community radio concept to be supported through provision of free space, antenna and electricity at the ticket booth site and a few other members individually requested there be no rent charged for a community radio antenna on the ticket booth.

Council confirmed at the Cape Tribulation forum in November that the fee would be waived.

## Other Ideas

There were a range of other comments and suggestions which were as follows:

- Encourage development of Bailey Creek Marina for Island style destination from Port Douglas. Re-establishing access from airstrip and encouraging the historic tidal flow of the Bailey cry wetlands that was restricted in the historic ford style crossing of Baileys creek (no reefs at mouth of Baileys supports a limited impact)
- Ferry Life Rafts need to be suitable to protect passengers from crocs. Having rafts is just not suitable in an area that has seen a fatality less than 300m away. They need to go above and beyond maritime requirements. This should be non-negotiable.
- Ferry also needs a better design of ramp door to avoid vehicles bottoming out on low and high tide.
- Proper complaints procedures with written records and incentives/penalty system in place. The operators confirmed there is a procedure in place. Complaints received directly by operator are resolved. Those received by Douglas Shire Council are referred to the operator for resolution.
- Two people mentioned the ferry announcements, wanting a system which would eliminate the need for loud speakers blaring out and shattering the peace and serenity for visitors doing river cruises, and nearby residents. Better signage was suggested however again referring to Coroner McFadden’s Report 3.11.1989, *“I further recommend that a warning signal be given over a loud speaker or PA system.”*
- Clear and tested contingency plan, staff training to deal with any breakdown situation.
- Wi-Fi on ferry to allow download of visitor information e.g. Daintree Walks Booklet & map

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- Better signs on the ferry to eliminate the need for loud speaker blaring out and shattering the peace and serenity for visitors doing river cruises. The ferry operator has advised the announcements are as a result of the Coroner's Report: *I further recommend that a warning signal be given over a loud speaker or PA system.*
  - Not flexible at times, traffic survey from 2004 still not implemented and all the issues are still here. Lack of 'can do' attitude.
  - Stop large vehicles, which barely fit into the driving lane on the Alexandra range.
  - Build a new lower [sic] ferry
  - Include a clause giving Council first right to buy ferry at end of contract at an agreed price.
  - Contract should be 10 years only if involving new ferry, to allow recoup of costs (and therefore better Council/community contract). If no new ferry, 5 years only.
  - Do a night into the Daintree coming using the \$100,000 state government or ferry income approximately \$3 million or \$4 million ferry reserve.
  - Council needs to be sure and clear on intent of tender.
  - There already seems to be a good deal of negativity flowing down the chain of command, I have recently been told that EFTPOS on the ferry can't work' and there have been other small messages passed on the hint of the status quo being maintained. One only needs to look at the DSC website to see that a new 'vessel' in the singular is proposed. Once again, if the research leads us to an outcome already decided by council staff that is simply the status quo, there will be a long battle with the community.
  - In case current contract is extended (e.g. new ferry construction), prior agreement as to payment, lest a repeat of the debacle of the previous contract.
  - Make people feel proud and confident of the ferry service
  - Have free beer and prawns during crossing!

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## Section Four: What's Working Now

At the forums the following points were mentioned when asked what was working:

- Employment opportunities offered by ferry operator were valued. The ferry operator employs 18 people. And whilst they are not all full time positions, it does make the company one of the biggest employers in the Daintree.
- Some appreciated that the ferry was relatively quiet.
- The artwork on the Daintree Ferry is appreciated and is better than the old photographs.
- The ferry is very reliable and there are very few stoppages.
- Ferry personnel are, in the main, viewed favourably by residents, and certainly TripAdvisor reviews reinforce this opinion.
- The concession cards (free travel for residents) need to be retained.

There were seven respondents 6% who were satisfied with the current service

- No improvements; it is fine as it is
- I am more than happy with the ferry service as it is.
- No improvements I can think of. A great job is being by all the crew. Thank you for the extra services given to the locals.
- Could not wish for a better ferry and service.
- I think it runs very efficiently now and can't think of any enhancements
- No improvements; it's great as it is.

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## Section Five: Ferry Closure

The five-day ferry closure which occurred earlier this year is still very much in the minds of residents. Comments need to be taken into consideration when specifying what arrangements need to be in place for mandatory AMSA inspections, which could be either every 3 or 5 years, depending on the age of the vessel/s.

### Comments in Full - Residents

- When there is a ferry mechanical problem and as it happened this year when the ferry had to be taken out of the water for 5 days for a check... with only a 28 days' notice when this was known much earlier... No replacement ferry was organised, no consideration was given to the financial loss to some businesses north and south of the river...to the medical situation of some residents whose medical appointments can take a long time to get... and all other repercussions. The arrangements put in place to facilitate crossing the river and getting people to their destination were not satisfactory, the consultation with residents and businesses was very poor; it was presented more like a " fait accompli ".
- lack of community engagement about ferry closures and ferry stoppages.
- Significant loss of income due to short lead up time when ferry was taken out for inspection this year. Poor plans put in place to deal with visitors, industries other than tourism that use the ferry (e.g. primary agriculture) and not enough preparation time to mitigate huge costs and sacrifices to our business. Poor or no response from DSC Community Engagement Officer about ferry issues and shortfalls with DSC proposed plans. Ferry fund is capped and services and infrastructure needed for the long waits and to make ferry crossing much easier not being invested in.
- It also causes huge inconvenience during breakdowns and when taken out of the water for inspection. Whilst DSC believed they handled it well, it is still a massive detrimental impact on residents.
- replacement ferry organised early and ready for yearly repairs necessary - carrying capacity of three large busses should be one year in advance & off peak only all residents and business should be notified ASAP.
- A vehicle carrying ferry available for planned maintenance or lengthy breakdown of the regular service.
- clear and public service agreement levels that include no ferry closure for days without replacement service. Planning of any inspections to be submitted in advance and in no circumstances allowing closure of the landing on either side (ferry to be taken somewhere else if necessary) so other service can be put in place at operators cost.
- Lack of understanding that people's lives can depend on the ferry operating and so many business depending on the ferry - food supplies, tradies, medical appointments, etc.
- Longer forward notice for ferry maintenance. it will affect Tourist bookings. Fruit growers need alternative transport. but to stop grumbling not anyone's fault ferry must be maintained.
- Adequate planning, preparation and provision of an adequate replacement vehicle ferry during mandatory foreseeable AMSA inspections isn't given, thereby the locals who use the ferry aren't given priority.
- Also, as a north of Daintree resident the handling of the closure of the ferry earlier this year was inadequately managed by mostly Council.
- Maintenance issues are increasingly an issue - outages leave the community (residents, businesses, visitors) literally stranded - and this year was 5 days - totally unacceptable situation.
- More community consultation about ferry stoppages with a minimum 6-month lead in.

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## Section Six: Community Engagement

A few residents commented on the community engagement, both in regards to the ferry contract and ongoing communications.

### Ferry Contract Engagement

A few felt an edited copy of the current contract would have been useful to help them give better quality feedback and also that the engagement had started too late, and had envisaged the consultation would begin in 2016.

The online survey was successful in generating a significant amount of data but a few felt it was too simplistic and whilst all individual comments have been kept confidential, some weren't entirely sure this would be the case, even though including name and suburb was optional. Submissions from three organisations, DMC, DSSG and TPDD have been published with their permission, as there is value in seeing each one's submission as a whole.

- I hope that a forum or two will be run before the tender process is underway.
- Would be happy to give more suggestions if we were allowed to know what is in the contract - the total lack of transparency in this regard doesn't give a good image and leads to a lot of speculation.
- Copy of current contract would have been useful.
- The nonsense regarding the ferry contract and residents not being able to see any of it needs to stop. All but the remuneration sections should be freely available for the ratepayers to see.
- Weak community engagement plan
- I completed the survey but didn't submit as I thought comments might be attributed to me
- I am incensed at the late entry into research and consultation by DSC, and honestly tired of the nonsense surrounding this ferry service. I feel like an idiot for supporting it, but the reality is I love it, I just want it improved to be what will be needed for 2021 and beyond.

### Future Engagement

- We request the operator and the Council prepare a transparent communication and consultation plan for future operations that be enacted as required. With the consultation group there should be north of the river representatives from a number of different industries (tourism, agriculture etc.) to ensure that potential disruptions minimise the impact on tourism and the community.
- Set up Daintree Ferry Joint User Group with residents, business, etc.
- Council officers to regularly meet with residents to seek feedback about what is working and what isn't – not just a monkey survey.
- Inadequate public notice of ferry maintenance, priority lane opening and closure dates.

### Did We Miss Anything?

Council is presently preparing tender documentation which is expected to be finalised in the first quarter of 2019. There may be aspects about the Daintree Ferry operations not contained in the feedback received to date. If this is the case, further comments would be very welcome, and will be considered up and until such time as the tender documentation is finalised. Comments may be emailed to [enquiries@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@douglas.qld.gov.au) with Daintree Ferry Contract in the subject line.



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## Appendix One – Waiting Time

### Comments in Full – Online Survey & Forums

- The ferry service is not satisfactory when one has to wait for a very long time (half an hour to 2 hours) before being able to get on it, this happens during the peak time of holiday, on the south side late morning to early afternoon and on the north side, late afternoon.
- Long wait times in tourism season
- The wait times are too lengthy especially in peak periods.
- Long waits. Nothing has been done to fix this.
- Long queues even with priority lane. Local vehicles can't access the priority lane due to a kilometre of queued vehicles.
- Due to the large number of tourists there is an unreasonable wait on the northern side if you are travelling into town in the afternoon.
- Queues during the busy season and lack of access to priority lane both north and south.
- the wait time for crossing the river at peak times of the year is shocking
- Only issue is the traffic build up north and south in peak times
- One ferry is not adequate for the volume of traffic for a large portion of the year; there can quite often be excessively long wait times. This also impacts travellers, which effects the lively hood of a large number of residents in the Daintree.
- Traffic build up with long queues effecting locals, tourists and businesses.
- A little bit faster crossing would help. Seems a bit too slow. Need to shift the traffic backlog a bit quicker.
- During high tourism season, the ferry is unable to provide a "reasonable service." Waiting times of up to 3 hours are excessive.
- Wait times at peak periods for tourists and locals alike / Long queues in peak season.
- Unsatisfactory only during busy season. Absolutely unsatisfactory wait times. I find it embarrassing.
- Peak season times are becoming a major issue to people's welfare. Children stuck in cars for sometimes up to 2 hours. Many missing plane flights and tour bookings.
- Service is great. Just not enough trips across in busy times. Wait can be more than an hour.
- During the tourist season, local residents are lined up for more than an hour to access the locals' lane when travelling north. When travelling south there is no local's lane and locals can be held up for hours on the north side, waiting to get on.
- Visitors wanting to make a day trip do not want to spend 2 or 3 hours waiting to get across then back again. As a business owner we want our visitors to spend as much time visiting local areas and businesses. Not waste time trying to cross the river. I have also witnessed lots of cars turning around and leaving as the wait is too long.
- Total disregard for tourists lining up sometimes for hours waiting for the ferry - no signs for toilet, no estimate time for ferry.
- At peak times of the year ferry queues are embarrassing at best for the shire and extremely inconvenient for all caught in the queue. I do not enrol my child in after school activities due to the south bound queue at after school time. Others, I am aware take their kids out of school early.
- For several months of the year there are long queues at peak times making it difficult to make after school activities / appointments etc.
- This is really not good enough for people who live north of the river. As a teacher north of the river, I see many of my students disadvantaged as they cannot easily access after school sports and other activities that happen in Mossman after school.
- The long queues coming North or South during school holidays. I work in Cape Tribulation and live in Forest Creek and sometimes I have to wait for half an hour plus before the long car queue moves so I can turn into Forest Creek road.
- We think the ferry service is fair however during tourist season the lengthy wait is unsatisfactory

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- There should be better information provided when there are delays or problems... If one is waiting, there is no way to know what is happening and in the case of the ferry having to stop unexpectedly ... how do people find out what is happening next?
  - Better information on traffic flows

## Comments in Full – TripAdvisor

- Plan on getting to the river early and try not to get angry that the operator offers an express lane for tour operators and locals. I don't mind a queue provided everyone queues! But the money they charge in tolls (\$28 same day return) could be better spent on a bridge. Time to grow up, Daintree! Once on, ferry is fast, queue is a nightmare.
- The ferry itself is kind of a cool way to cross the river. No propulsion in the conventional sense (i.e. propeller) but rather cable driven. Rather small capacity which is adequate most of the time I suppose but at the end of the day we had to wait two hours to get across and that caused it to lose its charm.
- Attendants really nice, but there can be a long wait for the ferry.
- Although it is always a nice change to be transferred by ferry, waiting is of course less pleasant. Therefore, make sure you are at the ferry before 10.30 when driving from south to north (or later than 12.00) and before 15.30 when driving from north to south (or after 18.30). On the ferry you have a beautiful view of the river. Herons are waiting a long time and if you are lucky you will see different kinds of kingfishers or even a crocodile (saltie).
- Well worth the wait if you get stuck in the line for the ferry. On the other side the roads twist and turn through the rainforest on the way to Cape Tribulation. Many spots to stop and discovery while spending time on the other side of the Daintree river.
- Very fast crossing (about 5 mn + 10 mn to install the cars). Be careful there may be some waiting at certain times.
- We had quite a wait heading north mid-morning but drove straight onto the ferry when returning at about 8pm that evening. The system is well organised and once on board the ferry you are quickly across the river. Cost A\$30 return for our van (A\$28 for cars).
- Crossing the Daintree on the ferry was great. The service is very efficient but you can sometimes have quite a wait to make the crossing.
- \$27 return well managed loading and unloading, get there early to avoid long queues in peak times as in 10am -12 & return before 3pm and you will have a stress-free encounter
- Avoid peak times if you don't like waiting. We made the mistake of heading over around 12, it was very busy and we waited in the car for 45mins.
- \$27 return trip for a car. Very smooth operation with well trained staff. Although an essential transport service it is a bit of a novelty for most people. Definitely try and avoid the busy times.
- We used this ferry in our private car as we are visiting family in Far North Queensland. If you aren't a local it was a long wait to even get across the Daintree.
- The ferry does the job of getting you over the river - it's a quick and smooth operation once you get to the front of the queue. We set off early to avoid the queue and did OK on the way there but got caught with traffic on the way back. On a major tourist road using a ferry like this is antiquated and slow. Our group would have much preferred to pay a toll to get over a bridge with no wait.
- The ferry ride across the Daintree is lovely, and we enjoyed our trips across it but be aware that in peak periods it can take up to an hour before you get on the ferry. We were extremely late for our guided walk at Cooper Creek Wilderness because of this. We allowed ourselves two hours to get from Port Douglas to Cooper Creek. We should have allowed three hours due to the delay getting on the ferry.
- A bit of a wait on the way over, but we went in peak time 3pm till 5pm. Coming back we did earlier in the day and only waited about 5 mins. The attendants make it easy to understand what is going on. \$27 return ticket which does not need to be used on the

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same day. Police had set up a random breath test at the exit on the way back.

- There's only one way to cross the Daintree River and this is it. We crossed at peak hour both ways so there was a bit of a wait. The operators were quick, efficient and polite. No idle chit-chat but that would slow things down.
- If you want to visit the Daintree Rainforest and Cape Tribulation, then you have to cross the Daintree River by ferry. We went during school holidays and waited almost an hour before we boarded the ferry. Staff were good and the whole service is good if you don't count the queues.
- Wow...the wait to get onto this ferry was ridiculous. Paid \$26 for a return trip and the wait to get over was easily an hour. The queue was very long, with a priority lane. The function of this set-up was really poor and definitely needs to be improved. Very off putting
- First trip to this area, so crossing the river was a must do. We didn't have to wait long, either way, and this was in school holidays too. Price was reasonable...but have cash with you.
- You're across within 5 minutes and if you don't travel at peak times you won't need to wait too long to get on.
- There was a big line up waiting to get on as it was school holidays but the team were very efficient and got everybody on and off in no time at all.
- Travelled this ferry several times and never had to wait too long.
- Used the ferry today. It was fairly priced and quick. Staff were friendly. \$15 for a car. Only had to wait 10 minutes for the next ferry
- We caught the ferry across the Daintree river to Cape Tribulation, we didn't need to wait long around 10 mins max would be the waiting time.
- Really easy, very efficient. We tried to avoid peak times and it worked, we drove straight on, both directions.
- Went on a weekday morning, around 9.30am. No waiting, straight on.
- The staff on the Daintree ferry are very efficient. The long lines of traffic waiting to drive on are eliminated in superfast time by a very organised operation. A short trip to enjoy Cape Tribulation
- We were pleasantly surprised that the return cost of the ferry was only \$27 and we didn't have to wait long to get on board. Nice view of the river as we crossed over which seemed to be quite fast.
- You don't have to wait long and you're on your way. The staff have it sussed really well and the traffic moves quickly and effectively on and off the Ferry. Well organised.
- Well signposted, easy access, very reasonable rates and not long to wait. The ferry seems to take about 20 cars and goes continually over then back.
- This is one of those things that adds to the spirit of adventure when travelling in FNQ. I didn't mind it, even if there was a 30-45-minute wait during peak times. Also, be prepared to see tour buses and locals jump the queue after a long wait, that's just how it is and anyway it's great for a photo op and you get to walk around and have a chat before embarking.
- I was expecting long lines and a bit of a wait to board the ferry, turns out we were only waiting 5 minutes. The time on the ferry goes so quick and it is amazing how much the landscape can change from one side of the river to the other.
- A marvel of an experience, even although we had to wait for 1 hour before boarding on our first visit and 30 minutes only on our second trip across the Daintree River to reach Cape Tribulation.
- The queue was very, very long for the ferry. It simply was going to take what it took but to our surprise we were driven down a Priority lane and ended up the second vehicle on the next ferry so crossed over in no time. On the way back, we were dropped off before the ferry for a Daintree River cruise and our Bus driver met us on the other side a perfect way given late afternoon return trips can again be very long queues but no Priority lane on return trips. Not a lot of views or photo opportunities as you have to stay in the Bus or Car while on the Ferry but we did manage to site a large Crocodile crossing the River beside the Ferry about 200 yards away.

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## Appendix Two – Second Ferry

### Comments in Full - General

- two ferries [6]/ second ferry / second ferry for busy times / another solution would be to have two ferries operating / a second ferry is a must / we need a second ferry during busy times / Run two ferries parallel / A second ferry to run in peak times [3]
- We need two ferries this would solve the hold ups and would also allow for times when one ferry is out of action and all business has to stop for 5 days.
- Maintenance can be done during daylight hours in off peak times
- two Ferries with smaller capacity loads - unloads and loads much quicker
- Would help when fuel and gas trucks have to go on ferry alone; traffic gets backed up.
- Spare ferry for when maintenance is due or breakdowns
- The only solution, other than building a bridge is to have a larger ferry and a second back up ferry to be used during busy times and when the main ferry is not operational
- Main issue: having a second ferry is an absolute must - should be non-negotiable. If we don't sort this out, then the only other option is a bridge.
- The new ferry contract should include the obligation to have a second ferry or council must take that responsibility. Taking the ferry to cross the Daintree river is the only access for residents, visitors, deliveries like fuel, gas, food, police and ambulance services. Residents pay rates to Council to provide essential services, such as potable water, reliable electricity, waste and recycling collection; these services are either not provided or minimally provided north of the Daintree River. Safe and serviceable roads and public transportation are also essential services. The Daintree river crossing comes under that category; the need and safety of residents must take precedence over profit to the ferry contractor and to Council. Crossing the river is not optional, it is essential and the ferry service must be provided at a frequency and reliability that encourages and offers comfort to tourists, residents and contractors alike.
- Making the flow of traffic more efficient. Those long queues of cars during peak hours are not acceptable! Maybe a second ferry or a faster ferry.
- I believe two ferries are essential for peak times when one of them breaks down
- There is a need for a second ferry. Only one ferry means there is no backup in the case of emergency or breakdown.
- Spare Ferry for when under maintenance is due or breakdowns
- Shorter trips or multiple ferries to accommodate the traffic in peak seasons
- Second ferry for peak times and emergencies.
- A second ferry so there will be no interruption to service during foreseeable ferry inspections, and an adequate service provision for peak tourist times.
- A two-ferry system whereby continual flow of traffic instead of building bottle necks would alleviate pedestrian dangers and improve the wait times, whilst still delivering the experience of entering the very special Daintree national park
- Consider second ferry so it can keep running if one down for breakdown or maintenance so it can keep traffic moving
- two ferries to operate separately. No chance of a breakdown, Better in the busy season & for maintenance
- To have a second ferry installed. The service is unsatisfactory in peak months. It's not acceptable that people can wait up to 1½ hours to get across. We get priority in driving north but it's impossible to go south after about 2pm. I've got used to having to organise my travel around this but I did have an emergency once and I was abused by a ferry staff member when I requested to jump the queue due to the emergency. He demanded a doctor's certificate!
- There should ideally be two ferries so both can operate in peak season and have a back up for maintenance and breakdowns or the very REAL situation of being able to procure a

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replacement ferry (as opposed to the current theoretical emergency plan of a replacement ferry that is not actually feasible as demonstrated in February ferry closure for routine maintenance.... If you can't get a replacement arranged with that much notice how can you hope to get one in an emergency).

- Seriously consider a second ferry to be used in peak traffic times and when one ferry is down for maintenance and repair
- Maybe a second ferry for tourists
- An extra ferry at peak times would also cover breakdowns
- The current service is efficient and staff pleasant, however provision needs to be made for a backup service to be available during peak visitation time, breakdowns and when the mandatory servicing is required. Not having a backup system is not acceptable and rather irresponsible. The needs of the community, tourism, business, essential and emergency services require the reassurance of a second ferry in times of lengthy breakdowns.
- It is obvious that the next ferry contract needs to include two ferries, for several reasons. 1. The current one ferry obviously cannot cope with traffic flows, queues have been an ongoing problem since at least 2003, a meeting of council with tourism industry then led to council commissioning a study in 2004 recommending two ferries, this advice was ignored and now 15 years later the problem is still there. The perfect and obvious solution is to run one ferry during slow or normal traffic flows and run two ferries during busy times. 2. Two ferries provide vital access security for the North Douglas tourism industry which already struggles enough with their standalone energy supply costs, right now the entire economy north of the Daintree river relies on one ageing ferry, any breakdown causes immediate queues and delays, and in the case of a major calamity the whole area would be thrown in traffic chaos like we saw earlier this year. Should something happen that puts the one ferry out of action for days or weeks the chaos would be enormous, and enquiries made during the ferry closure earlier this year proved that there are no suitable ferries for rent anywhere.. While a bridge would be the most normal solution, I understand that council will never allow this to happen, so if we need to continue with a ferry service then we absolutely must have two ferries, to keep queues down and for security of access.
- No back up ferry, which cuts off access (emergencies or otherwise) during break downs or maintenance.
- There is no emergency back-up plan for times when servicing or breakdowns occur, leaving us who live and work north of the river cut off from normal activity and earnings.
- It is imperative that we have a second ferry. A second ferry would allow for more efficient crossings in the busy times, and one of them could be held away as a reserve in the wet season, while being maintained.
- Time should not be used as a reason to preclude a second ferry, or other work requiring permits to make the service more efficient and/or user friendly. The community has been on your case for years to get the consultation and research underway.

## **Comments in Full - Second Ferry Upstream**

- second ferry upstream to enlarge shire and assist commerce in Daintree village and eliminate inconvenience of shutdowns

## **Comments in Full - Longer / Wider Ferry**

- A second ferry or extend the length of the current one to hold more vehicles.
- A second ferry and/or extending the existing ferry to take another 6-9 vehicles per load.
- a second ferry or bigger ferry
- When it is really busy consider a second ferry, or wider ferry.
- a larger capacity to cut down on wait times in peak periods
- Detachable pontoons for peak season to increase load capacity.

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- An extension barge attached to existing ferry during peak times &/or DSC bites the bullet and purchases the vacant block on north side to create an improved, staffed interpretive centre (with cafe e.g.) to spread traffic flow moving north.

## Appendix Three – Northern Priority Lane

### Comments in Full - Priority Lane

- Needs to be priority lane on Northern side as cars are backed up around corner past Forest Creek road turn off, cars cannot get out at certain times. This leads to unsafe practices with people out of cars along the roadside.
- priority lane on north bank
- And on the North Side traffic controllers and/or a priority lane during the busy afternoon hours so that the locals can turn safely into Forest Creek Road after a long day's work.
- We should have accessible priority lanes going both ways.
- Local lane heading south.
- a priority lane on the north side, we are not in favour of a bridge
- Priority lanes north of the ferry approach to be installed
- traffic controllers on both road sides during busy times
- Locals Lane on north side
- Priority lane on north side too. Priority lane on the north side of the river
- enhancements to lane system both sides
- Priority lane on north side.
- Having No priority lane north-side is an issue
- I would like a priority lane permanently for residents on both sides of the ferry.
- A priority lane for cardholders on the Cape Trib side of the river during peak times
- Priority lane for locals on the northern side of river / Priority land on the Cow Bay side
- As for 20 years a priority lane is needed on the northern shore.
- Provision for local traffic on northern side of river.
- Dual Lane On North side of river to overcome congestion of tourist buses in peak periods
- Priority lane for northern side of the river, better access on southern side, we now have more than a dozen cars a day crossing
- priority lane going south on north side for July - October, road improvements
- Priority lane for southbound traffic during peak tourist season
- I said it was excellent and it brought me here although on return trip needs to be better organized like on the other side need a local's lane for tourist season
- Priority lane and traffic control on northern bank during peak periods, at an absolute minimum allowing local traffic to Forest Creek Road to pass.
- Priority boarding for concession card holders from north of the river.
- Road between ferry landing northern side and Forest Creek Road needs to be 3 lanes. Stop vehicles driving illegally. This is a road Council owns, DSC is responsible.
- Should be a local's lane heading south and it can be difficult or impossible and unsafe to reach forest creek road when the ferry queue is long.
- There is no priority lane on the north side, creating a significant interruption to local and business traffic during peak hours. As it stands, the queues are likely to impact on routine localised traffic such as after school activities for children and commuting (both locals and visiting contractors) with flow-on impacts on productivity and costs.
- Reduce the speed limit to 10km/hr on the north side approach, which would enable narrower lanes such that three lanes could fit in the existing space, with minimal tree removal – with the third lane allocated as a priority lane.
- North side traffic exits ferry at speed and dangerously. Tour buses turn into Forest Creek road, then return on wrong side of road. Extremely dangerous and I'd like to meet with appropriate Council staff and Police to explain. We don't want another death and a damning coroner's report. North side is a mess.

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## Comments in Full - Facilities on Northern Side

### General Facilities

- Facilities on north side of river for wait time to include area for children to play, interpretive information, safe viewing jetty and provision for food vans to park and provide drinks and food for tourism.
- A pontoon needs to be installed on the North side for the ferry tender ONLY. At the moment the ferry drivers who live on the north side have to travel to and from the ferry at 6am & midnight in the small ferry tender to get to and from work. This is extremely dangerous especially when it is dark, as they have to jump out of the tender and onto the bank to tie up the tinny. I cannot believe that a risk assessment of this situation has been carried out and approved. The reason for operating the temporary vessel during the recent closure between 6am & 6pm was because DSC found it unsafe to operate during darkness. A pontoon would make this dangerous situation far safer for the staff.
- Nowhere on north side of ferry to sit and wait comfortably. This year my longest wait on the north side was 2½ hrs in August. People were wading into the river along the bank, walking over the ferry cables and throwing rubbish into the bush. No park, no seating facilities (apart from a sad bus shelter that seats three), no clear signage regarding ferry safety and cables, no play area for children, no interpretive signs about Daintree National Park.
- Council must plan for a ticket booth on the North side – 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.

### Northern Side Precinct & Tour Buses

- Something also needs to be done on the North side. Perhaps staff to do ticketing on the passenger side of vehicles for safety. Buses that come off the ferry on the north side and park near the toilet block is an accident waiting to happen. I have counted six tour buses at a time waiting for the croc tours to come to pick their guests up. Perhaps a north side drop off can be eliminated and the new precinct used for both pick up and drop off. Some tourists also pull into this area to allow faster traffic to go first and also to check maps, access their GPS etc.
- STOP the tour buses from collecting and dropping off their passengers on the north side. Insist they only operate on the South side. This would stop a lot of the congestion whilst unloading the ferry. There will be an accident soon, as there are a lot of tourists roaming around in the road whilst waiting for the tour boat to pick them up or waiting for the ferry to arrive.
- Improve parking at northern side ferry precinct for tour buses.
- Congestion on the North side caused by tour buses.
- The landing precinct is an accident waiting to happen and the parking situation and safety must be addressed. 'Improved parking itself' was recommended in point 8.2 in the Q Solutions Group Risk Assessment Report for the Daintree Ferry Precinct. Concerns have been raised regarding the monopoly of parking spaces by tour buses, no designated line markings for vehicles. This is an unsafe and inconvenient situation for those travelling in cars wishing to use the toilet facilities. They have no other option than to park on the side of the road further up and leave their vehicle to walk back to the facilities. This action is obstructing the road and at times halts the flow of the traffic leaving the ferry. We understand the car park/reserve area is part of the DSC owned road. May we suggest removing the 3 small trees growing in the centre of the area/ road, this would free up more spaces. Also, could council please consider resurfacing the area and introducing designated/ lined parking spaces with signage for cars and for busses. Some busses are



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very long and those with trailers on occasion totally monopolise the carpark. Tour busses at times park for up to 45 minutes on the north side landing waiting for their passengers to complete their Croc tours. This is after having them alight for the tours commencement on the south side. Given these buses are able to utilise to priority lane when available, surely they could wait on the South side for longer and not make their ferry crossing until absolutely required. This whole issue could be alleviated by simply instructing the tour buses to drop off and collect their clients from the established and recently upgraded southern side carpark also known as the Western Precinct.

## Appendix Four – Southern Priority Lane

### Comments in Full - General

- The priority lane is a wonderful added service to locals, however, the access to the priority lane is very short (especially in busy tourist times) and there needs to be better signage further back from the ferry booth than there is currently - as it is quite common to be abused by tourists waiting in line.
- longer priority lane on south side
- Unsafe practices, cars being driven on wrong side road to be able to get to the start of the southern priority lane.
- Better access to priority lanes
- The south side priority lane is inaccessible to locals if there is a long line unless we illegally cross double lines on the road with minimal visibility.
- enhancements to lane system both sides
- Priority lane south-side is designed wrong
- The priority lane on the southern side is not satisfactory for locals as you still have to wait in very long lines to get to the priority lane in the first place.
- Access to and from the ferry are ridiculous at peak, locals being booked for crossing double lines trying to access priority lane
- During the tourist season it is almost impossible to access the ferry at all. Going south the traffic goes up past Forest Creek Rd, so you can't get onto the ferry for a very long time. Going north the priority lane is inaccessible due to the long line of traffic. It means residents have to go blindly around the bend (which is dangerous and illegal) to get onto the priority lane in the first place or else again have to wait a very long time. Then in the off season because locals are lined up with the tourists we often miss the ferry because the tourists ask so many questions when paying for the ticket that we again have to wait a very long time.
- Attempts to use priority lane can result in infringement notice by police for passing waiting non-priority traffic
- Take priority lane back to the corner on the southern side, as at times the vehicles are lined up as far as the cane load out ramps.
- If priority lanes are provided then road design should enable entitled cars to reach these lanes, right now residents have to risk \$300 fines to overtake on double lines while on the north side there is nothing at all.
- Lack of access to local lane in busy times unless you break the law crossing double white lines
- My main issue is the peak season delays incurred. As a local I appreciate the priority lane but at times to get to the priority lane there can be a long delay to get access, unless as I have witnessed people illegally use the right-hand side of the road.
- The fact that the ticketing booth is not located to allow a full ferry load, especially after the recent redevelopment of the car park, seems extremely poor management.
- Priority lane needs to start further back on south side.



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- Double lane to southern approach to the ferry of at least 1km from ticket booth. This will allow priority users easier access to the ferry during peak times. Lanes should be clearly marked asking visitor wanting to access the ferry to use the left lane.
  - Poor road signage in lead up to ferry meaning I have to illegally cross double white lines to get to Locals Entry. At times I have waited two hours just to get to ferry booth (as a local who does not break road rules).

## Comments in Full - Operation of Priority Lane

- Also it seems unfair for tourists to wait when it's really busy. Maybe every second ferry just load tourists. Locals should know peak times and plan.
- Extend the time period for use of priority lane.
- Priority lane should always be available with a swipe card and boom gate system like car parks in the city have, no need for extra staff
- Possible boom gate so you can just scan your ferry pass to access so the priority lane is always open.

Further to the first comment, in peak season, the ferry operator does make a judgement call and will stop loading vehicles from the priority lane to allow those waiting in the visitor lane to load. In terms of visitor attitudes towards the priority lane, the analysis of comments on TripAdvisor indicates that while a few visitors are resentful about the locals getting preference, it is not widespread with just 4% of reviewers complaining about the priority lane. There are also visitors on the tour buses who also have access to the priority lane and this "jumping the queue" was welcomed.

## Comments in Full - Relocation of Ticket Booth

- The booth on the south side should be set further west in order to process all the cars which can fit on the ferry so there is no delay due to having to pay as you go through.
- Moving the ticket booth so a full ferry load each trip is feasible / move the ticket booth back so at least the ferry can fill
- Ticket booth should be moved back so there is a ferry loading zone where a full ferry load can be waiting to facilitate quicker loading.
- Relocation of ticket booth to allow full ferry load to queue beyond barrier.
- I would also like to see somewhere for tourist waiting in the heat for the ferry to have access to cold water or drinks. If the booths were moved closer to the Croc tour precinct the tourists could be given water when they purchase their tickets. At \$26.00 return a 30 cent bottle of water or two would be very welcomed.
- move the ticket boxes on the south side down near the croc tour precinct so that at least one ferry is ticketed and ready to go at all times and locals won't have to wait in the queue.
- Double lane on south side extended for 1 km (before booth).
- Locals should be using a boom gate to avoid being caught up behind the tourists. A chip could be implanted in the ferry concession card for this purpose Giving the locals the timely access to the ferry would solve all the problems and protect the Daintree and its wildlife.
- Extend the commencement point for the south side as it's hard to see how far one can travel when it's a big line up.
- Reconfiguration of approach to enable one full ferry load after the ticket booth.

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## Appendix Five – Ticketing

### Comments in Full - General

- Total review of issuing ferry card and visitor tickets.
- Revamping of tourist ticketing so it becomes more streamlined.
- Ticketing improvements
- Ferry rules on tickets to complement signs to turn off engine
- 2020 technology for ticketing and card reading,
- Possible Ticket Sales/collector on the north side during peak Season to ease the load on ferry staff
- Electronic ferry tickets for visitors; simply impossible to get tickets to visitors and friends before arriving at ferry
- Ticketing archaic, no offsite ticket sales
- Online ticketing. There should be no ticketing on the ferry (only in case of break downs with other ticketing) as the ferry slows down to issue all tickets. Ticketing machines could be available elsewhere.
- Online purchase for tickets [2]
- Ability to purchase tickets on-line so they can be shared with family and friends visiting.
- Tickets should be available online and redeemed in separate lane.
- Should be an option for prepaid tickets or online purchase.
- Ticketing all from central digital platform.
- Ticketing is archaic and needs to be updated to the latest state of the art system. If the phone signal is no good on the ferry, install satellite internet and a Wi-Fi area and do it that way. IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE.
- 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 the [www.destinationdaintree.com](http://www.destinationdaintree.com) website

### Comments in Full – Online Ticketing will speed things up

- Getting tickets online could improve the time to process the vehicles; a boom gate for prepaid tickets and card holders would be more efficient.
- Faster ticketing
- Take ticketing off the ferry to speed up the crossing time.
- Also ticket machines at Wonga Servo and Cow Bay Pub might speed things up.
- Sell ferry tickets at service stations within the shire
- Ticket selling booth is inefficient due to the operator needing to spend time with tourist questions etc., so often in peak times there isn't a full ferry load.
- Some felt an automated boom gate for concession card holders and those with pre-booked tickets would be a faster system. The ferry operator felt this would take more time than the current practice of ticket booth attendant checking card and waving through – time approximately 4 seconds compared with vehicle coming to a complete stop, wind down window, insert card/ticket into gate, wait for gate to open then proceed – time approximately 20 to 30 seconds. In addition, some ferry concession card holders abuse the

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system by giving their card to people who are not eligible, and this abuse would not be picked up with automated gates.

## **Comments in Full - EFTPOS**

- There should be EFTPOS facilities day and night. No excuse for cash only unless area wide phone issues.
- EFTPOS and Pre-purchase tickets should be available all the time.
- Ability to pay by EFTPOS or credit card on the ferry after hours. Portable card machine technology is readily available
- Ability to pay with card after hours.

## **Comments in Full - Timeslots / Priority for Pre-Booked Tickets**

- Online ticketing & bookable travel with priority for those bringing economic benefit to the Daintree Coast i.e. with tours or accommodation booked
- Booth potentially to move to Western Precinct parking area, allowing pre-purchased ticket holders to move through automatic boom gate. Ability to book for specific timeslot, so visitors without a booking during peak period can purchase a ticket on arrival, and then use the waiting time in a way that brings some economic benefit to the region, like going on a croc cruise, visiting Daintree Village, or purchasing food and/or beverages
- priority lane available to visitors with confirmations for tours and / or overnight accommodation north of river
- Have a pre-paid system similar to car parks where you insert your ticket or scan a bar code so a boom gate allows you to access the ferry.
- Online ticketing facility. Scheduled boarding time slots to reduce the 'unknown' wait times that visitors currently experience (first time visitors currently arrive at a traffic jam with no ferry or ticket booth in sight and absolutely no idea if it's a crash, a queue or how long the queue is likely to be which is terrible service).
- The way that it is managed contributes to a style of visitation that it simply cannot cope with. The charging and provision of priority is anti-ecotourism. Travellers should be rewarded for pre-booking tours and overnight accommodation north of the ferry, with free passage and priority access, whilst those travellers that have not made pre-bookings that support the ecotourism interests of the destination north of the ferry should be charged higher rates and denied priority.
- On-line pre-booking site for ecotourism product north of the ferry only, to attract ferry discounts and priority access during congestion periods.
- Bookable time slots have the potential to delay operations if not well thought out. It may be a separate lane is required, but certainly there needs to be procedures in place to stipulate what occurs if people do not arrive at their allotted time slot. Sky Rail has an effective system for travellers to pre-book times slots which may be worth looking at, including their practice that time slots are not fully booked.

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## Appendix Six – Operating Times

### Comments in Full – Times

- A number of residents north of the river work in hospitality in Port Douglas. A 5.30am would allow them to work earlier shifts which start at 6.30am in some companies. It would also be nice to have 1am closures on Friday and Saturday nights, so again locals and tourists can go to Port Douglas. Both of these time changes would also help with flight schedules.
- 5am-11pm service: Ferry operating times would be greatly improved for many residents if the hours were changed 5:00am to 11:00pm. There is minimal traffic from 11:00pm to Midnight. There is a significant need for people who work south of the river to obtain employment and conduct business activities in Cairns. I personally travel between 11:00pm and Midnight so as to be on the south side. I then need to sleep in my vehicle. This change would improve job and business opportunities for those wishing to traverse both South and North during 5-6am. I see very little benefit for travel between 11-12.
- 4 am starts
- To work in Cairns etc. ferry 6 am start is too late.
- Extension of ferry hours with 5am opening to allow visitors to spend extra night in Daintree prior to tours/flights
- Why doesn't the ferry operate 24/7?

### Comments in Full – Christmas Day

- Ferry should operate 365 days a year (except of course in case of "force majeure" events like cyclones or major floods)
- No lunch break in Christmas Day- staff can work it out, surely.
- Christmas Day operating hours same as 364 days – it's difficult to communicate hours to travellers.
- Christmas Day is open normal hours.

## Appendix Seven – Pricing

### TripAdvisor Comments in Full

- The crossing whilst a bit expensive at \$28 return per car, was easy to access and felt safe.
- Plan on getting to the river early and try not to get angry that the operator offers an express lane for tour operators and locals. I don't mind a queue provided everyone queues! But the money they charge in tolls (\$28 same day return) could be better spent on a bridge. Time to grow up, Daintree! Once on, ferry is fast, queue is a nightmare.
- If travelling to Cape Tribulation you need to take the ferry to cross. Were greeted at the pay station by a person who didn't engage in conversation and didn't want to talk about the area, cost \$24 for a day pass (hopefully that money is going back into the Daintree National Park not the greedy government) and the ferry attendant resembled something like scrooge McDuck, didn't even reply when I said G'day. At least on our return trip the attendant waved. I know it's only a quick trip but for such a busy tourist destination a bit of Aussie friendship would have been nice. This was the only disappointing encounter we had in this spectacular part of the world.
- To pay to cross a river when you are continuing on a public road is ridiculous. They have these ferries to cross the Murray River and are free. There is effectively a \$25 fee to enter the rainforest.

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- The ferry itself is quite interesting from a croc watch point of view (you probably won't see one though) but the ride over only last 2 or 3 minutes. On the Cape Tribulation side are a few attractions but if you want to return without taking the ferry involves a major detour via Bloomfield (dirt roads) back south which is fine if you want to go to Cooktown. The ferry staff are generally very friendly but \$27 return is steep. The ferry over the Murray River at Stanley and Morgen is comparable and free!!
  - Went on a weekday morning, around 9.30am. No waiting, straight on. \$27 return. Maybe a bit expensive for what it is but you need the ferry to get across the river.
  - The ride across was smooth and had a good view of the river however the fee to get on is too high in my opinion and I think they need to lower it. The fee is \$27 return, most expensive Ferry I have ever ridden.
  - Why do people give this four and five stars? They are being forced to pay nearly \$30 to cross a river with a main road on either side, surely this should be free! Where else do you know of in Australia that you have to pay to use the only river crossing to a main population centre? Yes there are lots of locals living north of the river and this is the main road to Cairns for people as far north as Bloomfield. It's a local council scam.
  - A short 5 to 8 minute pay ride. You have to take this to get north toward the Daintree and Cape York. \$26 return trip is a bit pricey!! However, you have no other option. I did notice the car in front of us lost their ticket for the return journey but the ticket collector allowed them through. Aussies are nice people.
  - Easy way to visit the Daintree forest, bit expensive for this short ferry but there is no other option
  - If you want to go to Cape Tribulation, you have to go and it is paid a bit too expensive for my taste: \$ 27 round trip
  - Paying 27 bucks for a return ticket is ridiculous. Ferries in NSW are all free. That's more expensive than the best motorway costs. It's a public road
  - The ferry was very easy to use and not expensive. On the day that we visited the phone lines were down meaning that EFTPOS could not be used, so it was lucky that we had cash. Be aware that if this happens there isn't an ATM around the corner.
  - Really easy. You just get in line and they shepherd you on. The ferry runs very regularly, it takes quite a few cars at a time and the crossing only takes a couple of minutes. Not overly expensive and you can get a return ticket.
  - Clear direction to find the ferry and use of the ferry. The staff were friendly and it was fairly priced
  - Good, quick service. Reasonably priced, especially since it's the only way to the Daintree proper and Cape Tribulation
  - One cannot cross the Daintree river but on the ferry. In spite of that (being single operator), the service was efficient, fast and relatively cheap
  - The Daintree Ferry was not too expensive: \$27 return.
  - Used the ferry today. It was fairly priced and quick. \$15 for a car.
  - It costs \$26 return and well worth it to get to Cape Tribulation.
  - We were pleasantly surprised that the return cost of the ferry was only \$27 and we didn't have to wait long to get on board. Nice view of the river as we crossed over which seemed to be quite fast.
  - Well signposted, easy access, very reasonable rates and not long to wait.
  - At first the \$27 cost seemed a bit expensive but then I realised it was a two-way ticket for the car. The loading and unloading of vehicles on each side of the river was excellently orchestrated.
- It was most inexpensive at \$27 for a return trip for our car. I spotted a large crocodile on our first visit, on the bank, sunning itself. The cameras were clicking all around. Excellent service.
- \$27 return but that's fine as you need to use the ferry to visit the Daintree.
  - First trip to this area, so crossing the river was a must do. Price was reasonable...but have cash with you. Staff were friendly and helpful.

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- If you are not 4WD person or towing a normal sized caravan, you'll need to get across the Daintree River by their local ferry runs from 6am to midnight. Not badly priced with our truck and 28ft caravan \$39 return and only takes a few minutes.
  - If you want to visit the Daintree Rain Forest and Cape Tribulation, then you have to cross the Daintree River by ferry. We went during school holidays and waited almost an hour before we boarded the ferry. The charges of \$26 for the return trip sounds expensive for such a short trip however that is all you have to pay for your visit. There are no charges for entering the National Park.
  - It's not expensive, one set price per vehicle regardless of the number of people. The drive through the Daintree Rainforest is beautiful. There's lots to see and do, places to eat, camp and relax.

## Comments in Full - Residents

- A percentage of the proceeds from the ferry service should go into the maintenance of the Cape Trib/Bloomfield Road. Currently the council keeps the road as an 'adventure' 4WD track but in reality, it is the northern residents of the Douglas Shire's community road linking it to their local shire. The road is a disgracefully dangerously unmaintained dirt road for the benefit of tourist 4WD drivers and not a thought or consideration is given for the Douglas Shire ratepayers who live in Bloomfield River.
- Every dollar of surplus funds taken from over-charging should go to a dedicated management authority north of the ferry, to provide local employment and manage ecotourism to achieve world's best-practice.
- The ferry should be a support for sustainable tourism that benefits the local community. Ferry revenue in excess of ferry costs should be used to support local management, of the area north of the Daintree River to Cape Tribulation. Ferry users should pay full cost of operating the ferry on a sliding scale determined by the amount of revenue paid to the community. The higher the amount paid, the lower the amount paid to the ferry. The priority lane should only be for local community and proven providers of revenue to the local community. The ferry charges should be used to control and reduce non-contributory tourism in the area.
- The price of the return ticket should give the customer 3 or 4 days of open access.
- A ferry pass should be valid for more days than one, allowing tourists to return to the Daintree
- Reduction in ticket cost - seeing the "ferry fund" is full at its capped amount.
- Overpriced.
- High cost, which puts tourists off coming to the Daintree.
- The ferry charge continuing to increase every year is horrendous and needs to be addressed.
- The entire financial situation of this ferry should be investigated and overhauled, out of the 25 cable ferries in Australia it is by far the most expensive and this impacts tourism in North Douglas, there must be some gross inefficiencies and council should not be allowed to make a profit on this ferry to prop up consolidated revenue.
- It's expensive, which also impacts on local business.
- use the profit in the Daintree
- It is also too expensive. As the owner of a local business we get many complaints about the cost and delays.
- Prices for non-concession card holders are ridiculous.

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## Comments in Full - Concession Cards

- I feel that all residents of Wujal Wujal should also be eligible to purchase a ferry pass, since they have so many family connections to Mossman. It seems unfair for them to have to pay full price to travel back and forth. They are in a similar position to residents of Forest Creek, Cow Bay and Cape Tribulation.
- Better way of getting new ferry cards e.g. at the ferry booth on weekends not just at council offices during working hours
- Stickers on car windows (like old rego stickers) for residents. It would make it easier and save time for ferry staff to identify most pass holders. (still keep the cards for when not in primary vehicle)
- Digital recognition of concession card holders

## Appendix Eight – Ferry Precinct

### Comments in full Signs and Ferry precinct

- Turn the ferry approach, from an eyesore into a picturesque experience.
- The ferry precinct is a mess and unsightly. Current operator leaves machinery and bits and pieces everywhere. The whole ferry precinct is an eyesore.
- The Croc Café back on south side.
- Small Kiosk for cold drinks/ coffee and snacks.
- small kiosk for drinks and snacks, like there used to be.
- Making sure the deck and ramp look in good condition at all times.
- Signage is unprofessional / Effective, attractive signage
- Works very well may be a large sign saying no swimming at all of any beaches or rivers
- Less but more explicit signage to avoid confusion.
- Signs in other languages
- Also distance to toilets
- Waste disposal facilities to dispose of waste on entry and exit to Daintree Coast
- Coffee shop/information centre at gateway
- Install large and readable signs relating to how far you are from the ferry, costs, and which lane to take are overdue. Gantry signage should be investigated.
- Install interpretative signage in adjacent to south side ferry queuing area to inform visitors of what to do, where to go, location of key infrastructure (e.g. toilets), wildlife to watch out for, tours available etc.
- The Western precinct should be further developed as an entrance with interpretive centre and cafe and accessible to people waiting for the queue to shorten.

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## Appendix Nine – Dangerous Goods

### Comments in full – Fuel and/or LPG Vehicles

- Allow vehicles on the ferry when the fuel truck is on. This is not an AMSA requirement, but a DSC policy which can be changed.
- You can drive down Sheridan Street in between two fuel trucks travelling at 60km/hour. Seems unreasonable other vehicles are prevented from travelling on ferry with fuel truck.
- Fuel trucks travelling on their own causes more delays.
- Only ferry in Australia where cars cannot travel with fuel, insanity.

## Appendix Ten - Bridge

### Comments in Full - Bridge

#### Do not support a bridge

- I have heard of a bridge but this would create too much traffic for this pristine area.
- A priority lane on the north side, we are not in favour of a bridge
- I really like the ferry, each day feels like a holiday and makes the working week more enjoyable. I really don't want a bridge. Thanks for asking for our thoughts.

#### Only support if ferry cannot be improved

- Whilst I believe a bridge makes more sense for residents, the ferry is appreciated by tourists who haven't been stuck in a queue. If that means a bridge with minimal running costs after the initial capital investment, then so be it.
- Double the size of the ferry or build a 2-lane bridge with a toll gate
- If we don't sort this out, then the only other option is a bridge.

#### Support a bridge

- Need a bridge or second ferry.
- Build a bridge
- A bridge is overdue; it was recommended in the 2004 Ferry report which has been ignored.



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## Appendix Eleven - Staff

### Positive Comments – TripAdvisor

- Wonderful part of the FNQ experience with friendly and helpful staff, great views and the opportunity to mix with the locals and tourists.
- Clear direction to find the ferry and use of the ferry. The staff were friendly and it was fairly priced
- We were here during offseason but found the ferry very easy and the staff ran it very efficiently.
- Literally a 5 min crossing. I suspect there are busy times and seasons but I never waited at all. Staff are friendly.
- This ferry is the only way to cross the river in the rainforest, hence, it IS essential. The staff is wonderfully efficient in getting vehicles quickly on the ferry.
- Met by a very helpful lady who showed you where to park. The short journey is very smooth and the scenery down the river stunning
- Attendants really nice, but there can be a long wait for the ferry
- Travelled this ferry several times and never had to wait too long. The people were friendly and kept everything moving well
- Used the ferry today. It was fairly priced and quick. Staff were friendly. \$15 for a car.
- The ferry itself is quite interesting from a croc watch point of view (you probably won't see one though) but the ride over only last 2 or 3 minutes. On the Cape Tribulation side are a few attractions but if you want to return without taking the ferry involves a major detour via Bloomfield (dirt roads) back south which is fine if you want to go to Cooktown.
- The ferry staff are generally very friendly but \$27 return is steep.
- Easy Pay (\$27 car return trip) Easy Access on & off. Friendly staff Lovely View while cruising on the river Nice and quick Gateway to a wonderful place
- Was fortunate to see a crocodile in the river as we were crossing on the Ferry.
- Spectacular river and friendly staff on the ferry
- Nice quick service with very friendly staff. Didn't have to wait long either way. Good deal for 5 return trips
- The staff on the Daintree ferry are very efficient. The long lines of traffic waiting to drive on are eliminated in superfast time by a very organised operation.
- Staff were efficient and friendly.
- \$26 return trip is a bit pricey but you have no other option. I did notice the car in front of us lost their ticket for the rerun journey but the ticket collector allowed them through. Aussies are nice people
- The staff have it sussed really well and the traffic moves quickly and effectively on and off the Ferry. Well organised for sure.
- The staff are most efficient, courteous and friendly, thank you. I spotted a large crocodile on our first visit, on the bank, sunning itself. The cameras were clicking all around.
- Excellent service.
- Very smooth operation with well trained staff. Although an essential transport service it is a bit of a novelty for most people. Definitely try and avoid the busy times.
- Staff were friendly and helpful.
- Like friendly staff on board.
- We crossed at peak hour both ways so there was a bit of a wait. The operators were quick, efficient and polite. No idle chit-chat but that would slow things down.
- The ferry was efficient and staff friendly. If you are a slow vehicle you can move to the left after going north on the ferry to allow other vehicles to pass.
- Staff were good and the whole service is good if you don't count the queues.

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## Negative Comments – TripAdvisor

- If travelling to Cape Tribulation you need to take the ferry to cross. Were greeted at the pay station by a person who didn't engage in conversation and didn't want to talk about the area, cost \$24 for a day pass (hopefully that money is going back into the Daintree National Park not the greedy government) and the ferry attendant resembled something like scrooge McDuck, didn't even reply when I said G'day. At least on our return trip the attendant waved. I know it's only a quick trip but for such a busy tourist destination a bit of aussie friendship would have been nice. This was the only disappointing encounter we had in this spectacular part of the world.
- You wait for the ferry, you get on and a few mins later you get off. This is a chain ferry. Staff were not very cheerful but did their job. You can't get out of your car so the view etc is limited. A good shortcut though.
- We stayed at Wonga Beach and used the ferry twice; how different these experiences were! The first time there was a lovely Irish lady at the booth who went out of her way to explain the options and was lovely! Unfortunately, the second time was so different, booth appeared closed and young lad would not turn around to answer my husband's question. Then as we approached the ferry to board a guy came up and had a go at hubby for abusing the kid (actually just called him ignorant). Almost weren't allowed on the ferry but they directed us on with a few choice words! Not one smile from any of the crew to anyone or pleasantries, gave off extremely bad vibes! Reminded me very much of hard core unionists! When talking to other people who actually live around the area and have to use the ferry discovered this is quite common! Management need to take a good look at some of their staff considering they're in the tourism business! We had bought the multi-use book but never returned!
- Just a way to get from A to B really. The view would be very nice, except you have to remain in your vehicle. The person on duty who sold me the ticket was very unenthusiastic and unexcited, I hope he just missed his coffee that day. On the return trip the operators were much more cheerful and friendly.

## Comments in Full – Residents

- On a positive note, the staff do a good job and outside peak season it's fairly acceptable.
- Ferry staff should not be allowed to play games and personal politics directing local people they don't like in to outside lanes to end up at the back of the traffic.
- Some staff treat locals badly
- All but 2-3 attendants need to get a personality
- Staff are Fabulous
- Inconsistent information from ferry staff (both at booth and on ferry). E.g. Some staff take visitor tickets (still valid to April 2019 although printed expiry date is June 2018) and some staff don't.
- Customer service, to be told that I have to pay if I don't have a ferry card on me! Really?! I live here for 11 years and people know and have seen me several times with the card. To be told to pay just because I have forgotten it once is rude in my opinion and things are taken just a tad too seriously and the community spirit crumbles under those nonsense rules!

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## Appendix Twelve – Full Submissions from Organisations

Submissions from

- Daintree Marketing Cooperative
- Douglas Shire Sustainability Group
- Tourism Port Douglas Daintree



## DMC Submission to Daintree Ferry Service Invitation

Douglas Shire Council  
64-66 Front St  
Mossman QLD 4873

Enquiries@douglas.qld.gov.au

cc CEO, Mark.Stoermer@douglas.qld.gov.au

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.**

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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.**

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#### 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.

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#### 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.

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ABN 58 087 330 225 email: [secretary@destinationdaintree.com](mailto:secretary@destinationdaintree.com)



#### 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](http://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

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ABN 58 087 330 225 email: [secretary@destinationdaintree.com](mailto:secretary@destinationdaintree.com)



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,

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ABN 58 087 330 225 email: [secretary@destinationdaintree.com](mailto:secretary@destinationdaintree.com)



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

Director  
Daintree Marketing Co-operative  
On behalf of the DMC Directors and Members

Daintree Marketing Cooperative Ltd, CMA 4, Cape Tribulation, Queensland 4873  
ABN 58 087 330 225 email: [secretary@destinationdaintree.com](mailto:secretary@destinationdaintree.com)



PO Box 762  
Mossman Qld 4873

[sustainabilitydouglas@gmail.com](mailto:sustainabilitydouglas@gmail.com)

26 September 2018

Douglas Shire Council  
PO Box 723  
Mossman  
QLD 4873

Via email: [enquiries@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@douglas.qld.gov.au), [gaye.scott@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:gaye.scott@douglas.qld.gov.au)

CC: Mayor and Councillors via email : [Julia.leu@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:Julia.leu@douglas.qld.gov.au),  
[Abigail.Noli@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:Abigail.Noli@douglas.qld.gov.au), [david.carey@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:david.carey@douglas.qld.gov.au),  
[roy.zammataro@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:roy.zammataro@douglas.qld.gov.au), [Michael.kerr@douglas.qld.gov.au](mailto:Michael.kerr@douglas.qld.gov.au)

Attention: Gaye Scott

**RE: DAINTREE FERRY**

Douglas Shire Sustainability Group (DSSG) welcomes Council's consultation about the ferry, its future and the design of the next tender.

**The ferry should remain**

The ferry should remain as the only means of crossing the Daintree River and operating hours should not be extended, recognising that:

- There is a limit to the amount the road on the North side can carry,
- The ferry is a unique and valued experience for visitors,
- It provides a lot of employment – the largest employer on the Daintree Coast,
- It is a poorly used opportunity to engage visitors – e.g. handing out maps and brochures,
- It is an opportunity to collect revenues from visitors for the benefit of the Daintree Coast and its community,
- Six hours of no traffic on the road prevents the death of a lot of wildlife

The road north of the ferry has limited capacity. Upgrading will require extensive earthworks, clearing, loss of scenic values, major impact on the World Heritage Area and serious damage to the tourism industry.

Increasing the size of the ferry will not speed up transport across the river as loading times can exceed travel time.

Increasing the speed of the ferry by selling tickets before loading when there is a queue and seeking agreement from AMSA to allow the ferry to go faster may be possible.

A smaller second ferry has merit as a replacement of the main ferry during haul-out; a means of carrying extra traffic in peak times; and as a means of offering priority to locals.

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However, with increasing traffic, it too will become congested and DSSG believes there needs to be a limit on the number crossing the River, by whatever means. DSSG understands an additional ferry will be costly and require a fee increase to pay for it. This needs to be balanced against the benefits of carrying more traffic.

DSSG believes locals should have priority access to the ferry on both sides. People who live and work on the North side should not have to queue - and there is no better way to upset locals or hasten the drive for a bridge - than forcing locals to queue.

#### **Traffic Management**

Therefore other means of traffic management should be introduced regardless of whether carrying capacity across the river is increased or not. DSSG therefore proposes council investigates the following:

- Detailed analysis of traffic using the ferry by collecting information at the ferry.
- A booking system that guarantees priority access to the ferry (those who do not book can take their chances);
- The Western precinct should be further developed as an entrance with interpretive centre and cafe and accessible to people waiting for the queue to shorten (see earlier submissions in attachments);
- A shuttle service from the north side of the ferry to Cape Tribulation should be considered. Tour boats could offer a passenger service or simply leave people on the North side to meet a shuttle (was suggested in the 1996 Planning Scheme);
- A website established with live queue lengths/waiting time to help locals and visitors choose a better time;
- One way tickets should cost substantially more to discourage through traffic;
- Introduction of a community and conservation levy.

#### **Community and Conservation Levy**

An additional charge should be levied against visitors for environmental management and community benefit.

A CSIRO study (**Attachment 1**) estimated people's willingness to pay. It clearly demonstrated they are prepared to pay considerably more than the current cost provided the money is spent on the environment and its presentation. People who do not want to pay, or do not want to wait, have an option to catch a passenger boat and meet the shuttle bus.

The property for sale on the North side should be purchased to provide:

- an upgraded boat landing on the north side,
- car park,
- priority lane,
- boat launching ramp for locals,
- conservation purposes (the land has very high conservation values).

The charge can be made legal by amendment to the Local Government Act as per the Kuranda Train infrastructure levy. Alternatively, Council can collect the money but not account for it separately, instead taking a pre-determined amount for community and environment.

DSSG prefers amendment to the Local Government Act as it is more accountable, would define the purpose of the fund and establish a process for its management, and be transparent to those who pay the levy. We suggest the split could be 50/50 (community and conservation) because:

- Visitors want to see the money spent on environment and presentation



- 
- o Locals should get more benefit from tourism than they currently do (very little of the Daintree derived tourism \$ stays north of the Daintree – most stays in Cairns or Port Douglas, with accommodation, hire cars, tours and food)

It is suggested Council would establish a board, elected by residents of the Daintree Coast, to oversee disbursement, report publicly and decide on community priorities (which could be anything from a community hall to improving RAPS and/or micro grids).

#### Information for visitors

Visitors need:

- Information about places to see and visit,
- Information about the conservation values,
- An explanation of how the money raised at the ferry is being spent,
- Guidance on how to behave responsibly (e.g. take your rubbish back out, drive carefully, interaction with wildlife (e.g. Cassowaries),
- Information about who lives here.

It is therefore suggested Council provide a brochure that explains all this and hands it out with tickets. Council used to do this with a small brochure called the Z card that folds down to the size of a driver's licence.

#### The big picture

The ferry submission raises again the need for a big picture study, as presented to the ~~Daintree~~ Joint Management Group (DJMG) by DSSG.

DSSG recommends that setting an agreed vision and management plan for North of the ~~Daintree~~ should precede any major investment whether it be a ferry, road upgrade, electricity or changes to policy in planning and local laws.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.  
Yours faithfully



~~Laurene Hull~~

Secretary

#### Attachments:

1. CSIRO study re ferry levy
2. Copy of an earlier submission to CRC covering the same issues.
3. Previous submissions about the ~~Daintree~~ Entrance
4. Extracts from Local Government Act and Regulations.

## **Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree (TPDD) Position Statement**

### **Daintree Ferry Contract Renewal Community Consultation**

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#### **OVERVIEW**

Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree (TPDD) supports the Douglas Shire Councils community consultation for the 2020 Daintree Ferry Contract Renewal and its future potential to enhance the tourism economy and visitor experience.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The tourism industry is critical to the sustainability of the Douglas region, contributing an estimated \$494 million to the local economy for the year 2017-18 in direct visitor spend alone. From a population base of 11,000 people, we accommodated approximately 410,000 visitors over 2.3 million room nights during the last financial year, and most significantly our average length of stay is 5.6 nights for domestic visitors and 5.4 nights for international visitors, with 53% repeat visitors.

The purpose of Tourism Port Douglas Daintree, as the local tourism organisation for the Douglas Shire, is to build destination awareness and desire to travel from the Australian and selected international markets. This is achieved through a targeted mix of marketing activities to maximise sustainable visitation, length of stay, expenditure and regional dispersal within the Douglas region in collaboration with the regional tourism industry. Our region covers a diverse range of tourism opportunities showcasing our spectacular natural environment, being host to two World Heritage Listed Areas the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Daintree Rainforest.

The Daintree Ferry is critically important to our destinations tourism industry and our wider community. The ferry is a unique gateway to this part of the Daintree Rainforest. As such, it should be seen as a crucial part of the region's Tourism business.

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 tourism industry in the Douglas Shire.



We consider that the new ferry contract is a timely opportunity to dramatically improve the performance and reliability of this iconic operation.

TPDD believes that an efficient ferry service benefiting the overall interests of the community and businesses north of the River is paramount, and the ferry contract needs to reflect a number of broad 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
- 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

## RECOMMENDATIONS/SUPPORTED INITIATIVES

TPDD supports the Daintree Ferry contract renewal with consideration given to the delivery of a service that meets the community and visitor needs and supports TPDD strategy to sustainably build visitor numbers and regional dispersal.

TPDD supports numerous initiatives to be considered for the Daintree ferry renewal discussions, including:

- The area between the boom gate and ferry should allow for a **full ferry load to be queued**, ideally in a Painted Loading zone, thereby improving efficiency of ferry loading and allowing visitors the option of utilizing facilities at the Western Precinct prior to queuing.
- **Online ferry ticket sales.** Bookable timeslots should be introduced to manage traffic flow and disperse unbooked visitors to alternate activities (river cruise, visit Daintree Village etc) while awaiting ferry travel.
- **Need for attractive, clear & effective signage** to enhance visitor experience and facilitate ease of use of the area
- Investigate the acquisition of a **larger new ferry**, in addition to the existing one, and both should be kept operational providing back up in case of emergency and maintenance situation

PO Box 511, Port Douglas, QLD 4877  
Phone: 07 4099 4588  
Email: [info@tpdd.com.au](mailto:info@tpdd.com.au) Website: [www.visitportdouglasdaintree.com](http://www.visitportdouglasdaintree.com)



- o Working with coach operators to investigate access at low tide, to ensure they are able to load and disembark with ease and no incident.
- o Visitors without pre-booked tickets to be directed through the Western Precinct to purchase tickets, access visitor information\* and access/be exposed to River Cruise options.
- o An **Automated boom gate** for Ferry Card holders and pre-booked ferry ticket holders should be installed, bypassing Western Precinct.
- o An **Incentive Ticket System** should be introduced to encourage visitors to travel on the ferry outside peak times (e.g. significant discount for travel north before 10am or after 3pm). This would also assist in more efficient dispersal of visitors to businesses.
- o **Investigate a space** in the Northern precinct for the Ferry Ticket booth with some additional visitor information facilities. Online ticket sales would alleviate much of the problem given that waiting drivers could go online and purchase tickets there and then.
- o **Wifi or FM radio available on ferry** to enhance visitor experience and provide professional delivery of information.
- o **Extension of ferry hours** (specifically earlier opening eg 5am) to allow visitors to stay an extra night in the Daintree prior to catching flights from Cairns or departing on early tours from elsewhere in the region.
- o **Visitor Information** – We believe it is important for the Western Precinct to incorporate some additional visitor information facilities (whether this is separate to or included with the Ferry Ticketing) that would include information/ebook downloads (requires Wifi but no internet), a map (whether virtual or physical) to include National Parks Walks & visitor facilities north of the Daintree River, brochure stands and possibly wifi hotspot for tour info & booking.
- o We also request that the operator and the Council prepare a transparent communication and consultation plan for future operations that be enacted as required. Within the consultation group there should be north of the river representatives from a number of different industries (tourism, agriculture etc) to ensure that potential disruptions minimise the impact on tourism and the community.



Tara Bennett

Executive Officer Tourism Port Douglas Daintree