

BRIDGE

OR

FERRY

FOR THE DAINTREE RIVER

Douglas Shire Council received 61 submissions.

This document is a compilation of all those submissions in their entirety, with the exception of removing content which identified contributors. The exception being those organisations and community groups who requested their submission be published under the organisation's banner.

For ease of readability, submissions have been grouped under the following headings:

▪ Preference for a two-ferry service	Page 2
▪ Preference for Single Ferry	Page 38
▪ No Clear Preference as to Single or Two Ferries	Page 70
▪ Preference for a bridge	Page 74
▪ No Preference Specified	Page 99

Enquiries

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Preference for a two-ferry service

Ferry adds to the specialness and mystery

I would like to ask the Council to drop the idea of a bridge across the Daintree River. I believe building a bridge would be killing the goose that laid the golden egg. The whole cache of the Daintree is that it is part of it is pristine rainforest. Reaching this area by ferry adds to the specialness and mystery. Protecting this area has been a hard won fight since the blockade. I think the fact that Douglas is considered one of the world's top tourist destinations shows that preserving the Daintree was an important step in achieving this accomplishment. If it works - don't fix it. Visitors love it the way it is. Another ferry is a much better solution to the issue of long waits during peak times. A bridge will destroy what is attracting people in the first place. Thank you for the opportunity to have a say in this issue.

Seven Main Reasons Why

I strongly OPPOSE a bridge across the Daintree River for many reasons. The main ones are:

1. The ferry is a unique visitor experience and is a contrast with other places. It is an asset and adds to the experience of visiting the Daintree. I believe a bridge will devalue the wilderness experience for visitors.
2. The ferry is an ongoing source of jobs in the region which is important.
3. A bridge will allow more night traffic and this will inevitably increase wildlife roadkill.
4. A bridge will require rainforest vegetation clearing which could be avoided by maintaining a ferry.
5. The Daintree is a wilderness experience for visitors - an increasingly rare one in our world. The values of such an experience must be carefully protected from overdevelopment or it will lose its attraction or status as world heritage.
6. A bridge (in any of the proposed locations) will not be flood proof so therefore no improvement in the wet season.
7. A two ferry option will solve the demand/wait time issue

A solar powered ferry is a good idea as a problem solver

Never happy with the idea to leave it alone and basically can't-" the tropical coasters-" greedy itchy brainers-" continually try to DOMINATE in many ways. New roads, new resorts, new bridges, new infrastructures, new concrete jungles, new apartment complexes an endless trampling of an amazing, old, ancient, natural coastal, wilderness.. A solar powered ferry is a good idea as a problem solver, but also to -" tame the heavy traffic of vehicles & tourists-" who really- could NOT CARELESS about conservation preservation. The Gold Coaster mentality has taken over our FNQ tropical coast & will continue to demolish nature for more decades, simply for EGOs & GREED.

We do not want non-stop traffic on Forest Creek Road.

I live on forest creek road and if you put a bridge in down towards the DAINTREE Village you would be using our road as a main road for traffic to join back up with the Cape Trib road. We moved here 20 years ago to be in a quiet place with nature. We do not want non-stop traffic!!! This being the only rainforest left in the world. Having more tourists coming through here is not going to help the environment. More cars 24hrs a day 7 days a week is more pollution. We need to preserve what we have left. 2 ferries from 5am to 12pm makes more sense. If you had one running more for locals and workers and delivery vehicles there would not be as much congestion. We want to keep the rainforest a beautiful place to live and for others to visit and enjoy the quietness and listen to nature. We Do Not Want Non-stop Traffic.

Monday, 12 October 2020

To: Mike Kerr, Mayor
Douglas Shire Council
Mossman, Qld

Re: proposed options of crossing the Daintree River

Dear Mayor Kerr,

Rainforest Rescue is strongly opposed to the building of a bridge across the Daintree River on environmental and economic grounds.

Rainforest Rescue has had a significant presence in the Daintree area for close to twenty years. To date, we have successfully fundraised to purchase and protect 35 properties. The majority of these are covered in intact rainforest, with the exception of one 27.6 h property showcasing our best practice, large scale rainforest restoration. We contribute to the economy of the area by the amount of time our staff, Board of Directors, and business partners spend in the area. We introduce many new visitors who very quickly succumb to the desire to return. We partner with many local businesses, including the Cairns International Airport. We also work with/partner with the local Kuku Yulanji people and Jabalbina. We consider ourselves locals in our connection to country and care for country.

This determined commitment to the Daintree is based on protection of the rainforest's natural values, which are the key to its sustained longevity as well as its capacity as a drawcard for visitors and scientific research. A visit and walk into this 'world away from the everyday world' offers an experience like no other. We must preserve this. Protect it. Treasure it. Ensure that the Daintree rainforest remains healthy and intact. As such, we are its guardians, and have this responsibility.

This priceless World Heritage rainforest is unique on the continent of Australia. It offers locals and visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in a rainforest experience of rare and threatened species they will not see anywhere else, along with its spectacular beauty. Much of its flora and fauna are found nowhere else on the planet, and have lineages that date back over 100 million years. An evolutionary wonder that we need to ensure that we protect.

We have read the proposal paper that DSC have created in regard to potential Daintree River crossing options. We strongly believe that the quality and feeling of the entry to the Daintree is a critically important part of the entire Daintree experience. People drive onto the ferry and quickly leave the world of human activity, cleared landscapes, busy roads, towns and cities behind them. It's a rainforest wilderness journey that is accessible in a world where rainforests are rapidly dwindling. The sense of entrance is intrinsic to the eco-tourism experience. Building a bridge will reduce the Daintree experience to the same level as virtually any other in Australia.

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We feel the following points are important in regard to determining a decision of this significance and long term effects.

Two Ferry option:

1. offers the visitor a meaningful and slow entry to the wonders of the Daintree's natural environment
2. offers the delight and adventure of the ferry experience itself; which countless visitors throughout the years have commented on as an important part of the entire journey
3. overall is a more environmentally and people friendly option
4. both ferries would only need to operate during the 'heavy traffic' tourism times
5. allows for continuous movement of traffic, to and from the Daintree
6. allows for a better 'scaled' movement of traffic (versus continuous flow of traffic) which would offer greater safety for native fauna crossing the road
7. the Threatened Southern Cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius*) is found only in the tropical rainforests of north-east Queensland. 'Continuing clearing and fragmentation of rainforest and increased mortality from cars and dogs have reduced cassowary numbers to perhaps as few as around 2000, threatening the species with extinction' (Australian Dept of Agriculture, Water and the Environment).
8. 'scaled' traffic movement also offers less traffic congestion which could prevent the real potential for more traffic accidents
9. offers DSC the opportunity to look into purchasing a 'zero emissions' ferry
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6Lp-qV9ZJU>
10. as per #9 – this would highlight DSC's determination towards reducing emissions and the creation of sustainable alternatives – a truly positive story that would be applauded
11. is a fee paying option so would continue to deliver regular income to Douglas Shire Council.

The strategic imperatives of the Council are unclear in pursuing the bridge option. A bridge will diminish the eco-tourism experience and decrease the tourism brand of the region that will be vital in the post COVID 19 recovery if it is to occur. Moreover, it will be at odds with the goal of cassowary conservation and significantly damage the brand of the region.

Sincerely,



Chair Board of Directors

on behalf of Rainforest Rescue

A bridge is an ill thought out concept

The concept of replacing the existing ferry service with a bridge remains an ill thought out concept. The following represents why I believe this is true.

The existing ferry. Some people point to the environmental issues associated with the existing ferry service and a potential second ferry to augment it as a reason to move towards a bridge.

Because of the dynamics of the river it is necessary to dredge the river at the ferry site to maintain the service. While this activity would create a flume during the activity it is generally not considered to be a significant pollutant source. As dredging is usually carried out at lower river flow periods the flume would not extend far and as it is not nutrient rich or loaded with farm chemicals would have minimal impact on the reef. The main issues with water quality effecting the reef are through farm based fertilizers and chemicals washed down during heavy rains. The dredge materials, which mostly comprises of river sand, is removed from site and utilised appropriately.

The introduction of a second ferry will require significant alterations to the ferry terminal site. While it will require the removal of some mangroves I note that it is intended to use the old River Train mooring site on the south bank and this having already been significantly altered should minimise any additional impacts on this site. The northern bank does require a second landing pad beside the existing one and this may require some clearing of mangroves but still dramatically less than any of the bridge option proposed.

Some argue because the existing ferry runs on diesel it is not very environmentally appropriate and this is partially true. However the concept of building a 36 car carrying capacity, largely solar powered, ferry to provide the bulk of the service and to use the old diesel ferry only during peak times should lessen this. But of course a bridge is not fossil fuel free either. Every vehicle still needs to cross the river on a bridge and while many may dismiss this as negligible individually, collectively it amounts to more fuel burnt than what the ferry service uses. Depending on which bridge option is selected travel times could be increased by as much as 25 minutes, constituting a massive increase in fuel use as compared to the ferry service.

The existing ferry service employs up to 30 locals all of which stand to lose their jobs if the service closes. In these very troubling times we can't really afford to squander jobs.

The ferry service generates revenue for the Douglas Shire. Revenue that will be difficult to find somewhere else. Some have suggested that we could place a toll on a bridge should we build one. This seems very unlikely as from the Councils own proposals they are unlikely to self-fund a bridge it would be very hard to justify collecting a toll and keeping it. Clearly toll roads and bridges do exist around Australia but they are generally so that the financiers of constructing said roads and bridges can recoup their outlays and make a modest profit. Also when tolls are instigated they do not exclude local commuters. The collection of a toll even though I do not believe that one is likely to be permitted would in itself create hold ups at the entrances to the bridge creating another source of delays. Electronic e-tag gates would be extremely expensive to install and would present a host of running problems in our wet humid environment.

When infrastructure was designed for National Park visitation in the Daintree car parks were structured and sized to accommodate the ferries pulse feed of vehicles every 15 minutes or so. To replace the ferry with a bridge runs the risk of causing traffic congestion at sites like the Alexandra Range Lookout and Jindalba Boardwalk. There is little capacity at either site to accommodate expansion of car parks.

While road kills of wildlife are a significant concern with the existing service, particularly after sundown, replacing it with a bridge would greatly increase that risk. It would remove the

period of time when few if any vehicles are moving around creating a greater hazard for nocturnal birds and animals. This includes Bennett's Tree Kangaroo, Quolls, Pademelons, Owls, Nightjars and Frogmouths.

Building a Bridge. Each of the four bridge options present a number of significant issues both during construction and longer term. The information provided through the consultation process makes no mention of the environmental impacts that building a bridge would cause both during the construction phase and as a flow on effect nor does it make mention of the social justification for building a bridge. Some of the impacts should have been obvious to the engineers who designed and costed the proposals but they make little effort to discuss this. While I accept that with so many options on the table undertaking an EIS for each of them would have been expensive and wasteful I find it alarming that it was not covered in the project proposal at all.

All options except option 1. (building at bridge at the existing site) require significant alterations to existing roads. Some, according to the Engineer, have been accommodated in the costings but I find no mention of upgrades needed along Forest Creek Road to accommodate all traffic using what is effectively a local road. Option 4. (a bridge near Daintree Village) does not mention any changes to the Barratt Creek bridge. This bridge has recently had significant repairs carried out on it. As I live very close to this bridge and that our driveway floods at exactly the same time as the bridge I am very much aware of the frequency and duration that flood events occur here. It is noted that the existing ferry service is disrupted by flood events but not nearly as frequently or for the length of time that Barratt Creek bridge is out of service. Replacing this bridge on top of the other expenses associated with a Daintree River crossing and a massive time increase to get back to Cape Tribulation road make this options ridiculous.

Surveys of visitors to the Daintree clearly show that the ferry service is of special note to tourists. Even when they are inconvenienced by delays. To replace it with what is effectively a boring, brutalist structured bridge that they can effectively see anywhere removes any point of difference that we currently have. We need to keep and improve our entrance to this magnificent destination.

The construction of a bridge is not in keeping with the existing Douglas Shire Council Planning Scheme which specifically mentions retaining the ferry service. The Town Planning Scheme is what guides investment within our Shire. To move away from our gazetted planning scheme must surely require a more profound consultation process than what we have been presented with here.

Building a bridge is not in keeping with the State Government Regional Plan which also advocates retaining the ferry service. At a State level the Regional Plan is what guides investment decisions by the Queensland State Government.

I remain both dismayed and alarmed that this new Douglas Shire Council would choose to spend a considerable sum of our rates on this issue. This consultation process would not have come cheap coupled with the fact that a great deal of effort had already been expended by the previous council and a resolution had been both established and agreed it seems very wasteful to be revisiting it again.

I sincerely hope that council is wise enough not to choose to plunge the shire into endless angst and hostilities that proposing to actually build a bridge will surely do.

Cover Costs Only

I would prefer a 2 ferry service, to cover costs only as tourists will most likely be supporting businesses over the river. Thank you for the research.

Ferry is tourist attraction

I live in Cow Bay and hope it is ok to offer some community feedback with regard to the bridge vs ferry issue. I have not received the check box survey yet, so I thought I would just send some feedback via email.

There may be many reasonable arguments to support the case for building a vast bridge over the Daintree River, but nevertheless I love the ferry service. So do the tourists. Gliding across the crocodile infested river in the safety of your car is a bit of a thrill for newcomers. It feels as if you are leaving civilization behind and heading into the heart of the Congo.

The ferry service is a tourist attraction in itself and my hope is that it is expanded to help eliminate delays in crossing.

A bridge will mean that cars will just fly past and not stop as often to do boat tours at the ferry location. The ferry location offers a great opportunity to create a ferry crossing hub of commercial activity. An elevated restaurant serving crocodile burgers would be excellent. Or a retail space selling local produce.

There is something to be gained by having to stop and slow down. The roads are challenging, especially for newcomers and a bit of a pause is often much needed by the tourists in particular.

The ferry crossing signals a line where you leave behind civilization and head into the wilds of nature. That's how it feels when you cross on the ferry. If it is decommissioned, I shall miss it.

Thank you for asking for feedback,

Insurance Not Factored in for a Toll Bridge

The statement below, which is in answer to a FAQ on Councils' website indicates a further substantial expense for insurance not factored in for a toll bridge.

A bridge would be constructed to the suitable design standards that would make the destruction of the bridge unlikely. In the event of significant damage/loss from a declared event such as a cyclone, then the Disaster Relief Funding Arrangements would apply whereby State and Federal governments contribute almost all of the repair/replacement costs for un-tolled bridge. Insurance or other similar mechanisms would have to be acquired for a tolled bridge.

Not only would ratepayers fund the full cost of building a non-toll bridge, which would provide no revenue to Council, the top-up on Disaster Relief Funding for repairs would also be borne as a forever additional cost to ratepayers for rebuilding the bridge approaches after flooding events or the annual after-flood cost of removal of trees and debris pushed against the bridge causing blockage and damage, and increasing flood levels on properties up stream.

During flood events and approach repairs, access to or from north of the river will still not be possible even if a bridge is built, so no real gain to for residents or Emergency Services.

What sort of traffic bottle-neck will be caused by collecting a toll to cross the bridge? How much are travel times likely to be reduced - if at all?

How is Council supporting ratepayers if asking them to pay millions to build and maintain a bridge when the current ferry and any new ferry is supplied and maintained by the ferry contractor at no cost to ratepayers and provides local jobs?

The provision and maintenance of the land-based infrastructure is, or should be, paid for from the Ferry Levy at no cost to ratepayers. This is why the Levy was introduced. The Levy also has provided a revenue stream which has so far given Council M\$4 in the bank.

If the two ferry option was in place, wait times for frustrated locals could be reduced in peak times if one of the ferries was dedicated to access for locals during those times, and a coffee shop/information centre (built using Levy funds) at the ferry access, as there was in the past, would give tourists something of interest to do while waiting to cross and also provide a further revenue stream for Council.

The eyes of the world are on Douglas Shire and our current prestigious recognition and award-winning status as one of the world's Sustainable Top 100 Destinations would be severely compromised by the environmental destruction required to build a bridge, in addition to removing an exciting part of the experience currently enjoyed by visitors from around the world.

Finally, I believe the survey analysis should separate ratepayers from 'individuals living in the Shire (Ratepayers and Residents)' as it is the ratepayers who will be footing the bill with years of debt to repay if a bridge is ever built.

Strongly object to a bridge

I strongly object to a bridge. It would certainly detract from the ambiance of the area; the ferry has served us all , well !

Totally opposed to the proposal of building a bridge

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this very significant topic, crucial to the future of the Douglas Shire. I am writing this letter as a concerned and passionate resident of the Douglas Shire.

I am totally opposed to the proposal of building a bridge across the Daintree River. Here are some points I'd like to bring to your attention:

- Going across the Daintree River by ferry offers a unique experience for tourists and locals alike. It is the perfect introduction to approaching the World Heritage Daintree National Park, with the calming effect of slowing down traffic and people, with the realization that one is entering a very special environment.....an environment that needs to be protected, at all cost.
- A bridge would potentially lead to further development, in this already vulnerable rainforest. With a bridge comes pressure to widen and straighten roads, which in turn makes people drive faster, putting wildlife at risk, particularly the nocturnal fauna.
- With a bridge would come a constant flow of traffic, day and night. With the ferry, there is a pulse of traffic flow operating from 6am to midnight, which gives the wildlife and forest some breathing space!
- Daintree National Park is not the place for wider roads and faster traffic!
- The image of the potential bridge structure (shown at the community meetings) is very un-aesthetic....in other words.... ugly.... what a way to enter this magnificent rainforest.... on an ugly steel/concrete bridge!
- A bridge would be undermining the philosophy behind the creation of the Daintree National Park as a World Heritage area.
- It would also impact on The Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, as with building a bridge, comes other infrastructure, not just at the bridge site, but along the road to Cape Tribulation and beyond. More traffic flow means major road reviews, with roadworks which could potentially create runoff to the already dying Great Barrier Reef.

- This isn't about the simple equation of building a bridge. This has huge ramifications beyond the bridge!
- It would also be undermining the existing Douglas Shire Planning Scheme which states:

(6) The Daintree River and its vehicular ferry represents a significant break between movement north and south of the river and also represents a significant threshold on development and population capacity on the northern side of the river. **The Far North Queensland Regional Plan does not envisage any alternative to the ferry, and as such, areas north of the Daintree River will remain sparsely populated and maintained as a conservation area and a remote recreation experience.**

- The new ferry caters for 36 vehicles. So, with this ferry and the second ferry operating during peak times, relief from traffic queues and time delays would be addressed. It seems, from reading the "Daintree River Crossing Options Assessment Report", that queues and delays, are **the major issues**, from tourists and locals alike.

So, this problem certainly needs to be addressed.

A bridge however, isn't the solution, as the financial, environmental and social costs are prohibitive. A bridge across the Daintree River is an ill-conceived idea.

Why would council go through this \$60-\$75 million project (cost would increase greatly by the time the bridge would actually be built, with a myriad of State and Federal? Government approvals needed), when a second ferry would solve the problem? Estimated cost of a second ferry is calculated at \$2.8 million. With the current ferry reserve of \$4 million, doesn't it make sense to utilize this money for the second ferry? Much less upheaval and achievable within a much shorter time frame than building a bridge. Also, much less burden on us, the rate payers!

I must ask, where is the pressure coming from, to build a bridge?

- The ferry currently provides many ongoing jobs (about 20), to locals in our community. A second ferry would provide even more jobs during the peak periods. A new, state of the art, predominantly solar/electric ferry, is so important during these times of climate change.

Now is the time for the Douglas Shire Council to be leading the way with the best environmental practices possible.

- Surely Douglas Shire needs a point of difference in these competitive times of destination travel. The ferry provides this unique experience that is priceless. This is what the tourists love to see.... a point of difference.... not a point of "sameness".

A bridge certainly **does not** provide a point of difference.

Finally, the Daintree Rainforest is recognised worldwide as an extremely important asset to the World, not just to this Shire! This isn't just about local politics.... this is of worldwide concern, that the Daintree rainforest is protected for future generations.

Death of a Great Rainforest

The ferry crossing adds a sense of adventure, it's a natural slowing down before discovering the world most ancient rainforest...it is what makes the Daintree National Park special, the fact that it is not so easily accessible, a bridge would certainly be the end, the death of a great rainforest experience for all, since it is world heritage it should be left alone, I can't understand why anyone would want a bridge, even the locals living across the Daintree River as most of them benefit directly from the tourist dollar, if the Daintree National Park is accessible by car it will be just another drive. Definitely No to a BRIDGE.

Shocked and Horrified

Although I am not in your Council area, the suggestion of building a bridge over the Daintree River has shocked and horrified me.

It is not necessary for everything to be developed and changed and some things need to be left as is. This area has to be left alone. There is only one Daintree.

The next thing will be once a bridge is built, there will be development applications and the area will be ruined and please don't try to tell me this won't happen because it will.

A bridge will bring with it too easy an access for too many people and that in itself will eventually ruin what it is today.

Just look at Fraser Island... Ruined Too many people, too many 4WDs, too much rubbish left behind, pollution and fauna and wildlife suffering. This is what easy access to anywhere brings.

Humans bring with them food waste, toilet waste, litter like cigarettes and alcohol bottles and cans and plastics, fire etc.

The barge should be in operation with another barge in lieu of building a bridge which itself brings with it an environmental impact which is not acceptable. Running barges also keeps people in employment. No barge, no job. No one needs to be employed once a bridge is finished.

People are killing our beautiful national parks because they are loving them to death and the environment can't cope.

Keep our region special and protect what we have for a viable long-term future

I have lived in the Douglas Shire for the past seven years and recently have become a property owner here. I would like to express my strong opposition to the building of a bridge across the Daintree River.

Part of the reason our World Heritage listed Daintree Rainforest is such an extraordinary place and a renowned international as well as local tourist destination is its remoteness and the unusual access to it. The lack of a bridge helps to limit access. Building a bridge would inevitably mean more traffic, effectively 24/7, thereby removing some of the mystique of remoteness, so reducing its desirability and exceptional characteristics to tourists seeking a nature experience as different as possible from the city lives many are trying to escape.

A second ferry should effectively reduce wait times during peak periods, and will help psychologically to reinforce the mystique of the region. I still remember the first time I crossed by ferry. The feeling of excitement that I was finally getting into this very special place that had to be accessed by barge ... If I hadn't already felt a strong urge to protect this unique place I do think the slowness of the crossing would have made me stop to reflect on what a unique place the Daintree is. I am sure I am not the only first-time visitor who experienced this. Even now, having been there many times, the ferry crossing reminds me what an extraordinary place I am going into, every single time I go there. Note that I work in Port Douglas and talk to hundreds of visitors/tourists. I have never once heard a visitor complain about the need to cross by ferry. It simply adds to the experience.

Those of us who were born and raised elsewhere and have chosen to live here do so often because of a desire to be closer to what's left of our natural world, and a relatively pristine ecosystem. We almost all value our unique and extraordinary rainforest (I could list some of its many amazing characteristics but I am sure you are aware of them too).

The southern cassowary is already endangered. Opening the road up to more traffic 24/7 would inevitably result in more road deaths. (And we know there are many other threats to cassowaries, such as dogs). We should be doing whatever we can to help this species, and all the other less colourful and less well-known rainforest species, to survive. Australia has a terrible rate of species extinction, particularly in recent decades. Being a region that is heavily dependent on tourism, our long-term economic future will be much better for protecting the things that make our region unique and make tourists want to come here. Our unusual species are worth protecting for that reason, even if we didn't consider them to have particular intrinsic value, which we should.

The people and businesses who live and operate north of the river have moved there knowing access is by ferry not bridge. The businesses that operate there should only be doing so if eco-tourism and protecting the unique environment they inhabit is front of mind at all times. If these are not their values then they should live and/or operate elsewhere. Protecting this unique ecosystem should be the highest priority for the Douglas Shire Council.

Let's keep our region special and protect what we have for a viable long-term future. We should be marketing the mystique of the Daintree (including the ferry crossing) and any 'developments' should be in eco-tourism, according to very high standards of sustainability and environmental protection. In this environment we have the opportunity to be a world leader in eco-tourism. Let's be that.

Damage to Environment Totally Unacceptable

We just want to say we DO not want a bridge over the Daintree River. The damage this would cause to the environment is totally unacceptable and it would degrade the World Heritage status. We are residents of Wonga Beach and find it very disturbing that Council is intending to spend this amount of money on something the community has not been properly consulted on.

I DO NOT support the construction of a bridge over the Daintree River.

I have chosen to live in this Shire because of its environmental attributes and the proximity to protected wilderness areas. I am dismayed to find that these assets are under threat by the Douglas Shire Council and it is difficult to understand why the Council would propose a direction that contravenes both the Douglas Shire Planning Scheme and the State Government Regional Plan.

It concerns me greatly the council would risk damaging our most valuable environmental asset. With the reef under threat by climate change, we must strive even harder to protect the Daintree wilderness. After all, this is one of the main reasons that tourists visit the region. I believe that the two-ferry option will adequately reduce waiting times and that the cost and disruption to the environment of a bridge is not warranted. The ferry provides a special experience for visitors who come to the Daintree to immerse themselves in the rainforest, not to be faced with overt superstructures over wild rivers.

The long term employment opportunities provided by the running of two ferries is of great value to the community, as secure jobs in the region are in short supply. What jobs does a bridge provide after it is constructed?

There are many aspects of a bridge which concern me as a resident. Any amount of clearing of vegetation alongside the Daintree River is unacceptable. There is already far too much cleared land alongside the river, making a mockery of its 'World Heritage status'.

I am concerned that the bridge could be the beginning of increased development over the river, resulting in degradation of the region clearly in contravention of World Heritage protection principles.

The 'Pulse Effect' mitigates impact on wildlife

As a Cow Bay resident, I fully acknowledge the need to improve traffic flow and waiting times across the Daintree River - particularly in peak tourist season. As such, I am in favour of a two-ferry solution and am writing a submission expressing my concerns and opposition to a bridge over the Daintree River option; with the following points for consideration.

- The ferry provides a unique tourist experience. The ferry provides 'breathing time' whereby tourists slow down, stop and anticipate what is on the north side of the river. Entering a predominately World Heritage listed rainforest is a special experience and the ferry crossing is part of that. In effect, a bridge would make it like anywhere else in Australia. In an area struggling to maintain tourism, a bridge would basically make the Daintree Coast an easy drive suburb. Anything which takes away our uniqueness would (in my view) be extremely detrimental.
- Partygoers - who know there are no police. The ferry stops from midnight to 6.00 a.m. It is well known that the Daintree Coast has little to no police presence, which can and does attract partygoers. The rubbish and noise (and human excrement) are already bad at places like Cow Bay beach and Kimberley. The addition of a 24/7 access bridge will very likely encourage people to bring their parties north of the river. We who live here (not to mention the wildlife) already have to put up with rubbish and noise. A bridge will likely greatly exacerbate the situation as Port Douglas residents can drive up here at night - seven days a week - party all night (with little chance of police intervention) and then sneak home (still under the influence) in the early hours over a bridge. I would invite councillors to be over here at 2 am at various locations and then ask themselves - "Would we like this rubbish and noise doubled or tripled?"
- Lose the 'pulse effect' for wildlife. The ferry naturally provides a 'pulse effect' for wildlife. As the ferry empties, you get a convoy of vehicles, followed by around ten minutes of no traffic. I firmly believe that much of our diurnal wildlife (like Cassowaries) have become accustomed to this pulse. Conversely, being nocturnal, much of our iconic wildlife are on the road at night, such as reptiles, possums, bandicoots, pademelons and tree-kangaroos. With almost no traffic from midnight to 6.00 a.m. that wildlife crosses in relative safety. However, a bridge, with its 24/7 access, would destroy the pulse effect and render our nocturnal wildlife having to play continual 'Russian roulette'. As a local wildlife carer, I do not look forward to scooping dead and injured animals off the road each morning.
- Increased risk of feral animals crossing in the middle of the night - rats, foxes and cats. The ferry provides a natural barrier to feral animals. A bridge - particularly in the early hours of the morning - would create an unfettered access route for aforementioned animals into the National Park. We only have to look at cane toads and feral pigs to see what can happen. Introducing rats and particularly efficient apex predators loose on our small mammals and reptiles could be devastating for Musky-rat kangaroos, possums, gliders, native rodents, ground-dwelling birds and small to medium reptiles.
- An accident or breakdown on a bridge could involve extremely lengthy delays with trying to get a tow truck through backed up traffic. With two ferries, one could keep operating while the problem is fixed on the other.

This is a decision for the people most affected

Thank you for the opportunity to vote. We no longer reside in Port Douglas, we have our unit rented out as we relocated for family reasons to Brisbane. At this point we believe this is a decision for the people most affected and wish you well in the decision making process. If I still lived there I'd probably be a two ferry person myself :)



SUBMISSION REGARDING A PROPOSED BRIDGE ACROSS THE DAINTREE RIVER



26 October 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT DSSG	3
SUMMARY OF SUBMISSION	3
PRELIMINARY REMARKS	4
What is the demand for a bridge across the Daintree River?	
Why are we discussing this now?	
Community impact – division and angst.	
THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS	7
The Survey	
The Options Report	
Submissions	
Community meetings with staff	
Focus Groups	
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	10
REGULATORY ISSUES	12
TOURISM IMPACT	13
THE COST OF A BRIDGE	14
BACK OF THE ENVELOPE COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS	15
DREDGING AND DIESEL	16

ABOUT DSSG

The Douglas Shire Sustainability Group Inc. (DSSG) is a community-based environmental advocacy organisation, registered by the Queensland Government under the Associations Incorporation Act in 2006.

DSSG has operated continuously for the past fifteen years, and our membership comprises over one hundred residents and ratepayers of the Douglas Shire. We have been actively engaged in community projects such as beach clean-ups, Mynah bird trapping and environmental art; and we have formed partnerships with other local community groups such as Plastic Free Douglas and Low Isles Preservation Society. We have partnered with larger organisations such as Tangaroa Blue, CAFNEC and GBR Legacy.

DSSG is a strong advocate for the special environment of the Douglas Shire, and we have made dozens of submissions on relevant issues to Douglas Shire Council, the Queensland Government and Wet Tropics Management Authority, Terrain and the Climate Council. DSSG is a member of the LMAC, CAFNEC, QCC and QWALC.

Our objects are:

- (a) To promote and encourage the adoption of the principals of ecologically sustainable development to all sectors of the community throughout the Douglas Shire;
- (b) To the protection and conservation of the unique environment in the Douglas Shire and its surrounds, including the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics and World Heritage areas;
- (c) To promote social, economic and environmental balance;
- (d) To promote and support environmentally sustainable practices, education and great environmental awareness amongst visitors to and residents of the Douglas Shire;
- (e) To recognise and promote the sustainable practices of the traditional owners of the Douglas Shire; and
- (f) To engage in any other activity in support of the objectives above (a to e) allowable under the Associations and Incorporations Act 1981 of the State of Queensland as amended.

SUMMARY OF SUBMISSION

Members of DSSG have participated in the Douglas Shire Council's process which is aimed at determining the appetite of residents and others for a bridge over a two ferry system, as a means of crossing the Daintree River.

Our members do not support a bridge as a means of crossing the Daintree River.

We note that a single ferry with improved traffic management has the least environmental impact and is, by far, the least costly to the ratepayers of the Douglas Shire. However, taking a 'real world' view - DSSG supports the two ferry system as envisaged and commissioned by Douglas Shire Council in 2019. A new solar / electric ferry will enable speedy, efficient travel, minimise emissions and utilise existing infrastructure. The reservation of the existing ferry in service for peak periods or emergencies is a sustainable addition.

A real options approach is the evolutionary "no regrets" approach to dealing with real-world issues. The key thing is to select options that do not "lock you in", that offer you the choice to adapt to changing circumstances as they arise, and to minimise the 'regret' that arises from being locked into a particular option that cannot be undone.

Although we do not envisage short term increases in tourist traffic, due to Covid 19, a northern priority lane for locals should be considered. Pre-booked ticketing for peak tourist visitation periods should also be considered with cheaper fares either side of "rush hour". The concept of "park and ride" could be investigated and encouraging self-drive visitors to stay overnight in

the rainforest would not only alleviate the amount of vehicular traffic on a single day but would also be a positive for the local accommodation providers.

In addition, DSSG recommends an upgrade of the Daintree entrance, including interpretation centre, booking office and cafeteria licence. This gives travellers an alternative to the ferry queue, a place to catch a river tour, or a lift to the other side to meet transfer and shuttle buses.

We, as custodians of the World Heritage Daintree Rainforest, must do all we can to protect this precious place for future generations.

On 28 April 2020, DSSG established an on-line petition asking for signatures to SAVE THE DAINTREE (AGAIN), in the face of developments such as a bridge to replace the ferry crossing. At the time of writing, there were almost 24,000 signatures – 24,000 people who do not want a bridge over the Daintree River.

The Daintree Rainforest is a World Heritage Icon – a globally significant ecosystem with some of the highest diversity of primitive flowering plants and monotypic species in the world. A poorly conducted local poll does not give the Douglas Shire Council a mandate to make development decisions that will put this crown jewel at risk.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

What is the demand for a bridge across the Daintree River?

Douglas Shire Council's Economic Review Group had already approved the ferry option. So, what had changed? Why was a bridge now being considered? Douglas Shire community is told that we need to consider a bridge across the Daintree because:

1. The option of a bridge wasn't fully considered in 2018

The purpose of the consultation in 2018 was to consider enhancements to the existing ferry service, prior to going to tender for a new ferry contract:

"As part of stage 1 of the Daintree River Ferry contract renewal, Council is seeking feedback from all relevant stakeholders for suggestions on enhancements to ferry service..... To ensure a seamless transition from the current contract to the new contract, sufficient time has to be allowed for potential service providers to submit their tender and to ensure the vessel is ready to commence operations 1 July 2021. To facilitate this end result it is planned to be in a position to invite tenders no later than 30 June 2019 and to award the contract by no later than 31 December 2019. That would allow the successful tenderer to implement all necessary arrangements to effect a seamless transition to the new contract"ⁱ.

The 2018 process was not testing appetite for a bridge to replace the ferry. Respondents were asked to identify enhancements to the ferry service. Six respondents said build a bridge and three of these suggested a bridge only if ferry issues could not be resolved.

As outlined in the Council's Q&A, the issue with the 2018 process is:

"In summary, the Round One consultation does not enable us to know with any accuracy the percentage of people who do, or do not, support a bridge across the Daintree River."ⁱⁱ

2. Residents living across the River spend too much time waiting for the ferry

Clearly waiting times in peak periods are frustrating for residents.

In our view, the traffic issues which occur only at peak times do not warrant the building of a bridge across the Daintree River. For most of the time the current single ferry is more than adequate to accommodate the amount of vehicular traffic traveling across the River.

None of the information presented to us tells us how much time will be saved in crossing the river, for what number of people, and at what times of the year or day.

The GHD traffic reportⁱⁱⁱ uses two years of data from 2015 to 2017 and extrapolates 20 years into the future. This assumption is considered highly dubious.

Underlying the GHD traffic growth rate estimate is an assumption that tourism across the Daintree River will continue growing at 2015-2017 levels – which has not eventuated. It also implicitly assumes population growth north of the Daintree River will match that of the rest of the Douglas Shire. This assumption will be determined by Council zoning and development approval trends and should be assessed more rigorously.

The current reduction in traffic arising from Covid-19 could act to extend the zero-queuing threshold by an additional 10 years (i.e. queuing will not commence again until 2040). This assumes that pre-Covid international travel and domestic (Douglas Shire) population growth rates will be resumed within 5 years (by 2025)^{iv}.

3. Emergency services will be able to access the community quicker and easier

It is noted that the ferry operator provides a 24 hour on-call service for emergency transport purposes, which reduces the relative benefit of a bridge as compared to the ferry.

4. Residents in Daintree Coast want a larger say

The Daintree Coast is struggling with what is there today. We constantly hear calls from a small cohort of those residents to provide services that were always going to be beyond the scope of the nation's taxpayers or local ratepayers. Services that are not in keeping with the very place in which they had chosen to live.

Mayor Kerr's election campaign included a commitment to 'unite' the Shire by giving a priority in decision making about the Daintree to those who reside there^v. The fact is that previous Councils have always provided opportunities for these residents to give their views. In the 2018 consultation *there were 117 responses to the ferry survey. 97 respondents lived north of the Daintree River, 13 lived elsewhere in the shire, one lived outside the shire and six did not respond to location. In addition, two community meetings were held in Cow Bay and Cape Tribulation.*

Mayor Kerr's policy has somehow become about creating opportunities (at ratepayer cost) for those people who were unsuccessful in their previous inputs to Council policy, to have a further opportunity to advance their agenda.

Why are we discussing this now?

DSSG notes the view of many in the community that consultation on this issue is poorly timed. In a COVID environment when the economic position of businesses in the Shire is dire, spending money on this exercise is seen as wasteful and an incorrect priority.

The current Daintree ferry contract is due to expire 30 June 2021. Following a tender process that drew international attention, Douglas Shire Council resolved to allow the Chief Executive Officer to finalise contractual negotiations with local company, Sirron Enterprises Pty Ltd. The contractors have operated the ferry crossing since 2006.

The proposed 36-vehicle ferry would carry nine extra vehicles and operate in the main channel, while the current 27-vehicle ferry would operate downstream in a second channel to alleviate traffic congestion during peak tourist season.

In April 2020, Council resolved to temporarily suspend the Daintree River Ferry contract negotiations and explore the option of a bridge crossing at various locations along the river.

The Mayoral Minute presented to the Council Meeting of 28 April 2020 was the first business item considered by this newly elected Council – it has set the tone for the priorities and interests of the new Mayor. The Mayoral Minute was not accompanied by any information as to why this issue had to be considered immediately. We assume the looming expiration date of the ferry contract was one issue in the mind of the Mayor.

In introducing the motion, the Mayor said he wanted the full ferry contract details to be considered by the community, including increased costs for the second ferry. He said as these are 'changing times' more transparency was needed, and decisions made on all the options.

All the options are 1. Remain with the current single ferry 2. Expand the capacity of a single ferry 3. Implement a two-ferry solution 4. Build a bridge.

Unfortunately not all the options have subsequently been included for community consideration – only two options – a bridge or two ferries.

Community impact – division and angst.

Developments north of the Daintree River have been contentious since the 1980s, when the Bjelke-Petersen government forced the Douglas Shire Council to subdivide the region into hundreds of lifestyle blocks and the developer promised that mains power would be supplied to these blocks.

The "Save the Daintree" Campaign gained global attention when the Douglas Shire Council forced a road through the rainforest from Cape Tribulation to Bloomfield. Locals and conservationists from all around Australia formed "The Blockade". This blocking of the bulldozers generated headlines around the world, and became one of main drivers of the World Heritage Listing of Wet Tropics rainforests. It also started the Council's environmental agenda that has been applauded as a role model for conservation in Australian local government.

Since the re-establishment of the Douglas Shire Council after the de-amalgamation with Cairns Regional Council, the last six years have been the most stable since the 1980s. This has now been de-stabilised by deliberately choosing one of the most divisive topics possible – the development of the Daintree by building a bridge over the river.

There is no evidence the Mayor has a mandate to pursue a bridge over the Daintree River.

His election materials, policy statements and priorities list do not mention a bridge. Making the very first business item he brings to the Council table a motion to explore appetite for a bridge was unexpected, inexplicable and divisive.

The Mayor wrote and published an open letter criticising those who opposed his campaign to put a bridge on Council's agenda^{vi}. This letter included the following:

"In a crisis stage of pandemic like this, with nearly all businesses and residents heavily effected, you would think that the community as a whole would be working together to garner the best possible outcomes for its residents and not intentionally inflaming discontent in this community by inciting division for nothing more than their own personal gain and agenda."

DSSG is of the view the Mayor's campaign is in fact inciting division in our community. This whole exercise will result in this Council being seen as captured by narrow and vested interests.

"I remain both dismayed and alarmed that this new Douglas Shire Council would choose to spend a considerable sum of our rates on this issue. This consultation process would not have come cheap coupled with the fact that a great deal of effort had already been expended by the previous council and a resolution had been both established and agreed it seems very wasteful to be revisiting it again. I sincerely hope that council is wise enough not to choose to plunge the shire into endless angst and hostilities that proposing to actually build a bridge will surely do".^{vii}

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Douglas Shire Council has adopted an engagement process which comprises:

- a 'survey' to be completed on line or by way of postal ballot,
- an Options Report to assist with decision making
- submissions which will be de-identified and published
- community meetings with staff
- focus groups

The Survey

DSSG observes a poll is different from a consultation. Polls need to be free and transparent, which means they should be conducted independently with scrutineers to ensure all the votes are accurately counted. The Council has appointed a professional company to conduct the poll, however as this company is the client of the Council, there is a potential conflict of interest.

If there is no independent verification of the results, how do we know that the results are correct?

Several members have pointed out that the survey can be manipulated and deceptively controlled by using another name and address if you are not a Douglas Shire resident and simply want to have your say – and put in false votes. No email identification is required for non-locals, so voters can use technology to vote repeatedly under their own database of names and addresses.

Council has devised its own survey tool. But instead of including all the options, they have limited it to two ferries or a bridge. This has been described as an unethical decision to manipulate the survey in order to obtain the answers they want. It is a good example of push polling. Push polling is a common tactic used to get people to support one side of a poll over the other.

Part way through the process, Council staff advised that people who are not happy with either of the two options presented on the survey postcard, can cross out both of them, and write in their own preference such as maintaining the single-ferry service, "leave as is." These comments will be taken into consideration in the quantitative results. Similarly, people who vote online can skip voting for either of the two options, and record their alternate preference in the comments. These comments will be considered in the quantitative results.

This change to the process in the middle of a poll, without informing the voters, calls into question the credibility and competency of the data-collecting process. It could be seen as unfair and unethical.

The Options Report

As with any consultative process, outcomes are driven by the scope of the issues considered and the quality of the information provided to the public.

Douglas Shire Council's "Daintree River Crossing Option Assessment Report" is the document prepared to assist us to decide how to 'vote'. Several commentators have stated this Report is based on assumptions, is missing clear data on key areas and is misleading in other areas.

For example, it does not consider environmental, social, economic, or cultural heritage implications.

Some of the impacts should have been obvious to the engineers who designed and costed the proposals but they make little effort to discuss this. While DSSG accepts that with so many options on the table undertaking an EIS for each of them would have been expensive and wasteful, we find it alarming that it was not covered in the project proposal at all.

It states that there would be no requirements for major environmental permits, yet the two lowest cost options require the clearing of endangered forest types.

The report omits relevant information about cost. It does not clearly state the bridge requires 100% funding by the State and Federal Governments. It does not give the cheapest option of keeping a single ferry, with better priority lanes on the north and south sides of the river.

It ignores the larger environmental impact and financial costs of subsequent road upgrades to accommodate increased through traffic going to Cooktown, due to the need to prevent accidents because the narrow, scenic, winding road is not suitable for larger traffic flows.

In the face of significant criticism of the Options Report, Mayor Kerr said:

"The Options report is presented in good faith and contains factual information on the costs involved around this project for both the installation and the operation for the community to decide. Other items which are subject to opinions and hypothetical thoughts such as Cost Benefit Analysis, Environmental Impacts and Tourism Impacts etc. have been left for community debate and your thoughts can be contributed once the consultation opens"^{viii}.

DSSG finds it very disturbing that Mayor Kerr views important considerations and considerable cost factors like Cost Benefit Analysis, Environmental impact assessment and Tourism impacts assessment as 'opinions and hypothetical thought'.

Dr Steve Turton DFIAG, Adjunct Professor of Environmental Geography, Central Queensland University and University of the Sunshine Coast says of the Options Report, that in order to bring credibility and rigour to the community consultation and Council decision-making processes:

"... the four crossing options must be examined from the perspective of the entire Shire, its existing planning schemes and its community values, as well as considering matters of national environmental significance and maintenance of World Heritage values to the north of the river... Cumulative impact assessment aims to consider the 'effects of multiple actions or impacts on the environment', including those beyond the particular river crossing point itself. Impact is a 'neutral' term and therefore includes positive and negative impacts on the environment, but social and economic impacts should also be included in any cumulative impact assessments."^{ix}

Submissions

Concern has been expressed about the lack of transparency in how public submissions, separate from votes on the survey, would be collated by the Council, de-identified and summarised in a document for Councillors and the general public.

How are these "results" going to be considered or weighed against the results of the survey?

DSSG is of the view all submissions should be identified, with the option of requesting privacy. This would go some way toward building confidence in the submissions process.

Community meetings with staff

DSSG expressed concern early in this process at the restrictions on participation in community meetings. Genuinely free, fair and transparent consultations should not have restrictions that severely limit the number of residents who can participate in the public forums. The Council chooses who can attend the forums and imposes severe limits on who can speak at these

forums^x. This is a secretive process that has not been adequately explained, lacks transparency, and could easily be manipulated. These rules acted as a disincentive to attendance.

COVID-19 is not a valid excuse to limit the public forums. The forums could have easily been conducted in open venues such as Rex Smeal Park and the Mossman Show Grounds, allowing for space for all those who want to attend.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are being held after the close of submissions, so DSSG is unable to comment on the utility or otherwise of this aspect of the consultation plan.

A significant omission from the list of groups to be involved is general businesses. The only business interests participating are limited to those operating north of the Daintree River and tourism operators working into the Daintree.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

As a succinct picture of the overall environmental value of the Daintree, and the threats posed to it by a bridge, DSSG quotes Dr Steve Turton, Adjunct Professor CQU^{xi}

“The largest area of tropical rainforest in Australia – the so-called Wet Tropics – is a narrow strip along the northeast coast of the continent, totalling about two million hectares. It represents just 0.26% of the continent, but is crammed with hugely diverse landscapes: rainforests, sclerophyll forests, mangrove forests and shrub lands, as well as areas of intensive agriculture and expanding urban rural population centres. The Wet Tropics are home to a dizzying array of plants and animals. These include at least 663 vertebrate species, 230 butterflies, 135 different dung beetles and a remarkable 222 types of land snail. The area is teeming with more than 4,000 plant species, including 16 of the world's 28 lineages of primitive flowering plant families.

In all, the Wet Tropics bioregion contains 185 distinct ecosystems. Of these, 18 are officially listed as endangered and 134 are of conservation concern.

Just under half of the region is covered by the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area, the world's second-most-irreplaceable natural world heritage area. A recent analysis listed it as the planet's sixth-most-irreplaceable protected area in terms of species conservation, and it's eighth-most-irreplaceable when considering only threatened species.

The rainforests in the Daintree Lowlands between Cape Kimberly in the south and Cape Tribulation in the north are undoubtedly the 'jewel in the crown' of the Wet Tropics. These ancient rainforests are globally significant as they represent the largest remaining area of lowland rainforest in Australia's Wet Tropics, with an area sufficiently large to ensure ongoing evolutionary and ecological processes – an essential requirement for listing as World Heritage by UNESCO.

In other parts of the Wet Tropics lowland rainforest was cleared for agriculture and urban development, with only small remnants remaining today. The Daintree National Park and most adjacent 'undeveloped' blocks of freehold land contain extraordinary plant biodiversity, with many endemic species. These extremely rare plants are often referred to as 'green dinosaurs' because of their archaic characteristics.

Yet despite its global conservation significance, the Wet Tropics was recently described by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as a World Heritage Area of “significant concern”.

This is due to the threat posed to the area's biodiversity and endemic plants and animals by invasive species, diseases and predicted climate change impacts. Only two other Australian

world heritage properties are listed as "of concern": the Great Barrier Reef and Kakadu National Park.

If a bridge is built across the Daintree River it is certain that more vehicular traffic will occur into the Daintree lowlands, with 24-hour access throughout the year. Research shows that bridges, road construction and road upgrades always result in adverse impacts in tropical forests around the world.

For example, we know that bridges and roads act as conduits for invasive plants and animals to penetrate into intact forest areas. The current Yellow Crazy Ant invasion into rainforests near Cairns is an ecological disaster that could easily be repeated in the Daintree. Judging by the ants' impacts elsewhere, this is an impending natural catastrophe.

These impacts could be direct – through predation and harassment – or indirect, such as by the removal of invertebrate prey or disruption of processes such as decomposition, pollination and seed dispersal. The potential for knock-on effects in a system as complex and interconnected as the Daintree rainforest is very high.

Building a bridge will bring inevitable pressures for road upgrades, residential and tourism development and will increase road kills of native wildlife, including loss of endangered species like the Southern Cassowary – an important keystone species. Roads also create a plethora of edge effects that can extend up to 100 m or more into adjacent rainforest. Opening of the canopy provides ideal conditions for invasive weeds and animals, and wider rainforest roads have been shown to be a barrier to the movement of some native animals.

All of these adverse impacts will result in a decline of presentation values admired by all tourists who visit the Daintree. Such threatening processes will undermine the outstanding universal value of the world heritage area – natural values that have remained remarkably stable for 10s of millions of years could be easily lost forever. If outstanding universal value of World Heritage attributes cannot be maintained due to threatening processes, then the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO has the right to list world heritage properties on the World Heritage In Danger list.

It's also worth pointing out that the Wet Tropics are a goldmine and the Daintree rainforest is a globally recognised icon. In its 2014-15 report, the Wet Tropics Management Authority calculated that this natural global asset is worth a whopping A\$5.2 billion each year – roughly half of it from tourism.

A 2008 report found that the Wet Tropics create the greatest economic benefit of any of Australia's natural world heritage properties, excluding the Great Barrier Reef. It found that every dollar spent on management costs earned an A\$85 return in tourism spending. Even in purely economic terms that makes a pretty compelling case for conservation.

A bridge over the Daintree River will be the beginning of 'death by a thousand cuts' for the Daintree rainforest, and a catalyst for UNESCO to place the entire Wet Tropics of Queensland on the in-Danger List.

The environmental and economic impacts of such an unnecessary project are not worth gambling within the new COVID-19 world"

While road kills of wildlife are a significant concern with the existing service, particularly after sundown, replacing it with a bridge would greatly increase that risk. It would remove the period of time when few if any vehicles are moving around creating a greater hazard for nocturnal birds and animals. This includes Bennett's Tree Kangaroo, Quolls, Pademelons, Owls, Nightjars and Frogmouths.

A bridge will bring greater access and with that comes further residential development in the Daintree. This in turn creates increased pressure for services such as electricity, mobile phone towers and sealing of dirt roads. This infrastructure increases the region's land value which then drives further development. Commercialisation of the Daintree will incentivise land owners to develop their properties.

The construction phase and inevitable road upgrade will disturb sensitive ecosystems – both terrestrial and aquatic. When roads are built or widened, the rainforest canopy is opened. This results in fragmented habitat, increased light penetration and more weed species.

Each of the 4 bridge options has its own significant impacts which will need to be properly assessed. DSSG has the benefit of a survey of the vegetation for two of the sites identified by Council as sites for a bridge.

The Bridge at Martinelli Road

Martinelli Road passes through a unique wetland that is listed as an endangered habitat. This wetland contains the only stand of *Melaleuca cajuputi* subsp. *platyphylla* in the Wet Tropics bio region. *Melaleuca cajuputi* subsp. *platyphylla* only occurs from New Guinea to Cape York, with a few isolated trees found as far south as near Cairns. The Daintree population is the most southern stand in the world, and is in a degraded condition because of para grass, molasses grass and hymenachne, the construction of dirt roads through it, as well as artificial and impeded drainage. The wetland also contains two waterlily species that some botanist believe are new undescribed species. These waterlilies are examples of the first primitive flowering plants and are now smothered by the exotic grass species.

Constructing a high-traffic volume, two-lane road through this unique and threatened wetland will require widening and raising the current narrow dirt road. This will result in clearing many of the unique melaleuca trees causing further degradation of the only example of this habitat in the Wet Tropics.

As well as damaging the *Melaleuca cajuputi* subsp. *platyphylla* wetlands, the bridge will require removal of highly diverse riparian (river edge) forests on both sides of the river. The riparian forest on the south bank is listed as endangered habitat. The environmental damage alone should be enough reason for never constructing a bridge and road along Martinelli Road.

Bridge Adjacent to 2874 Mossman Daintree Road

The bridge at 2874 Mossman – Daintree road requires the clearing of endangered riparian habitat on both sides of the river. The bridge will require the removal of 20 metres tall, highly diverse riparian forests on both sides of the river. It should be opposed for this reason alone.

On 28 April 2020, DSSG established an on-line petition asking for signatures to SAVE THE DAINTREE (AGAIN), in the face of developments such as a bridge to replace the ferry crossing. At the time of writing, there were almost 24,000 signatures – 24,000 people who do not want a bridge over the Daintree River.

REGULATORY ISSUES

The construction of a bridge is not in keeping with the existing Douglas Shire Council Planning Scheme which specifically mentions retaining the ferry service. The Town Planning Scheme is what guides investment within our Shire. To move away from our gazetted planning scheme must surely require a more profound consultation process than what we have been presented with here.

Building a bridge is not in keeping with the State Government Regional Plan which also advocates retaining the ferry service. At a State level the Regional Plan is what guides investment decisions by the Queensland State Government.

The two lowest cost bridge options require the clearing of endangered forest types. It is highly unlikely that permits would be issued to clear this endangered vegetation when there are other options.

The Council Options report is misleading about this critical environmental issue when it states there is no need for special environmental permits. The clearing of listed endangered habitats require special permits that are rarely issued these days.

Both options considered by the Options Report require significant permits and approvals - including from Local, State and Federal Governments - construction of a bridge, roads, tolls, dredging an additional ferry channel, clearing vegetation and impact on the waterways.

This significant requirement has received little attention in the Options Report.

TOURISM IMPACT

As Australia's first and only holder of the ECO Destination Certification – Nature Destination Level, the credibility of the Douglas Shire stands out as a hero in the offering of a tourism product unlike anything else in Australia. A destination brimming with world-class sustainable tourism experiences within a pristine environment is worth more environmentally and in terms of future tourism economics than the small convenience of a few less minutes to cross the river by way of a bridge.

A bridge will destroy our unique entrance to the Daintree National Park World Heritage area. A bridge will have little if any aesthetic appeal.

Many people regard these types of bridges as ugly and would regard it as an eyesore that is a blight on the visual beauty of the river and its highly diverse riparian forests. The Daintree tour boat industry is a globally renowned major tourist drawcard, employer and income generator for the Douglas Shire. It will be adversely affected because the image of the bridge is inconsistent with the pristine nature of the riverine and rainforest wilderness experience and has the potential to impact considerable damage on this valuable ecotourism industry. By contrast, the ferry, is seen as an integral part of this wilderness experience.

Surveys of visitors to the Daintree clearly show that the ferry service is of special note to tourists. Even when they are inconvenienced by delays. To replace it with what is effectively a boring, brutalist structured bridge that they can effectively see anywhere removes any point of difference that we currently have. We need to keep and improve our entrance to this magnificent destination.

One of the biggest selling points for a bridge is that it will bring in more tourists who spend money in the Shire. However inevitable road upgrades to accommodate through-traffic and 24-hour access may mean Daintree becomes the thoroughfare, not the destination that tourists travel through and don't stay over. The least valuable tourist is a day-tripper, the preference is for visitors who stay overnight, and spend more locally. Cooktown may be the beneficiary while the Douglas Shire pays the cost.

A 2008 report found that the Wet Tropics create the greatest economic benefit of any of Australia's natural world heritage properties, excluding the Great Barrier Reef. It found that every dollar spent on management costs earned an A\$85 return in tourism spending. Even in purely economic terms that makes a pretty compelling case for conservation.

THE COST OF A BRIDGE

At a cost of between \$53 million to \$75 million a bridge is well beyond the budgetary constraints of the Douglas Shire Council.

We have received expert advice that the Council estimated costs of \$10,000 per square metre for a pier and beam concrete bridge and \$750,000 per kilometre to construct new roads are conservative, and that the budgeting costs could be considerably higher.

Douglas Shire Council states that they expect the bridge to be fully funded by the State and Federal Governments. These governments usually require a 50% contribution from a Council for these types of infrastructure projects. This would be a \$35 million debt on residents, ratepayers and businesses of the Douglas Shire.

This is the last thing we can afford as Council finished the financial year with an \$828,353 deficit, down from the projected \$86,915 surplus, in part because of a loss of revenue from the Ferry.

No government has made a commitment to fund a bridge.

In our view, it is highly unlikely the State and Federal Governments will fund a bridge given only a few hundred residents live north of the Daintree River and only 5% said they wanted the bridge option in the extensive public consultation undertaken by the previous Council. Governments would not spend such large sums of money for the benefit of so few people. Especially, when there is substantial local, national and international opposition to building it.

Some have suggested that we could place a toll on a bridge should we build one. This seems very unlikely as from the Council's own proposals they are unlikely to self-fund a bridge it would be very hard to justify collecting a toll and keeping it. Clearly toll roads and bridges do exist around Australia but they are generally so that the financiers of constructing said roads and bridges can recoup their outlays and make a modest profit. Also when tolls are instigated they do not exclude local commuters. The collection of a toll even though we do not believe that one is likely to be permitted, would in itself create delays at the entrances to the bridge. Installing electronic toll infrastructure is costly, and it further requires extra administrative support within Council to chase toll payments from vehicles (often tourist vehicles) without an electronic tag, and generally manage the toll system. Electronic e-tag gates would present a host of running problems in our wet humid environment

The Options Report omits major costs associated with the bridge option – for example, it does not include costs of raising approach roads to match the height of the bridge. Without raising approach roads, the potential benefit of bridge use when river levels are high is reduced or lost entirely.

All bridge site options except building at the existing ferry site, require significant alterations to existing roads. Some, according to the Engineer, have been accommodated in the costings but we can find no mention of upgrades needed along Forest Creek Road to accommodate all traffic using what is effectively a local road. A potential bridge site near Daintree Village does not mention any changes to the Barratt Creek Bridge. The frequency and duration of flood events occurring at Barret Creek has significant cost implications if this option is chosen.

Additional roads, reconfiguring existing roads and land purchases will raise the estimated costs significantly. While some of the cost of land acquisition has been included in the bridge options, the cost of significant legal or court fees related to the land acquisition has not been allowed for.

When infrastructure was designed for National Park visitation in the Daintree car parks were structured and sized to accommodate the ferries pulse feed of vehicles every 15 minutes or so. To replace the ferry with a bridge runs the risk of causing traffic congestion at sites like the Alexandra Range Lookout and Jindalba Boardwalk. There is little capacity at either site to accommodate expansion of car parks.

In addition, the report assumes there are no environmental impact or hydrological issues – any of which will increase the cost of the bridge option.

The cost of (or revenue obtained from) operating the current ferry operations during the construction period has not been included in the financial comparison.

A bridge removes an existing revenue stream to Douglas Shire Council through the ferry fees. The existing ferry generates valuable income towards the running of the Douglas Shire which in the main is collected from people visiting our Shire.

A bridge will remove 30 immediate jobs. Jobs continue to be vital to our local economy and we cannot afford to squander these existing jobs.

BACK OF THE ENVELOPE COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

We have the benefit of a cost benefit analysis (CBA) undertaken by Mladen Kovac on 17 September 2020^{xii}.

As the Options report is very light on information or data to undertake a full cost benefit analysis (CBA) of the three river crossing options, this imposes a limit on how detailed a CBA can be undertaken. The 'back of the envelope' nature of the Options report necessarily means only a 'back of the envelope' CBA is feasible. Nevertheless, a 'back of the envelope' CBA should still provide enough insight into the broad costs and benefits of the various options – enough to determine whether it is worth exploring a bridge option in more detail.

A CBA will determine which of the bridge or two-ferry options provides the greatest net public benefit (i.e. which one is the better option from a whole-of-community perspective). Even if the bridge and two-ferry options are not financially viable (from the perspective of the Council's budget), if they provide a net public benefit then that is a strong rationale for the Queensland Government to provide funding for them.

From a Queensland Government perspective, the most attractive option will be one that has a net public benefit and is financially viable at the local level (i.e. does not require State government funding).

This 'back-of-the-envelope' CBA has found that implementing a two-ferry solution is a far better option than building a bridge. The two-ferry option ends up delivering \$6.817 million worth of benefits to the broader community. On the other hand, the bridge option ends up costing the community \$40.644 million more than it delivers.

Another way of looking at the results is for each dollar spent on a two-ferry option, the community gets a return of \$2.72. But only gets \$0.37 for every dollar spent building the bridge. The wider economic benefits of increased tourism (briefly explored in Appendix B) strongly suggest that a bridge will not entice tourists to spend an additional \$475,000 per year in the Douglas Shire – enough to offset the net costs of the bridge option.

Current queuing times during peak periods of the year are the main reason for considering a bridge or two-ferry service. That is, the objective of considering options beyond the current single ferry service is to reduce the length of time taken to cross the river.

Savings in time spent crossing the river are the single largest benefit of both the bridge and two-ferry options. Unfortunately, neither the Options report nor the ferry traffic modelling report prepared for Council in 2019 provide enough data to calculate travel time savings without the need for significant assumptions. Simplifications associated with making assumptions may favour one or the other option.

The Council's Options report notes that four different bridge sites were considered and costed. The Options report acknowledges that the cost of bridge access roads is not included in the analysis - making it cheaper than in reality.

The Options report also excludes consideration of the travel time associated with different bridge options. Depending on the location of the bridge, drivers may be required to drive several additional minutes to reach the bridge, reducing the time savings associated with the bridge option.

Not including any additional travel times acts to bias the CBA analysis in favour of the bridge option. Excluding maintenance costs creates a bias in favour of the bridge option.

DREDGING AND DIESEL

There is no doubt that dredging is an environmentally sensitive activity, and it is heavily regulated in the Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park, by both the Queensland and Australian Governments.

In addition to the annual EPA Permit issued by the Queensland Government, Douglas Shire Council has a 10 year Marine Park Permit for dredging the river. The application process for that permit must be accompanied by an Environmental Management Plan and an Operational (Site) Management Plan. These plans are used to identify and mitigate environment damage to both the dredging and receiving zones.

Some people point to the environmental issues associated with the existing ferry service and a potential second ferry to augment it, as a reason to move towards a bridge.

Because of the dynamics of the river it is necessary to dredge the river at the ferry site to maintain the service. While this activity would create a flume during the activity it is generally not considered to be a significant pollutant source. As dredging is usually carried out at lower river flow periods the flume would not extend far and as it is not nutrient rich or loaded with farm chemicals would have minimal impact on the reef. The main issues with water quality effecting the reef are through farm based fertilizers and chemicals washed down during heavy rains. The dredge materials, which mostly comprises of river sand, is removed from site and utilised appropriately.

We have researched the impact of river dredging by reference to Reef 2050 Plan and the Reef Water Quality Improvement Plan (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority), and established the sediment fraction that impacts the reef is the "fines" i.e. the small particles that remain suspended when river flumes go out to sea. The coarse components of the sediment are left in the rivers or on the beaches in the form of sand.

There is obviously a turbidity impact while the dredging occurs but it is short lived, localised and intermittent. The Reef 2-2- Water Quality Improvement Plan has found that *"Monitoring and scientific modelling have shown the main source of sediments from the Great Barrier Reef catchments is from agricultural land use, with grazing including gully and hillslope erosion accounting for nearly half of the fine sediment generated by human activity. The second biggest contributor is streambank erosion. Sugarcane cropping, non-irrigated dryland cropping and other land uses, such as urban, mining and industrial, also contribute but to a smaller degree"*.

The ferry requires regular dredging while the bridge will result in (currently unknown) siltage and scouring effects. Siltage and scouring effects (exacerbated by floods and heavy rains) are a potentially significant environmental impact.

Some people argue that as the existing ferry runs on diesel that it is not very environmentally appropriate - this is partially true. However the concept of building a 36 car carrying capacity, largely solar powered, ferry to provide the bulk of the service and to use the old diesel ferry only during peak times should lessen this.

The proposed new electrically driven ferry is to be partly solar powered, and recharged from mains power overnight. It will use no diesel and will have a fraction of the greenhouse gas emissions of the current diesel engine.

Of course, a bridge is not fossil fuel free either. Every vehicle still needs to cross the river on a bridge, and collectively it amounts to more fuel burnt than what the ferry service uses. Depending on which bridge option is selected, travel times could be increased by as much as 25 minutes each way. That constitutes a massive increase in fuel use as compared to the ferry service.

Whilst we acknowledge the need to reduce fossil fuels, we can find no evidence that diesel fumes directly damage forest. If it did damage the forest, the evidence would be on the roadside where there is the greatest concentration of diesel exhaust fumes. We also note trees grow happily in inner city areas where exhaust fume concentrations are huge. There is also evidence that increased CO₂ concentrations speed up plant growth - not surprising as that is what plants live off and is the reason trees are planted to pull CO₂ out of the atmosphere.

And finally, the greenhouse gas footprint in a concrete bridge is huge. According to the think tank Chatham House "*.....Cement is the source of about 8% of the world's carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.....If the cement industry were a country, it would be the third largest emitter in the world - behind China and the US. It contributes more CO₂ than aviation fuel (2.5%) and is not far behind the global agriculture business (12%)*"

DSSG does not know how much concrete would be used for the proposed bridge and suggests Council should calculate the amount for the purposes of better understanding the climate footprint of the bridge, in comparison to a ferry that is partly solar powered.

- I. Douglas Shire Council Meeting 24 July 2018. Agenda paper.
- II. <https://douglas.qld.gov.au/daintree-river-crossing-consultation/>
- III. GHD | Report for Douglas Shire Council - Daintree River Ferry Traffic Assessment
- IV. Back-of-the-envelope CBA of Daintree River crossing options, Mladen Kovac 17 September 2020
- V. Michael Kerr election platform <https://www.michaelkerr.com.au/reformation/connectingnorthriver/>
- VI. <https://douglas.qld.gov.au/download/LetterFromTheMayorSep2020.pdf>
- VII. Allen Sheather, Committee member DSSG
- VIII. Mayor Kerr's Facebook Post
- IX. Dr Steve Turton, DNN Opinion 3 September 2020
- X. Daintree Ferry Crossing Round Two Public Consultation Plan
- XI. Dr Steve Turton, DNN Opinion 19 May 2020
- XII. Back-of-the-envelope CBA of Daintree River crossing options, Mladen Kovac 17 September 2020



ADDITIONAL SUBMISSION ARISING FROM ENVIRONMENT FOCUS GROUP

Members of Douglas Shire Sustainability Group (DSSG) have participated in the Douglas Shire Council's process aimed at determining the appetite of residents and others for a bridge over a two ferry system as a means of crossing the Daintree River.

Members attended the focus group held today at Community Centre, Port Douglas. The discussion provoked some further thoughts which had not been explored fully in our principal submission lodged yesterday. These matters are:

1. Ferry contract

Given that tourism numbers are likely to be suppressed for some years due to impact of Covid-19, Council could consider delaying the expenditure on infrastructure to provide for a second ferry. The existing ferry could be dry-docked once the solar ferry is operational, and launched when demand increases to require extra ferry service.

2. Precautionary Principle should apply

<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/precaution>

The precautionary principle is also one of four guiding principles of ESD (Ecologically Sustainable Development) included in the IGAE (Australian Government 1992, para. 3.5.1). The IGAE (Inter-governmental Agreement on the Environment, 1992) provides an overarching framework for environmental and natural resource management. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), which applies to a broad range of environmental, natural resource management, and conservation activities, requires the Minister to consider the precautionary principle in decision making (s. 391(2)). Various statements of the principle are included in more than 120 Australian and state statutes and hundreds of non-binding policies (Dovers 2002). (See Peel 2005, Appendix A for a list of some of the main Australian legislation providing for application of the precautionary principle or precautionary approaches.)

Definition per Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Environment 1992, para. 3.5.1: Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation. In the application of the precautionary principle, public and private decisions should be guided by: (i) careful evaluation to avoid, wherever practicable, serious or irreversible damage to the environment; and (ii) an assessment of the risk-weighted consequences of various options.

President



About Rainforest 4 Foundation

Rainforest 4 Foundation is an Australian not for profit organisation and registered charity. We own several properties in the Douglas Shire, are rate-payers, regularly bring people to the Daintree, use the ferry and work collaboratively with many organisations based in the Shire.

Rainforest 4 exists to protect and restore the Earth's rainforests which provide habitat for more than half of all species.

Rainforests regulate weather patterns, sequester carbon from the atmosphere and provide vital ecosystem services upon which humanity depends.

Through our [projects](#) we deliver real outcomes for wildlife, climate, people and planet. We purchase land, creating new protected areas, reverse the impacts of development, and restore rainforest ecosystems which have been damaged in the past.

We are land owners and rate payers in the Douglas Shire. We are actively acquiring rainforest blocks, working in partnership with Kuku Yalanji to manage this land and adding these acquisitions to the National Park estate.

Rainforest 4 Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation registered with the Australian Government as a Company Limited by Guarantee and with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission.

Summary of submission

A bridge over the Daintree River will cause irreversible damage to World Heritage values. Thousands of people have added their voice to our own calls to put a stop to proposals for a bridge. Rainforest 4 Foundation is strongly opposed to a new Daintree River crossing and in particular we are deeply concerned about proposals for a bridge.

A bridge over the Daintree River will come at a huge economic cost, with very little return in terms of the tourism economy and local jobs. The Daintree is globally significant, with an unbroken evolutionary history going back more than 120 million years. Indeed, that's the reason why it has been awarded World Heritage status. A bridge puts this status In Danger and will erode the region's natural and cultural values.

With a bridge comes the potential for inappropriate future development and increased pressure for services such as electricity, mobile phone towers and sealing of dirt roads. Commercialisation of the Daintree will incentivise land owners to develop their properties where what is actually needed is more buyback of land for essential ecosystem services and conservation outcomes.

And of greatest concern is the impact a bridge will have on the Daintree's unique wildlife and globally significant ecosystems.

More vehicles on the road for more hours of the day will lead to an increase in car strikes of endangered animals. Road fatalities are the single biggest killer of the endangered Southern Cassowary. When roads are built and widened, rainforest canopies are opened, increasing habitat fragmentation, light penetration and weed incursions.

The construction phase and inevitable road upgrade associated with a bridge across the Daintree River will also disturb sensitive ecosystems – both terrestrial and aquatic – and have a detrimental impact on habitat and wildlife.

Rainforest 4 Foundation strongly opposes a bridge across the Daintree River.

Global significance

The Daintree is one of only two places on Earth where two World Heritage sites exist side-by-side. It is home to the oldest intact tropical lowland rainforest in the World and boasts the greatest diversity of plants and animals found in Australia. There are more tree species in 1ha of the Daintree than in all of the UK.

The Daintree's global significance is well documented. It is home to some 22,000 species of insects – many of them rare and threatened and 13 of its mammal species are found nowhere else in the world. 28% of Australia's frogs, 90% of our bat and butterfly and 34% of Australia's mammal species are found in the Daintree. 28 of Australia's 36 mangrove species are found in the Daintree as are 40 endemic fern species and half of the world's primitive flowering plant families. All-in-all, more than 3000 plant species call the Daintree home and 142 of those are rare or threatened.

Opposition

The current proposal to explore a bridge over the Daintree River is of deep concern to our organisation as well as more than 8000 of people who've signed a petition, which has been sent to the Mayor and Councillors of Douglas Shire Council. More than 150 signatories to that petition are Douglas Shire residents. While other petitioners live outside of the Douglas Shire, they have shown a financial commitment to the region by either visiting the Daintree as tourists or contributing their own money to the purchase and protection of land in the Daintree lowland rainforest.

Rainforest 4 Foundation strongly opposes proposals for a bridge over the Daintree River on four key points:

1. economic cost
2. inappropriate future development
3. tourism and World Heritage in danger
4. impact on wildlife and habitat

A summary of our concerns against each point is included in the following pages.

1. Economic impact

The economic benefits of a bridge are questionable.

- A bridge could cost up to \$75 million. Neither State nor Federal Government have indicated financial support.
- In comparison, a second ferry has been fully costed at less than \$3 million, and a contract just about to be signed before Council altered the process
- A bridge continues to cost money after its construction. A ferry makes money for Council
- No assessment has been made as to whether a bridge will increase visitor numbers into the Daintree
- A cost-benefit-analysis undertaken by Mladen Kovac suggests that a bridge ends up costing the community some \$40 million more than what it delivers
- A bridge only creates jobs during its construction phase
- 30 local employees operating the current and potential second ferry would lose their jobs once the ferry was decommissioned.
- Council has stated that it has not considered job losses in its deliberations
- Council's costings also do not consider any cumulative impacts and costs which might arise from the bridge, including the cost of environmental impacts.

2. Catalyst for inappropriate future development

We're deeply concerned that a bridge will be the catalyst for an increase in inappropriate future development to a sensitive and globally-significant ecosystem.

- A bridge will bring greater access. But with that comes further residential development in the Daintree.
- This in turn creates increased pressure for services such as electricity, mobile phone towers and sealing of dirt roads
- This infrastructure increases the region's land value which then drives further development
- Commercialisation of the Daintree will incentivise land owners to develop their properties
- An increase in development exacerbates all of the issues identified here, in particular road kills of native wildlife, including the endangered Southern Cassowary

3. *Tourism and World Heritage in Danger*

People from all over the world visit the Daintree for its pristine rainforest environment. These people highly value the genuine ecotourism experience (which includes the ferry) and have expressed deep concern about the region losing its World Heritage status.

- The Daintree lowland rainforest has an unbroken evolutionary history going back over 120 million years to the first flowering plants
- It is listed as World Heritage because of its global significance
- Tourists are drawn to the Daintree now because of its intact rainforest and genuine wildlife experiences
- A bridge will undermine the region's natural values and put its World Heritage status in danger. UNESCO cites dangers to World Heritage listings as being: "the serious decline in the population of an endangered... species or the deterioration of natural beauty or scientific value of a property caused by human activities such as logging, pollution, settlement, mining, agriculture and major public works"
- Additional infrastructure will negatively impact current nature-based and eco-tourism offerings
- The majority of tourists publicly reviewing the current ferry, rate it as "very good" or "excellent".
- Tourists currently view the Daintree Ferry as a rite of passage for their entry into the Daintree Rainforest. The time it takes to use the ferry means that tourists are more likely to spend a night in the Daintree than if they could drive from Cairns to Cape Tribulation and return in one day. A bridge may well see a reduction in overnight tourist stays in Douglas Shire.

4. *Impact on wildlife + habitat*

The Daintree is home to 12,000 species of insects. 13 mammals found in the Daintree are found nowhere else in the world. It is home to 44 rare and threatened species, 28% of the nation's frogs species, 90% of our bat and butterfly species and 35% of Australia's mammals.

There are more tree species in 1ha of the Daintree than in all of the UK. 3000 plant species are found here – 142 of them rare or threatened. Daintree boasts 40 endemic fern species, 28 of the country's 36 mangrove species and more than half of the world's primitive flowering plant families.

- A bridge will increase both the number of vehicles, as well as the hours of the day that they're driving on narrow, windy and poorly lit roads through the Daintree lowland rainforest.
- 24-hour access across the river means cars are crossing at all times of the day and night, putting at risk already endangered wildlife.
- Improving lighting or other traffic devices will have a detrimental impact on nocturnal animals
- More vehicles on Daintree roads will lead to an increase in car strikes, particularly on the endangered Southern Cassowary. Road fatalities are the single biggest cause of Cassowary deaths.
- The construction phase and inevitable road upgrade will disturb sensitive ecosystems – both terrestrial and aquatic
- When roads are built or widened, the rainforest canopy is opened. This results in fragmented habitat, increased light penetration and more weed species.
- Habitat fragmentation leads to changing humidity regimes, increased light penetration, decimation of climax vegetation and more weed species.

Rainforest 4 Foundation strongly opposes the proposal for a bridge over the Daintree River.



Kelvin Davies, Co-CEO

We can only hope sanity prevails.

I confess to being totally mystified as to why this incredibly ill-advised proposal is being pushed with such urgency by the newly elected Mayor.

Unfortunately there seems to be an expectation of a return to "Business As Usual" after the Corona virus situation has eased. I suspect that this will not be the case.

There are a number of issues that will directly impact the proposal. They are:

- A) The increasing awareness of global warming worldwide – and the pressures presently building to curtail fossil fuel use, which will be reflected in reduced vehicle use.
- B) The increasing realisation that there are fewer and fewer places in the world that are largely untrammelled by human activity. While the Daintree Coast has some development, mostly hidden by vegetation, the spectacular hinterland is untouched, as are most of the spectacular beaches.
- C) The expected reduction in air travel (fuel, expense, CO² impact and what appears to be an increasing desire to "stay local"), and economic uncertainty, will result in reduced tourism.
- D) With the growing awareness the Great Barrier Reef has become seriously degraded due to Global warming, and that this is highly unlikely to reverse, so this major drive for tourist visitation is lessening.
- E) An intact (as far as possible) Daintree Coast, will remain as one of the few tourist attractions that will be available to the Shire. Having an arterial road (as that appears to be what is suggested) through the area would do much to seriously damage this attraction, and would probably destroy the World Heritage status of the area.
- F) The idea of spending an estimated 70 million dollars (and probably considerably more if we take the proposed road "improvements" into consideration) to facilitate a faster connection between Cooktown and Mossman is extremely foolish – a case of "cutting off your nose to spite your face". Especially since it is highly probable there will be a significant reduction in vehicle traffic for the reasons stated above.
- G) Dredging is necessitated by the long history of farmland/pastoral development in the Upper Daintree. The Daintree was once a navigable waterway – occasional dredging will be required to maintain this.
- H) Concerns have been raised about the diesel fuel usage by the ferry. Per-round trip it probably uses about the same as a heavy vehicle travelling 10 km. The energy and fuel required for the proposed bridge and road construction (and CO² emissions), would vastly outstrip many years of existing ferry operation. The proposed solar ferry, would reduce this further. Besides, having a solar ferry would be a great selling point for visitors.

We can only hope sanity prevails.

Concerns re dredging pale into insignificance.

I have submitted my vote in favour of the two ferry solution and would like to reinforce my vote with some further thoughts.

As the existing ferry service is much loved by many locals and is deservedly advertised as a unique entrance to the World Heritage Daintree rainforest it would seem logical to be retaining this service.

The cost of a second ferry is a manageable one for our council and can be offset by the collection of ferry fees. A bridge would remove this income stream as any toll charges would undoubtedly go towards repaying the costs incurred in its construction.

The retention of a ferry service means that approximately 30 jobs would be retained. Congestion problems at peak times should be sufficiently improved by this second ferry.

The ill-informed environmental concerns regarding dredging the ferry channel, pale into insignificance when compared with the potential environmental destruction caused by the building of the access roads to a bridge on both the southern and northern banks.

As to time saved on the trip? This would surely depend on which of the bridge options were chosen. In some cases the increased road travel and possible road congestion would negate any 'time saved'.

Lastly, as a resident and ratepayer of 35 years I sincerely hope the ferry option will ultimately be chosen by the Douglas Shire councillors as I do not wish to be burdened with a massive increase in my rates which will surely be the result of a decision to build a bridge.

Negative Impacts

I submit my opinion that a bridge not be built over the Daintree River. This will have negative impacts on the World Heritage listed values of the unique fauna and flora.

Preference for Single Ferry

Profound Impact on Wildlife

I am writing to state my opposition to the proposal of a bridge over the Daintree river.

I believe that we, as custodians of the unique World Heritage Daintree Rainforest, must do all we can to protect this precious place forever. It is far too special to be jeopardised by any increase in development or traffic and every effort must be made to preserve and cherish it for future generations. My main concerns are:

- A bridge could result in a profound impact on wildlife. Increased traffic during the day and at night, will mean many daytime and nocturnal creatures currently crossing and/or living near the road will be at increased risk.
- A bridge will potentially accelerate development along the Daintree Coast. It is hard to imagine there will not be an increase in development applications. I am aware there will be supposed safeguards against this but there are many examples where these are eroded over time. I am also concerned the installation of a bridge over the Daintree River would result in an upgrade of the road to Cooktown.
- A bridge will negatively impact on the unique entrance to the Daintree National Park World Heritage area. The ferry requires visitors to slow down and pause before entering this reverential place. It is unique and requires an entry which is also unique and special.
- On an economic level, a bridge removes a valuable existing revenue stream to Douglas Shire Council through the ferry fees. It will also impact on the people currently employed running the ferry service. I am also concerned about the enormous cost associated with building a bridge and its ongoing maintenance. I note the maintenance of the now existing bridge over the Bloomfield River has created maintenance cost issues locally.
- I support upgrades to the current ferry system – my preference is for a single ferry – that is primarily solar powered – that also provides for a wonderful tourism experience.

I have completed the on-line survey, choosing the 2 ferry option as opposed to a bridge. I found the survey frustrating as I wanted to choose a single ferry option but was not provided with that choice.

A believe a single ferry, with improved traffic management, has less environmental impact and is the least costly option for Douglas Shire ratepayers. Thank you for considering my submission.

Why I don't support a bridge

I would like to state that I have completed the on-line survey, choosing the two ferry option as opposed to a bridge. I chose the two ferry option as I believe it would have fewer negative impacts/ implications on the World Heritage area.

I was, however, very disappointed that the a single ferry with improved traffic management was not an option.

I have since learned that at one of the information forums held during the consultation period it was suggested that if respondents wanted to choose a single ferry option they could cross out the 2 ferry option and the bridge option and simply hand write what option they preferred. I believe it is highly irregular that the consultation process is being changed halfway through and I think this represents a serious flaw in the whole process.

Regardless of my view that the consultation process lacks an appropriate level of rigour, I will take this opportunity to list the reasons why I do not support a bridge. They are as follows:

- A bridge will destroy our unique entrance to the Daintree National Park World Heritage area. A bridge will have little if any aesthetic appeal.

- A bridge removes an existing revenue stream to Douglas Shire Council through the ferry fees. The existing ferry generates valuable income towards the running of the Douglas Shire which in the main is collected from people visiting our Shire.
- A bridge will remove 30 immediate jobs and potentially more when the second ferry comes on line. Jobs continue to be vital to our local economy we cannot afford to squander these existing jobs and potentially more when the second ferry comes on line.
- Each of the 4 bridge options has its own significant impacts which will need to be properly assessed. There are serious environmental impacts that will need to be assessed but more than this is the additional work that is required to safely link up each bridge proposal with our existing road network.
- At a cost of between \$53 million to \$75 million it is well beyond the budgetary constraints of the Douglas Shire Council.
- The Queensland State Government has made no commitment to funding a bridge and in these tough economic times it seems like a lot of money for very little benefit.
- A bridge could mean 24 hour traffic leading to a profound impact on wildlife (more road-kills). While we do suffer from road kills with the existing road network to increase traffic to include throughout the night will mean many of the night creatures currently crossing the roads after the ferry closes will be subject to greater deaths. This includes Bennett's Tree Kangaroo, Quolls, Pademelons, Owls and Frogmouths.
- A bridge will have the potential of accelerating development along the Daintree Coast particularly if it is augmented by upgrading the road through to Cooktown. It is inconceivable that the installation of a bridge over the Daintree River would not be closely followed by serious upgrades to the road through to Cooktown.
- The building of a bridge is not in keeping with the existing Douglas Shire Council Planning Scheme which specifically mentions retaining the ferry service. The Town Planning Scheme is what guides investment within our Shire.
- The building of a bridge is not in keeping with the State Government Regional Plan which also advocates retaining the ferry service. At a State level the Regional Plan is what guides investment decisions.

I noted at the public information sessions there has been some concern about the environmental impact of continued (single ferry) or increased (two ferry) dredging. Whilst dredging has some negative environmental impact, it is far less than the overall impacts of a bridge.

To summarise, I strongly believe the traffic issues which occur only at peak times do not warrant the building of a bridge across the Daintree River. For most of the time the current single ferry is more than adequate to accommodate the number of vehicles traveling across the River.

A northern priority lane for locals should be considered. Pre-booked ticketing for peak tourist visitation periods should also be considered with cheaper fares either side of "rush hour". The concept of "park and ride" could be investigated and encouraging self-drive visitors to stay overnight in the rainforest would not only alleviate the amount of vehicular traffic on a single day but would also be a positive for the local accommodation providers. These are just a few ideas that could be investigated.

A single ferry with improved traffic management has the least environmental impact and is, by far, the least costly to the ratepayers of the Douglas Shire.

We, as custodians of the World Heritage Daintree Rainforest, must do all we can to protect this precious place for future generations.

All tourist could park on the south bank

I am concerned that either a bridge or additional Ferry bringing more cars would impact upon this sensitive environment. The current roads hardly sustain existing traffic and during the wet season there are annual slide offs on the road.

Potentially this is an opportunity to have this area operated as a true Rainforest experience. The existing ferry could allow only locals to take cars across the river. All tourists could park on the south bank of the river and travel by passenger ferry to the other side and go to an Information Centre, similar to the Mossman Gorge, or even more similar to that at Skyrail, where they could learn about the Rainforest, then there could be a continuous bus service to take people to the walks, accommodation etc.

This type of solution would generate income for the Council, create jobs for locals working in the Centre and on the buses etc while preserving the delicate ecosystems. This would also avoid the need for a Bridge or additional Ferry which would of course save the rate payers a lot of money.

Let's show the world we care for our small Shire.

I appreciate your notice about above matter. My partner and I reside in Port Douglas (21years) and have a tiny home in Bloomfield (2014). We know tourism won't be what it used to be in this new real world and know there is no need to change what is already there and practical. Money needs to be spent on sustainability, saving/upholding Reef and Rainforest and being proud of showing the world we are walking the Earths plead for generations to come. I'm in hospitality and we need to be accountable and be of service elsewhere where needed. There are courses I've been telling my friends about, Aged and Community Care, Coles are still looking for staff, petrol stations etc. There are jobs, so no we don't need any changes to the ferry. If we want to live here, we need to learn change and live harmoniously with this Natural Paradise not add more stress (concrete, high rises, old mentality ways). Let's show the world we care for our small Shire though a Big Eco part in this world!

Response from Daintree Seniors Group – The Circle of Wisdom

Email Cover:

We were very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the ferry or bridge debate, yesterday.

We would like Council to discuss and determine the role of the local community as the legal custodians, and using the ferry or bridge, as a control mechanism to improve the style of tourism, before they consider this issue.

We are grateful for the support of Council and we are very aware of the ever-increasing detrimental impacts created by the domination of mass tourism and the day-trip on our very special and fragile environment.

The Daintree Planning Package offered a vision for the area. It is not unreasonable to aspire to this objective:

“With the right sort of control and definition of permissible development on freehold blocks, the area could become as important as an example environmentally harmonious human occupation, as the surrounding natural treasures.” (Hill 1982 ii)

Can we agree to this vision together?

Attached Submission

The Circle of Wisdom represents the majority of residents in the area north of the Daintree River, namely senior residents over 50 years of age. In addition to the experience and wisdom that

comes with age, our members share a strong attachment to their land and value the experience of caring for the land, knowing it in ways that can only come from long term immersion, sharing the values with others and transmitting them to future generations. Most of our members experienced the changes wrought by both the "Daintree Rescue Program" DRP, and the "Daintree Futures Study" DFS, and understand the difficulties of consulting with small and diverse communities. We must be mindful of the lessons learned through these programs and ensure that we, as the custodial community, are able to meet our obligations of guardianship of this global treasure, supported by Government. People and Communities are part of the environment.

At its meeting on Monday 28 September 2020, Members spoke out openly and are in agreement. The ferry is an iconic entry into the World's longest surviving rainforest. It is the curtain-raiser to an immersion into the 180million year-old rainforest, where rarity, endemism, biodiversity, inspirational beauty and intricacy demand protection, conservation, appreciation and transmission of these values to future generations.

Executive Summary

There should not be a bridge and the single ferry should remain in place.

The current unsustainable nature of tourism in the Daintree must be addressed as a matter of urgency, prior to a discussion to increase the number of ferries.

Comments

- a) The chaos at the ferry in peak times is due to the buses and Independent travellers arriving at the same time on a day trip out of Cairns and Port Douglas.
- b) What is happening now is very bad for tourism. The world's second most irreplaceable World Heritage site is at risk, yet this doesn't rate a mention in the discussion paper.
- c) The majority of tourists are doing the Daintree Rescue Program's funded option – the 1-day trip from Cairns or Port Douglas arriving between 9.30am to midday and departing for the return journey at 2.00pm to 4.30pm. Cars and buses speed up to Cape Tribulation, look at the Cape, perhaps have lunch at our free picnic areas, stroll around a free boardwalk and think they have seen the Daintree.
- d) This option, which requires a continuous supply of funds from our taxes, is accompanied by a policy, "that Tourism north of the Daintree River be directed to places south of the River."
- e) The "mass tourism model" is non-contributory, because the money is taken in Cairns or Port Douglas, very little comes into the community. It is also accompanied by large numbers of FIT's, Free Independent Tourists who create impacts and irreversible damage e.g. Sacred places that ought to be closed to tourism.
- f) Ecologically Sustainable Tourism, Eco-tourism has been identified as the most sustainable form of tourism for the Daintree. The International Ecotourism Society and UNEP Delegation agree that ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.
- g) It is noted that conservation and management of "off reserve lands" has resulted in extensive revegetation over the past 25 years and that this is measurable and cost effective. The local community members are the legitimate custodians.
- h) The day trip is the outcome of Government planning and subsidisation, funded by the Daintree Rescue Program. Too many people not paying user fees, have created overcrowded conditions and chaos at the ferry.

- i) The "Daintree Rescue Program" was launched in 1995, funded equally by Australian and Queensland governments with 23million dollars of taxpayer money. The principal aim of the program was protection and conservation of off-reserve lands that were not part of the National Park system. The decisions-makers were representatives connected with Local, State and Federal governments. Their bias tended towards increasing the area of national park reserve and constructing public facilities to better manage an out-of-control State Government permit system.
- j) Excessive numbers of non-contributory travellers are unsustainable and damaging to the environment.

Recommendation:

Change the style of tourism to one that is appropriate to the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet, promote the area for its true values, and include the custodial community, the landholders who are part of the environment, supported by government.

Remove the disgraceful policy of redirecting tourism away from north of the Daintree River and encourage more meaningful immersion in nature, with longer stays. Give the Daintree what it deserves, a first-class tourism industry that is a model of sustainability and best practice.

Excess revenue should be allocated to achieving the desired model of high-class eco-tourism and conservation thereby empowering the community to meet its obligations.

Background:

In 1993, Environment Minister, the Hon. Molly Robson MLA, ordered a moratorium on any further commercial activity permits (CAPs) north of the Daintree River. Approximately 70 commercial tour operators had been authorised to carry 700,000 visitors per year and under the ensuing \$23million Daintree Rescue Program (DRP), visitor facilities and infrastructure were duly constructed to accommodate this latent visitor-carrying capacity.

In 1995, the QLD Government strategically expanded Daintree National Park, to include the former Mossman Gorge and Cape Tribulation National Parks. This expansion has caused great confusion; so much so that signage to the Mossman Gorge has long had 'Daintree National Park' officially concealed. Nevertheless, a wide geographic range of commercial tourism interests has intently marketed various Daintree-branded products, adding to the confusion.

In the same year, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) established Visitor Opportunities Policies and Actions, including:

Future growth beyond the sustainable level of visitor use in the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area will be directed to appropriate areas south of the Daintree River.

We are discussing this same old problem, which has never been addressed. Rather it has been drip-fed public money to prop it up, but the same scenario of the majority of vehicles arriving together at the ferry exists, creating long queues and spoiling the Daintree Experience This policy must be removed and compensatory action taken to undo the damage.

The ferry itself is a feature that we would not like to lose, and the forest is incomparable and irreplaceable.

Tourism has been reduced to the one-day trip to Cape Tribulation, with a short stop at a boardwalk featuring secondary growth. Very few get to immerse themselves in old-growth rainforest. The Daintree is over-run with one-day trippers who are offered mediocrity, funded by the taxpayers.

- I. A bridge would facilitate more of this style of tourism and would extend the impacts over 24hours/day. **Acknowledge that this problem exists and change the style of tourism in the Daintree to create a sustainable tourism industry.**
- II. **Using the ferry as the control point, encourage longer stays in the Daintree through promotional material and by charging higher rates for the 1-day pass and reducing costs for people booked into local accommodation, restaurants and activities.**
- III. Tourism has to pay the full costs of the boardwalks, and services, just like private businesses. "User pays" means sustainability and equity. The custodial community will benefit from best practice eco-tourism and the rainforest will be conserved.
- IV. Improved transport and communication systems could be developed.
- V. Accurate and full promotion of the Area and education is required to ensure that the Daintree is not permitted to slide into oblivion, and lost forever as a global treasure.

Conclusion:

1. The Daintree Ferry is the only entrance to the Daintree Rainforest. It is immediately recognised as the commencement of the Daintree experience. The custodial community relies on ecotourism for its livelihood and offers sustainable accommodation, restaurants and a variety of rainforest activities, which educate and inspire appreciation and conservation of the Daintree Rainforest. The ferry offers security to an area with no police presence.
2. **Using the ferry as the control point, we can encourage longer stays in the Daintree through promotional material and** by charging higher rates for the 1-day pass and reducing costs for people booked into over-night stays with local accommodation, restaurants and activities. Sustainable Eco-tourism will benefit the local custodians and support their presentation, protection and conservation.
3. **A second ferry is not recommended** to cope with the current over-subscription to the one-day trip and to maintain a service in emergencies. The deplorable intrusion and impacts of a non-contributing style of mass tourism must be reduced immediately and a higher yield, more satisfying immersion in nature developed and supported by all levels of government. The National Landscapes Program is a model that can be used for the Daintree Rainforest. Transport of gas on the ferry should only occur in off-peak times.
4. A bridge would exacerbate the existing problem of high impacts and a mediocre style of tourism that does not do justice to the World's second most irreplaceable World Heritage Treasure. This is not recommended. A continuous flow of traffic with a bridge would affect the wildlife, in particular nocturnal wildlife. There would be a massive increase in road deaths.
5. The Daintree Planning Package offered a vision for the area. It is not unreasonable to aspire to this objective:
"With the right sort of control and definition of permissible development on freehold blocks, the area could become as important as an example environmentally harmonious human occupation, as the surrounding natural treasures." (Hill 1982 ii)
6. **The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment** provides a policy framework that advises all levels of government that the users of natural resources should pay prices based on the full life cycle costs of providing the goods and services and that biodiversity conservation on all lands should be pursued in the most cost-effective way, by establishing incentive structures, including marketing mechanisms, which enable

those best placed to maximise benefits and/or minimise costs to develop their own solutions and responses to environmental problems.

7. Clearly, this Act, which is part of Queensland's Nature Conservation Act is being breached by government subsidisation of mass tourism on boardwalks, which were constructed in opposition to local rainforest enterprises. The exclusion of the local community as beneficiaries of tourism and the added burden of a policy of redirection of tourism to south of the Daintree River must be addressed immediately.
8. **World Heritage: National Protection and International Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage:** To ensure that effective and active measures are taken for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory, each State Party to this Convention shall endeavour, in so far as possible, and as appropriate for each country.
9. Article 5 adopts a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes;
10. Daintree Futures Study
 "The best future for the Daintree is not for it to become just another part of Australia's semiurban sprawl but for it to be a unique Rainforest Community: to protect its unique natural values as a base for an economy and a community. This is an ecologically, socially and economically sustainable solution. "

Recommendation 4: Residents participation in land stewardship through involvement in planning and management processes and incentives for ecologically sound land management

Why: For the long-term benefit of both residents and the environment, it is essential to have maximum participation of local people in environmental management and economic development. The local community has strongly expressed its desire for greater participation in decision making.

How: By expanding opportunities for nature-based tourism ventures and by including community representatives on proposed management structures. Providing financial incentives for voluntary nature conservation on private land, especially through the DSC rates system. Recognise community identity and the community guardianship of natural values by coordinated signage and information that informs visitors about residential land use in the area and the need to respect privacy

Summary:

It will be an environmental and social disaster if Douglas Shire Council fails to address the cause of the chaos at the ferry – the subsidised day trip.

Using the ferry as the control point, encourage longer stays in the Daintree through improved promotional material and by charging higher rates for the 1-day pass and reducing costs for people booked into local accommodation, restaurants and activities.

The local community needs to be consulted as the land managers in the planning process that includes the ferry and the area north of the Daintree River.

Find a solution for peak period without influencing rest of the year

I understand that during the school holidays – about 5 weeks a year for 5-6 hours a day that there is a queue to get over the Daintree River.

We need to be looking for a solution for that time period only and not influencing the rest of the year when everyone is satisfied with the Ferry and its availability. The tourism sector needs to be approached and asked to tell visitors to stagger their departure to avoid these busy times.

I have worked in tourism and retail in Port Douglas for the last 33 years and talk to visitors daily about our area. Not once has anyone complained to me about this wait – visitors have said that they knew about the wait and it gave them a chance to read the information and maps – others took snacks and had morning tea while they waited.

Could not street performers with a rainforest theme be used to entertain visitors in their cars and give out information while they wait?

I believe the Daintree Ferry is an attraction in itself. Visitors love the ferry- it's different it's an adventure. Many tropical areas in Australia and throughout the tropical world have rainforest. Every patch is beautiful and has different experiences to offer but there is only one that has a Cable ferry at its entrance.

When/if tourism comes back, the Douglas Region will need all the points of difference it can muster to compete in the tourism market. There is access to the Great Barrier Reef in many places, there is rainforest at Mission Beach on the Tablelands, there are great restaurants in Cairns – why should visitors come to the Daintree? Will people come to drive over a bridge? I doubt it...

The substantial changes that would be necessary for a bridge would have a detrimental effect on the environment that we are trying to protect.

If there is to be a second ferry – dredging is a major issue. Currently the sand dredged from under the Ferry is dumped on Newell or Rocky Point as it is regarded as an eye sore. This is a joke – after being dumped on Newell 6-8 times in as many years it has done nothing to stop the erosion and washed out to sea fairly quickly and then where has it gone?...suffocating the sea grass off Cooya.?

If there were two Ferries the dredging is a major issue that needs to be addressed. Newell Beach should not be looked upon as dumping ground with no recognition of where the sand is actually going.

We must at all costs protect our environment – our point of difference. The Daintree Forest needs to be protected at all costs for our future.

The Ferry is iconic- it's a tourist attraction in itself – it monitors the traffic flow – it's an adventure. Visitors love it. It's a gateway to the World Heritage Rainforest.

For the Earth.

I am asking you to urgently put a stop to proposals for a bridge across the Daintree River and instead work to protect the region's natural values. Building a bridge over the Daintree River will only support further undesirable development.

The local community and conservationists across the world oppose this plan to build a bridge over the Daintree River. For decades, government and NGOs have been investing in buying back blocks adjacent to the World Heritage Area to slow down development. I used to live in Daintree township in the 1970s and used to go to Cape Tribulation camping when there was nothing else there...and I have donated almost \$1,000 for the buy-back of several lots.

A bridge poses a significant threat to the area's biodiversity. There's no doubt a bridge brings with it an increase in vehicular traffic to this internationally significant region. With a bridge will come the following impacts:

- 24-hour access across the river means cars are crossing the river at all times of day and night, putting at risk already endangered wildlife
- The construction phase and inevitable road upgrade will disturb sensitive ecosystems, both terrestrial and aquatic
- The bridge is likely to increase the number and type of services available to residents and tourists of the Daintree, for example deliveries and waste services
- And increase in tourism development will increase road kills of native wildlife, including the endangered Southern Cassowary
- Expansion to the road network will create an edge affect, opening up the rainforest canopy and further catalysing the spread of pest plants and animals.

Tourists currently visit the Daintree for it intact rainforest and genuine wildlife experiences. Additional infrastructure will undermined the region's natural values and beauty.

I am calling on Douglas Shire Council to put a stop to development in the Daintree once and for all and to cease all proposals exploring a bridge across the Daintree River. For the earth.

NO To A Bridge Crossing The Daintree River

A bridge completely contradicts the aim and process of preserving and protecting the World Heritage Listing and the biodiversity of this environmental treasure, that is this unique rainforest. Human interference to the Daintree Wet Tropical Rainforest must be kept to a minimum – hence No Bridge, not now not ever!

There is a third option regarding the Daintree River crossing and one that I believe, deserves serious consideration. This option is one in use very successfully in many environmentally critical areas around the world. Given that the Daintree, in general, with its ancient perhaps million years old rainforest already depleted by the destructive nature of the human race in the name of progress, has to be preserved and nurtured no matter what the cost or inconvenience.

On the subject of cost, the World heritage Listing of The Daintree Rainforest and its surrounding area provides a huge attraction to adventure travellers from around the world, in normal times. These travellers bring a substantial financial contribution to the community and The Douglas Shire Council.

OPTION 3 Park and Ride and or Walk or Stay using One slightly modified Ferry.

Look no further than Mossman Gorge for a small example of Park, Ride and Walk, which is providing enjoyable experiences for locals and tourists, environmental protection for the rainforest plants and wildlife, as well as an income and employment opportunities for the Aboriginal Community,

Build a Visitor Centre & Cafe with secure parking for tourists' cars on the Mossman side of the Daintree River, similar to that at the Mossman Gorge entry.

The Ferry Crossing only to be used by northside residents, service vehicles, tour operators, as well as the visiting pedestrians. The ferry would need adapting to provide shelter for the pedestrians and room for their luggage.

On the north side of the river a privately run bus service with multiple buses covering a circular route between the Ferry and Cape Tribulation.

The provision of a safe walking track along the existing road, from the ferry to intermediate accommodation, beaches, lookouts etc. all the way to Cape Tribulation, with the option of

hopping on and off the bus along the way in either direction. Travellers would be able to purchase all encompassing tickets for ferry and bus transport valid for one or two days or longer periods. This style of travel is popular worldwide and many walks of this kind are booked out months in advance.

The Council would charge a licence fee to the bus operators, similar to the current ferry system. This arrangement would save the Council from incurring heavy debt and interest payments as well as encourage environmentally sensitive travel for the Shire – a win-win strategy!

Questions

Question 1. How many people live over the north side of the river.

Question 2. What would this bridge proposal cost?

Question 3. Who's going to pay for this project?

Question 4. Who benefits in terms of increasing land value?

Leave the ferry as it is.

Most irreplaceable natural and mixed World Heritage site currently included on the World Heritage List.

Our preference: Retain a single ferry with drastically improved visitor management, both over the ferry and across the entire area of visitation.

To all intents and purposes, the DRC is the gateway to **the most irreplaceable natural and mixed World Heritage site per unit area currently included on the World Heritage List**. Greatly enhancing these outstanding values, the contiguous portion of Great Barrier Reef and the world's most diverse mangrove community compound this phenomenal fusion of World Heritage wonders into *nature's masterpiece*.

Australia is duty-bound to protect, conserve, present, rehabilitate and transmit to future generations these ratified *World Heritage-values*. Members of the Douglas Shire are also utterly dependent on the tourism revenue generated by these values and the quality of their protection, making the irreplaceability even greater and for the people of the Douglas Shire that inhabit this unique environment and the progeny of those that were forcibly evicted after thousands of generations of inhabitancy, the irreplaceability and economic importance is even greater again, for it is also the environmental repository of their collective memories. Therefore, in aspiring to improve service-delivery, DSC must embrace the unrivalled treasury of these irreplaceable *World Heritage-values* with a world-class gateway infrastructure and management.

The *Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE)*, made on 01/05/1992, binds the Commonwealth Government, all States & Territories & Local Government to ensure that environmental considerations will be integrated into Government decision-making processes at all levels by ensuring that:

- measures adopted are cost-effective and not disproportionate to the significance of the environmental problems being addressed;
- where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation;
- the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations;

- conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration;
- environmental factors should be included in the valuation of assets and services;
- those who generate pollution and waste should bear the cost of containment, avoidance, or abatement;
- the users of goods and services should pay prices based on the full life cycle costs of providing goods and services, including the use of natural resources and assets and the ultimate disposal of any wastes; and
- environmental goals, having been established, should be pursued in the most cost-effective way, by establishing incentive structures, including market mechanisms, which enable those best placed to maximise benefits and/or minimise costs to develop their own solutions and responses to environmental problems.

As the well-being of the *World Heritage-listed* environment that the DRC provides access to is of paramount importance, the reserve powers of the Commonwealth Government, under the *Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999* have been established to ensure its protection. Neither *Douglas Shire Council (DSC)*, nor the Queensland Government have unfettered responsibilities for the development and implementation of policy in relation to matters of *national environmental significance*. Where there is a Commonwealth interest in an environmental matter, which involves a State or Local Government, the Commonwealth will approve or accredit State & Local Government practices, procedures or processes and the affected State & Local Government will cooperatively set outcomes or standards and periodically review progress in meeting those standards or achieving those outcomes.

A bridge should only be considered when the place that it provides access to is secured with a world-class conservation management regime across the entire area of visitation and visitor-management has achieved a world-leading example of genuine ecotourism. Then and only then, should a bridge be considered, but one befitting the second wealthiest country per adult in the world, with an architectural quality befitting its unrivalled environmental treasury, by drawing from an international design competition in the same manner that led to the design of the Sydney Opera House, with such outstanding success that it became *World Heritage-listed* in its own right.

Even if DSC resolved to build a bridge in the meantime, I do not believe that it would be permitted. There are already too many unresolved threatening processes occurring in an environment of national significance. The *World Heritage-listing* ensures Commonwealth lead-agency and there are other regulatory safeguards currently in place to prevent bridge construction. Also, by way of precedent, the Dresden Elbe Valley in Saxony, Germany was struck from the *World Heritage-list* in 2009, because of the construction of a €182-million, 635-metre bridge across the Elbe River that UNESCO believed would spoil the vista of riverside palaces.

Two-ferries may provide some relief to congestion during peak visitation periods, but already existing unresolved threatening processes would exacerbate, visual amenity would plummet, costs would sky-rocket and permit-requirements for capital works and vegetation removal remains uncertain. Also, the structural engineering requirements to incorporate two anchorages for two ferries on the northern side of the Daintree River, with sufficient distance between the two to avoid danger, makes permit-requirements even less likely. Presuming two-ferries run alternately, to avoid traffic congestion with simultaneous unloading, the danger for water vessels travelling along the Daintree River greatly increases across two-sets of variably submerged cables.

If DSC were to free-up ferry congestion by either installing a second ferry or a bridge, without having first resolved the rampant pre-existing degradations of *World Heritage-values* and wanton desecration of *Indigenous Cultural Heritage-sites* within the area, landholders already long-suffering injurious impacts may apply to the Federal Court under Section 475 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999* for an injunction to either prohibit the construction or make an order requiring DSC to repair or mitigate the pre-existing environmental damage.

Development concerns

Concern has been expressed for runaway development pressures threatening the irreplaceable *World Heritage values* that the area is renowned for. Certainly, the residential subdivisions of the early nineteen-eighties caused public concern and provoked intense parliamentary debate, with the Member for Cairns protesting, *that the manner in which this development was allowed to proceed is a national disgrace and the rezoning of this vast tract of virgin rain forest as rural residential is one of the sorriest episodes in the whole sorry chapter of land subdivision in Queensland*¹. Whilst the contingent approval of the Queensland Government arguably protected vast areas of rainforest from sugar-cane-cropping, the sheer number of properties and their relatively small size had potential for significant environmental harm in an area of extraordinary environmental importance.

On 16 June 1994, the Commonwealth and Queensland Environment Ministers agreed to jointly fund the \$23.162-million *Daintree Rescue Package (DRP)*, with the stated objective of *encouraging the use of the combined resources of the three levels of Government to address the most critically important threats to the World Heritage values and to ensure the ecological sustainability of ecotourism in the Daintree*².

Without explicitly stating what these most critically important threats were, it certainly seemed to me (and I'm sure a great many others from the local community at that time) that the freehold subdivisions were the primary target. However, counteracting what was belaboured as an unfortunate and ill-considered land-development decision *ex post facto*, is an entirely different thing to dismantling an authorised community on a property-by-property basis. Even if the pursuit of such an intent was a paragon of voluntarism and every landholder within the targeted area was invited to willingly sell their land to the State for conversion to *National Park*, the ever-diminishing rate-base would place the burden of loss onto remaining land-holders, weakening democratic influence, along with the prospects of improved services. Declining student numbers would lead to reduced teacher allocations and parental perceptions of bleeding educational disadvantage would prompt re-location to better-resourced communities, compounding the disadvantages of diminution.

As it was, four-hundred-and-eighty-five freehold landowners, representing forty-four percent of both the total number of properties and also the representative area, expressed formal interest in selling for conversion to *National Park*³. However, only eighty-three properties were acquired under the *DRP*, despite holding almost twice the funds to achieve this forty-four percent reduction, leaving ninety-two percent of the freehold allotments and eighty-percent of the representative area unacquired. Post-*DRP*, a rather desperate crusade was pursued to minimise potential environmental harm from increasing settlement, with a succession of economic, regulatory and administrative imposts and particularly via the mis-management of the single-ferry. These historical excises were inflicted under the intergovernmental policy that has applied, since 1995, to only one portion of the Douglas Shire, *which re-directs future growth, beyond the sustainable level of visitor-use in the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area, to appropriate areas south of the Daintree River*⁴.

This policy is admittedly ambiguous, but as a *World Heritage* land-manager and ecotourism operator within the area to which this re-direction policy applies, I verily deny that patronage upon our portion has ever run anywhere near to the limits of sustainability and I believe the same applies to almost every other non-government tourism business within the specified area. However, when the *Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS)* over-allocated *Commercial Activity Permits (CAPs)* to Cairns and Port Douglas day-tour operators in

the early nineteen-nineties, with a latent capacity of some 770,000 day-visitors per-year, this clearly exceeded the carrying capacity of both the ferry and the roads and yet the formal adoption of this re-direction policy by the *Wet Tropics Management Authority* (WTMA) extended beyond the boundaries of the *Wet Tropics World Heritage Area* (WTWHA) into adjacent jurisdictions and across the trade boundaries of privately-held lands.

Tourism crossing the ferry was profoundly influenced through DSC and the affiliated *Daintree Planning Coordination Group* (DPCG) and also as the *Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Rainforest Ecology Management* (CRC-TREM), in compliance with this policy. The DPCG directed the \$23.162-million *Daintree Rescue Package* (DRP) and the CRC-TREM undertook the *Daintree Futures Study* (DFS).

Subject to this formal policy of re-directing tourism growth to appropriate areas south of the Daintree River:

- *The area over which the policy applies has been denied a formal identity and is rather referred to as North of the Daintree River (which incidentally encompasses more than half the planet).*
- *On the reported basis that the subdivisions North of the Daintree River had been approved without the requirement to provide civic infrastructure, DSC resolved to implement differential ratings, to restrict the burden of this unfulfilled expense specifically onto the ratepayers of residential properties north of the Daintree River, at around two-hundred-and-thirty-four percent more than ratepayers of equivalent-sized properties south of the Daintree River⁵.*
- *In 1993, CAPs into the area were frozen under Ministerial moratorium.*
- *In 1995 Mossman Gorge NP, Dagmar Ranges NP & Cape Tribulation NP, were all re-gazetted (collectively) as Daintree National Park, but only the latter-most portion was subject to the re-direction policy.*
- *Freehold properties within the area were strategically acquired for construction of publicly-funded boardwalks and picnic facilities to accommodate the full carrying capacity of the existing permit allocation and then added to surrounding National Park.*
- *Tens of millions of dollars were invested into the development of competing Wet Tropics experiences, including the \$12-million-dollar Ma:Mu Canopy Walkway, the Misty Mountain Trails and Great Green Way, pulling tourism away, not just from North of the Daintree River, but from the Douglas Shire as a whole.*
- *Ferry-fees were substantially increased, under agreement with the regional tourism industry and on the assurance that the revenue raised would be separately accounted for, with an annual budget spent exclusively on management of infrastructure and the environment north of the river and that the people who paid (tourism industry) would have input into the budget, but after the first year of collecting, these over-charges were absorbed into general revenue without separate accounting and almost none of the money was spent on the environment north of the river⁶.*
- *The Queensland Government's clear policy position of opposing the extension of mains power north of the Daintree River was supported by the decision of the Regulator to amend the distribution authority under the provisions of the Electricity Act.*
- *In November 2000, the Wet Tropics Ministerial Council endorsed the Daintree Futures Study, which promoted the Daintree Ferry as an attractive gateway experience for visitors to the area, recommending that ferry-fees be increased from \$7 to \$10 per crossing, to deflect an additional fifteen-percent of travellers from crossing the Daintree*

River, on top of the fifteen-percent already identified as having turned away at the ferry because of existing charges⁷.

- Ferry-fees were further increased in 2003 with the introduction of a Conservation & Infrastructure Management Levy. The presiding Justice of the Supreme Court noted, that the operating surplus in respect of the ferry (including the conservation component) exceeds fifty-percent of the costs of the ferry's operation and maintenance⁸.
- In 2008, the Queensland Government amalgamated the Douglas Shire into an expanded Cairns Region and the new Regional Government subsequently increased ferry charges, which were increased yet again, subject to de-amalgamation after 1 January 2014.

This is by no means a full accounting of historical hardship imposed solely onto a portion of the Douglas Shire that never asked for such a burden. Nevertheless, the profound magnitude of injurious affect can be reconsidered, in the context of this DRC consultation, as the DSC's greatest scope for Tourism recovery and Economic Development potential. Indeed, the greatest prospect for rectifying the depth of damage and restoring the destination's outstanding potential and also to drastically and most cost-effectively resolve outstanding visitor mis-management, both on the ferry and throughout the entire area of visitation, is through a dedicated compensation of manipulations via a single-ferry. Put another way, these devastating historical damages would be irrevocably swept under the carpet of history, with either two ferries or a bridge, robbing the destination of its outstanding recovery potential. The complex extent to which this ill-disposition has been woven into the administrative fabric of society, requires a keen understanding of the full history of its embroidery to successfully negotiate its unpicking, but in as much as the people and communities are legislated components of the definition of environment, anything that was done to harm the local communities was definitively harmful to the local environment.

Ferry management reform

*The **Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009–2031**, stipulates that rural residential developments north of the Daintree River are not intended to grow or increase in density and tourist development north of the Daintree River should be small-scale, nature-based and protect the unique ecological values and local character. The Plan states that the car ferry crossing on the Daintree River will continue to limit development north of the river, while the road between the Daintree and Bloomfield Rivers will continue to be a scenic/adventure drive. The ferry crossing at the Daintree River is maintained to protect the World Heritage and scenic values of the area north of the Daintree River. The Plan explains that the existing access configuration and lack of mains power are two major reasons why the area north of the Daintree River has remained in a relatively undeveloped state and maintained its heritage status and attractiveness to tourists. The Plan supports the elements of the DSC Planning Scheme that provide for limited infrastructure provision north of the Daintree River, with a strong preference for self-sufficiency using sustainable technologies, explaining that the Daintree River ferry crossing is an important element of the tourist experience and tourism economy, creating a sense of destination and emphasizing the isolation and significance of the area. The ferry limits the number of vehicles that can travel into the area during peak periods, which serves to limit undesirable crowding on roads and at visitor facilities. In this regard, maintaining a car ferry, as opposed to constructing a bridge crossing, remains a Queensland policy for the region.*

Nevertheless, within these Regional Planning constraints there is tremendous scope for the DSC to grow Tourism and Economic Development to achieve the status of world's leading sustainable tropical shire. The problem with the ferry is too many vehicles are arriving at the same time. The solution obviously requires redistribution of visitors across a broader portion of the day and indeed, the year.

The *Daintree Futures Study (DFS)* recommends:

- *Self-drive vehicles be given a 30-day non-transferable pass, and*
- *ferry-fee changes that effect higher yielding expenditure and increased visitor nights north of the Daintree River.*

A priority access lane was also recommended, but only for local residents and business traffic and only at peak times and directions. DSC's original decision to increase the ferry fees and introduce the priority lane was justified by recommendations within the *DFS*.

The *DFS* states in section 2.6.1.5 *Ferry operations* (p.118) that:^[1]_{SEP}

- *The key issues at the ferry are that its pricing structure and management have a substantial effect on the convenience and cost of access for local residents and for the different categories of tourists.*
- *Conversely, varying prices and management can influence the equity to local residents and businesses and also provide a means of influencing visitation types.*

Indeed, the *DFS* acknowledged in section 2.8.2.2 *Visitor fees and charges* (p.129) that:

- *There is a significant issue of competitive equity between the local community's provision and maintenance of nature-based tourism facilities and those on private lands.*
- *As discussed in section 2.6, there is a need to adjust ferry charges to achieve a better balance between the costs paid by public site users and those who visit private destinations.*

The *DFS* states in section 2.6.1.5 *Ferry operations* (p.118) that:

- *It is important to provide priority to local residents through pricing and ticketing. Further, this can influence activities that contribute to sustainable nature-based tourist activities by influencing private vehicle movements, commercial tours and bus operations. For example, it is possible to give priority to overnight stays and group tours through pricing and ticketing.*

In July, September and November of 1999, under DSC-funding, CSIRO carried out extensive surveying of self-drive visitors at the Daintree River Ferry to determine visitor willingness to pay additional costs on the ferry for the value of the experience beyond its actual cost. The survey report (*DFS* Appendix 8, A208) theorised that price elasticity could be translated into policy for managing the *Free and Independent Travellers (FITs)* traffic volume to the destination by varying the price for a ferry crossing. The survey report concluded that the mean response to visitor willingness to pay higher fees on the ferry, was equivalent to the expectation that *FITs* bear a substantial consumer rent obligation for their trip to the Daintree rainforest, of an average \$40 per vehicle. An estimated 110,000 full-paying car ferry crossings in 1998/99 (DSC data) represented in excess of \$2-million annual consumer surplus and the *DFS* stated (p.132):

If some of this consumer surplus could be captured and added to the region's rent from its natural resources, significant efforts into managing and preserving the heritage and environmental attributes of the destination could be funded.

The CSIRO survey data indicated that if ferry fees were increased from \$7 per crossing to \$10, that 15% of respondents would not be prepared to pay this amount. The *DFS* subsequently recommended that ferry charges should be changed for:^[1]_{SEP}

- *increasing the resource rent which the DSC can draw from tourism and thereby generating revenue for the management of this area, and*
- *managing the volume of self-drive traffic into the area.*

As DSC has advised that the Queensland and Commonwealth Government-funded DFS establishes the appropriate policy framework for decision-making in respect to the management of the ferry, it is appropriate (particularly in this current debate) to consider the relevant implementation requirements of the DFS:

Recommendation 2:

DSC will revise both ferry fees and its Development Control Plan to increase the opportunities for local landowners to engage in tourism accommodation and commercial service provision.

Recommendation 22:

DSC will construct a (ferry) priority lane for local residential and business traffic. This would only be necessary in peak times and directions.

Recommendation 24:

DSC will change the ferry pricing structure to:

<i>Self-drive:</i>	<i>\$20 per vehicle (30-day non-transferable pass)</i>
<i>Transfer buses:</i>	<i>\$4 per person</i>
<i>Tour buses:</i>	<i>\$4 per person</i>
<i>Residents:</i>	<i>Current pricing retained</i>

As DFS Recommendation 2 requires ferry-fee changes that effect higher yielding expenditure and increased visitor nights north of the Daintree River and DFS Recommendation 24 specifies pricing, the only feasible scope for variation will be on an affirmative action per vehicle basis. Visitors contracted to overnight accommodation houses and providers of nature-based tourism facilities on private lands, should receive substantial discounts to their ferry-fee and also access to the priority lane. In respect to competitive neutrality (DFS 2.8.2.2 Visitor fees and charges p.129), visitors that have contracted to providers of nature-based tourism facilities on private lands should also be relieved of the conservation and infrastructure component of the ferry-fee. The effects of these two ferry-fee changes should achieve substantial increases in occupancy rates and visitor numbers at respective facilities, otherwise the magnitude of the discounts will require further increase.

Varying ferry charges has an effect on visitor willingness to pay for entry. According to CSIRO survey data, increasing the ferry charge to \$50 for a two-way crossing would reduce current numbers by 57%. It stands to reason that establishing penalty rates at peak times would discourage visitation for the respective periods, which would have effects on overall patterns of expenditure and visitation. If increasing ferry-fees at peak times were accompanied by decreasing fees for contracted clients of designated businesses within the area, changes to the style of tourism would follow.

Co-ordinated conservation management

The DFS recommended management arrangements that are critical to achieving the goals set out in the Terms of Reference, which are:

- *conservation of the Daintree's outstanding biodiversity, natural and cultural values (especially World Heritage values) for current and future generations*

- *provision of appropriate services for residents provision of appropriate management regimes and infrastructure to support a high-quality tourism industry which maximises returns to the local community.*

In addition, the model must:

- *empower the community in its role of preserving and managing the Daintree for its World Heritage Values; and*
- *be a model of management which will be an example for the world in the management of a sensitive area for conservation and tourism.*

The Daintree Coast community forum held in April 2000, reached a high-level of agreement with the following statement:

- *Develop an institutional arrangement that allows the local community to determine its own management priorities, through funds accumulated from tourism cost-recovery.*

Three-decades of heedless and sacrilegious desecration of the *Blue Pools Declared Indigenous Sacred Site* and all its surrounding *World Heritage values*, was utterly disgraceful. For all of the succession of responsible officials who were dutifully paid for protective services, not one intervened to halt the degradation and allow rehabilitation, as the site's declared conservation status requires. To one extent or another, they all skirted responsibility by blaming jurisdictional limitations or tenure complexities for their frustrations.

For the greater importance and binding responsibilities of *World Heritage-listing* and *Cultural Heritage registration*, why were these statutory weaknesses not resolved when first revealed and reported upon and why was the greater portion of the area that is not Crown Land and declared for conservation purposes, denied even the most fundamental provisions of protection for addressing these critical threats? Withholding the tools and authority that would otherwise allow for protection, robs the people and communities within the area of the support they are entitled to expect under the policy provisions of the *Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment 1992* and leaves them vulnerable to environmental criticism and further deprivation of rights to subsist.

To avoid any repetition of this wanton damage, an overlay of regulatory protection must be declared for the entire area. As decades of imposed disadvantage will have forged a legacy of mistrust, freehold landowners must be free to exclude their own properties, but all those that accept inclusion and all other managers of tenures that are currently unprotected, should never again be informed that nothing can be done to intervene and halt degradation on the grounds of jurisdiction or tenure weakness. Rate-relief could provide an incentive for increased inclusion and inclusiveness should remain open for freehold property owners into the future.

Visitor-management unquestionably needs improvement. Rampant and desecrating trespass into sacred sites is not entirely the fault of visitor insensitivity. Encouraged by unfettered referrals and the evidence of well-worn pathways, the immediate rewards of access and the absence of any serious consequence, tends to override any appeals to desist, from either signage or rebuking land-owners. The provision of an area-wide protection and management authority should supply all the requisite tools for comprehensive management. Offences against the area should be punishable by on-the-spot fines or referral to court for contended infringements or more serious violations, such that any penalties would derive income for fulfilment of the authority's duties.

Ecotourism

There are currently too many visitors making too inadequate a contribution to cover the full-costs of their management. Admittedly, there will always be some travellers determined to harvest as much value as they can possibly derive from the least amount of expenditure, but in an absence of any other economy, the destination's formal conservation land-use constrains

the resident community to ecotourism for its sole economy and yet the overwhelming dominance of visitation is currently subsidised to not contribute.

In 2002, the *International Year of Ecotourism*, the Executive Director of the *Wet Tropics Management Authority* proposed a Wet Tropics rainforest tax in his keynote presentation at the *International Ecotourism Conference* in Cairns. This presentation summarised that the annual costs of providing tourism with public access throughout the Wet Tropics was around \$13.5-million, whilst the only cost-recovery was from CAP-fees, accruing around \$325,000 per annum. Under such terms, the taxpayer effectively subsidises tourism in the Wet Tropics by more than ninety-seven cents in the dollar. Under such generous subsidisation, the string of publicly-funded, free-entry boardwalks and picnic facilities north of the Daintree River attract so many day-trippers that the ferry is often unable to cope, causing queues to develop and sometimes horrendously so. During peak visitation periods, the subsidised clients of the CAP-holders are provided with priority access onto the ferry, whilst independent travellers that have pre-booked onto scheduled tours on unsubsidised, privately-held lands within the same locality, are denied priority and actually have to queue longer to allow for the priority access of the subsidised day-trippers. This discriminatory treatment undermines ecotourism within the destination.

Another disturbing outcome of this *International Ecotourism Conference*, was the strategic re-purposing of ecotourism in Australia. From early on in the proceedings, industry leaders seemed to have already resolved that ecotourism would be undergoing a definitive paradigm shift. Aspiring to drive the tourism industry as a whole towards a more sustainable future, rather than merely representing an elite subset of nature-based tourism that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people, delegates were asked to consider the greater global benefits of a major international accommodation chain being persuaded to replace their toilet tissue with unbleached, re-cycled products, over the relatively local influence of even the purest practitioner of genuine ecotourism.

Fearful that this surrendering of principle would lead to the validating of CAP-day-tours with formal ecotourism accreditation, when the well-being of local people is by-passed and conservation costs are almost entirely tax-payer subsidised, I lent my voice of opposition to the fight for ecotourism not to compromise its definitive principles. Through the formality of a plenary session, I contended that genuine ecotourism transcends nature-based tourism by providing a medium through which travellers express their willingness to pay for what economists define as non-use values. Benefits derived from knowing particular environmental values exist and valuing their bequest to one's descendants and future generations, including ecosystem health, bio-diversity, rarity, endemism, scenic amenity and continuity of human habitation. I explained that off-reserve ecotourism particularly relies upon visitor-willingness to pay for these non-use values. With alternate economies in such short supply and so much relatively undamaged landscape enriched with the intellectual and interpretive expertise of Indigenous and other local inhabitants just begging to be cultivated, Australia possesses a remarkable ecotourism potential and the responsibility to nurture as much as possible towards fruition. Articulating respectability through the principle of sustainability and encouraging participation through a culture of altruism, Australia's tremendous ecotourism potential, to supplement and moderate the fluctuations of fickle rural economies and provide recompense and dignity to Australians living in remote parts of the country, should be pursued as a matter of national significance.

Alas, the proportion of members whose income derived benefit from the subsidisation of public-facilities was overwhelming and at the conclusion of the conference, despite impassioned counter-argument for protecting the integrity of genuine ecotourism, the majority of votes gave Australian ecotourism a re-purposing mandate. However, the almost complete subsidisation of nature-based tourism upon public-reserves, which contributes so very little to conservation costs and by-passes the well-being of local people, under the assurance of a nationally moderated ecotourism accreditation scheme, should be very carefully considered for its exclusionary influences to fair-trade across tenure, as both off-reserve conservation and

also the socio-economic support of Australia's Indigenous and other remote communities, are very much at stake.

In accordance with its presentation requirement as defined within the meaning of the *World Heritage Convention*, my family business opened up its freehold *World Heritage* property to the general-public, for limited-access, guided and interpreted rainforest walking-tours. In an absence of any other permissible form of income, cost-recovery had to be derived from the land itself and through user-fees as a basis for the management of public-access and other *World Heritage* responsibilities. We have subsequently acquired the greatest respect and gratitude for our genuine ecotourism customers, whom we think of as partners-in-protection, for their willingness and enthusiasm to pay for the privilege of guided-entry, under the rewarding expertise of a long-term *World Heritage* inhabitant. It irks us, however, that so many of our pre-booked clients have missed their scheduled tours over the years, waiting in a ferry-queue so that travellers on tours that don't necessarily contribute to the well-being of the local people can have priority access to competing facilities that are taxpayer-subsidised by more than ninety-seven-cents-in-the-dollar. We take even more offence from that subset of travellers that seem determined to pay for as little as possible and yet, under the pretense of being lost or confused, trespass onto our unsubsidised, privately-held property, for a sneaking glimpse. After three-decades, even the most creative and well-rehearsed of excuses have long surpassed our amusement, but when those interlopers steal into the Indigenous sacred site that we promised to forever protect from entry, then they also intrude into our minds' custodial centre of protective sensitivity and we think of them in an entirely different light.

Conclusion

With the advantage of a ferry-entrance, great conservation and ecotourism advancements could be achieved through a world-class management. Cassowary fatalities could be drastically reduced, if dogs without a dedicated transit license were prohibited from ferry-travel and licensing was strictly limited to bona fide residents and owners of dogs for disability assistance.

Despite arguments to the contrary and the rationalising contortions of even the most eccentric theoretical accounting, overcharging on the ferry has long been an established practice and so too has the provision of priority access, at least for some of the northbound traffic during peak visitation periods. If variable charging and priority entitlements were reconfigured to deliver ecotourism improvements within the destination, redress could be made for past impairments and great strides could be taken towards a much more sustainable ecotourism future. Through a relatively simple pre-booking system, travellers who have pre-paid for activities that satisfactorily contribute to both conservation and also improvement of the well-being of the residents within the destination, could be rewarded with priority access and ferry-fee relief. Tour-operators that contract with dedicated ecotourism service-providers within the destination, could regain priority access, if they satisfy an acceptable level of ecotourism contribution, however, to ensure the sustainability of ecotourism, travellers that are predisposed to avoiding payment wherever possible, could be compelled to contribute through substantially increased ferry-fees, on the proviso that the surplus funds go to the protection and management authority within the destination and not into DSC's consolidated fund, which currently accrues some \$1,150,000 p.a. beyond the \$4-million reserve.

Now is the time for DSC to aim for top of the world and claim the prestige of world's leading sustainable tropical shire, just as its strategic investment in the *TEDO* position intended. To this end, the *DRC* has tremendous potential to be a powerful catalyst project of the utmost universal importance; just as it should!

1. *Legislative Assembly Record of Proceedings (Hansard) 19 September 1984 - Matters of public interest - Daintree Rainforest* - http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/1984/1984_09_19.pdf

2. *Daintree Rescue Package - Deed of Agreement between the State of Queensland and the Commonwealth of Australia, 15 December 1995. Cairns, Rainforest CRC. "Daintree Futures Study." (2000).*
3. *Wet Tropics Management Authority - Protection Through Partnerships - <http://www.wettropics.gov.au/site/user-assets/docs/ProtectionThroughPartnerships.pdf>*
4. *Douglas Shire Council - Notice to Ratepayer pursuant to Section 579(1) of the "Local Government Act of 1993" concerning differential general rates, 1995.*
5. *Douglas Shire Council - Finance, Environment, Community & Library Services Committee Meeting - Discussion Paper - Specific purpose conservation levy to provide funding for implementation of the Daintree Futures Study, January 2002.*¹¹_{SEP}
6. *Cairns, Rainforest CRC. "Daintree Futures Study." (2000).*
7. *Supreme Court of Queensland - Citation: Douglas Shire Council v Queensland Ombudsman [2005] QSC 207 <https://archive.sclqld.org.au/qjudgment/2005/QSC05-207.pdf>*
8. *Douglas Shire Council - Finance, Environment, Community & Library Services Committee Meeting - Discussion Paper - Specific purpose conservation levy to provide funding for implementation of the Daintree Futures Study, January 2002.*

Daintree River Crossing (DRC) - Options Assessment Report Response

Our preference: Retain a single ferry with drastically improved visitor management, both over the ferry and across the entire area of visitation.

Paramount consideration of this proposal must be given to the treasure it provides almost exclusive access to. After all, the DRC is gateway to the second-most irreplaceable natural and mixed World Heritage site currently included on the World Heritage List and greatly enhancing these outstanding values, the contiguous portion of Great Barrier Reef and the world's most diverse mangrove community, compound this phenomenal fusion of World Heritage wonders into nature's masterpiece! The only World Heritage-listed property ranked higher is Canaima National Park in south-eastern Venezuela, along the border between Guyana and Brazil, which covers more than 3-million hectares. As Queensland's Wet Tropics covers less than one-third the area of Canaima and the Daintree – Cape Tribulation section indisputably contains the richest and most irreplaceable portion, the area of the shire that the DRC provides access to, represents the world's most irreplaceable World Heritage property per unit area.

These outstanding values constitute the heritage attributes that the citizens of the world are guaranteed Australia will protect, conserve, present, rehabilitate and transmit to future generations. Members of the Douglas Shire are also absolutely dependent on the tourism revenue generated by these superlative values and the quality of their protection, making their irreplaceability even greater and for the Douglas Shire constituents that inhabit this unique environment and the progeny of those that were forcibly evicted after thousands of generations of inhabitancy, the irreplaceability and economic importance is even greater again, for it is also the environmental repository of their collective memories.

Because Australia has sovereignty over and responsibility for this unrivalled environmental treasure and also because it is the second wealthiest nation per adult in the world, its development of a gateway infrastructure and visitor-management regime should aspire to global monumental greatness. However, there are already serious problems within the destination that require urgent amelioration. There are far too many cassowary fatalities from car-strikes and marauding pig-dogs. Indigenous Sacred Sites and World Heritage areas are desecrated and degraded through rampant trespass and vandalism and tourism as a whole makes too inadequate a contribution for too great a number to go anywhere near to world's best-practice.

A bridge should only be considered when the place that it provides access to is secured with a world-class conservation management regime across the entire area of visitation and visitor-management has achieved a world-leading example of genuine ecotourism. Then and only then, should a bridge be considered, but one befitting the second wealthiest country per adult in the world, with an architectural quality befitting its unrivalled environmental treasury, by drawing from an international design competition in the same manner that led to the design of the Sydney Opera House, with such outstanding success that it became World Heritage-listed in its own right.

Even if DSC resolved to build a bridge in the meantime, I do not believe that it would be permitted. There are already too many unresolved threatening processes occurring in an environment of national significance. The World Heritage-listing ensures Commonwealth lead-agency and there are other regulatory safeguards currently in place to prevent bridge construction. Also, by way of precedent, the Dresden Elbe Valley in Saxony, Germany was struck from the World Heritage-list in 2009, because of the construction of a €182-million, 635-metre bridge across the Elbe River that UNESCO believed would spoil the vista of riverside palaces.

Two-ferries may provide some relief to congestion during peak visitation periods, but already existing unresolved threatening processes would exacerbate, visual amenity would plummet, costs would sky-rocket and permit-requirements for capital works and vegetation removal remains uncertain. Also, the structural engineering requirements to incorporate two anchorages for two ferries on the northern side of the Daintree River, with sufficient distance between the two to avoid danger, makes permit-requirements even less likely. Presuming two-ferries run alternately, to avoid traffic congestion with simultaneous unloading, the danger for water vessels travelling along the Daintree River greatly increases across two-sets of variably submerged cables.

Development concerns

Concern has been expressed for runaway development pressures threatening the irreplaceable World Heritage values that the area is renowned for. Certainly, the residential subdivisions of the early nineteen-eighties caused public concern and provoked intense parliamentary debate, with the Member for Cairns protesting, that the manner in which this development was allowed to proceed is a national disgrace and the rezoning of this vast tract of virgin rain forest as rural residential is one of the sorriest episodes in the whole sorry chapter of land subdivision in Queensland[1]. Whilst the contingent approval of the Queensland Government arguably protected vast areas of rainforest from sugar-cane-cropping, the sheer number of properties and their relatively small size had potential for significant environmental harm in an area of extraordinary environmental importance.

On 16 June 1994, the Commonwealth and Queensland Environment Ministers agreed to jointly fund the \$23.162-million Daintree Rescue Package (DRP), with the stated objective of encouraging the use of the combined resources of the three levels of Government to address the most critically important threats to the World Heritage values and to ensure the ecological sustainability of ecotourism in the Daintree[2].

Without explicitly stating what these most critically important threats were, it certainly seemed to me (and I'm sure a great many others from the local community at that time) that the freehold subdivisions were the primary target. However, counteracting what was belaboured as an unfortunate and ill-considered land-development decision ex post facto, is an entirely different thing to dismantling an authorised community on a property-by-property basis. Even if the pursuit of such an intent was a paragon of voluntarism and every landholder within the targeted area was invited to willingly sell their land to the State for conversion to National Park, the ever-diminishing rate-base would place the burden of loss onto remaining land-holders, weakening democratic influence, along with the prospects of improved services. Declining student numbers would lead to reduced teacher allocations and parental perceptions of bleeding educational disadvantage would prompt re-location to better-resourced communities, compounding the disadvantages of diminution.

As it was, 485 freehold landowners, representing 44 percent of both the total number of properties and also the representative area, expressed formal interest in selling for conversion to National Park[3]. However, only 83 properties were acquired under the DRP, despite holding almost twice the funds to achieve this 44 percent reduction, leaving ninety-two percent of the freehold allotments and eighty-percent of the representative area unacquired.

Post-DRP, a rather desperate crusade was pursued to minimise potential environmental harm from increasing settlement, with a succession of economic, regulatory and administrative imposts and particularly via the mis-management of the single-ferry. These historical excises were inflicted under the intergovernmental policy that has applied, since 1995, to only one portion of the Douglas Shire, which re-directs future growth, beyond the sustainable level of visitor-use in the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area, to appropriate areas south of the Daintree River[4].

This policy is admittedly ambiguous, but as a World Heritage land-manager and ecotourism operator within the area to which this re-direction policy applies, I verily deny that patronage upon our portion has ever run anywhere near to the limits of sustainability and I believe the same applies to almost every other non-government tourism business within the specified area. However, when the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS) over-allocated Commercial Activity Permits (CAPs) to Cairns and Port Douglas day-tour operators in the early nineteen-nineties, with a latent capacity of some 770,000 day-visitors per-year, this clearly exceeded the carrying capacity of both the ferry and the roads and yet the formal adoption of this re-direction policy by the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) extended beyond the boundaries of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA) into adjacent jurisdictions and across the trade boundaries of privately-held lands.

Tourism crossing the ferry was profoundly influenced through DSC and the affiliated Daintree Planning Coordination Group (DPCG) and also as the Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Rainforest Ecology Management (CRC-TREM), in compliance with this policy. The DPCG directed the \$23.162-million Daintree Rescue Package (DRP) and the CRC-TREM undertook the Daintree Futures Study (DFS).

Subject to this formal policy of re-directing tourism growth to appropriate areas south of the Daintree River:

- The area over which the policy applies has been denied a formal identity and is rather referred to as North of the Daintree River (which incidentally encompasses more than half the planet).
- On the reported basis that the subdivisions North of the Daintree River had been approved without the requirement to provide civic infrastructure, DSC resolved to implement differential ratings, to restrict the burden of this unfulfilled expense specifically onto the ratepayers of residential properties north of the Daintree River, at around two-hundred-and-thirty-four percent more than ratepayers of equivalent-sized properties south of the Daintree River[5].
- In 1993, CAPs into the area were frozen under Ministerial moratorium.
- In 1995 Mossman Gorge NP, Dagmar Ranges NP & Cape Tribulation NP, were all re-gazetted (collectively) as Daintree National Park, but only the latter-most portion was subject to the re-direction policy.
- Freehold properties within the area were strategically acquired for construction of publicly-funded boardwalks and picnic facilities to accommodate the full carrying capacity of the existing permit allocation and then added to surrounding National Park.
- Tens of millions of dollars were invested into the development of competing Wet Tropics experiences, including the \$12-million-dollar Ma:Mu Canopy Walkway, the Misty Mountain Trails and Great Green Way, pulling tourism away, not just from North of the Daintree River, but from the Douglas Shire as a whole,
- Ferry-fees were substantially increased, under agreement with the regional tourism industry and on the assurance that the revenue raised would be separately accounted for, with an annual budget spent exclusively on management of infrastructure and the environment north of the river and that the people who paid (tourism industry) would have

input into the budget, but after the first year of collecting, these over-charges were absorbed into general revenue without separate accounting and almost none of the money was spent on the environment north of the river[6].

- The Queensland Government's clear policy position of opposing the extension of mains power north of the Daintree River was supported by the decision of the Regulator to amend the distribution authority under the provisions of the Electricity Act.
- In November 2000, the Wet Tropics Ministerial Council endorsed the Daintree Futures Study, which promoted the Daintree Ferry as an attractive gateway experience for visitors to the area, recommending that ferry-fees be increased from \$7 to \$10 per crossing, to deflect an additional fifteen-percent of travellers from crossing the Daintree River, on top of the fifteen-percent already identified as having turned away at the ferry because of existing charges[7].
- Ferry-fees were further increased in 2003 with the introduction of a Conservation & Infrastructure Management Levy. The presiding Justice of the Supreme Court noted, that the operating surplus in respect of the ferry (including the conservation component) exceeds fifty-percent of the costs of the ferry's operation and maintenance[8].
- In 2008, the Queensland Government amalgamated the Douglas Shire into an expanded Cairns Region and the new Regional Government subsequently increased ferry charges, which were increased yet again, subject to de-amalgamation after 1 January 2014.

This is by no means a full accounting of historical hardship imposed solely onto a portion of the Douglas Shire that never asked for such a burden. Nevertheless, the profound magnitude of injurious affect can be reconsidered, in the context of this DRC consultation, as the DSC's greatest scope for Tourism recovery and Economic Development potential. Indeed, the greatest prospect for rectifying the depth of damage and restoring the destination's outstanding potential and also to drastically and most cost-effectively resolve outstanding visitor mis-management, both on the ferry and throughout the entire area of visitation, is through a dedicated compensation of manipulations via a single-ferry. Put another way, these devastating historical damages would be irrevocably swept under the carpet of history, with either two ferries or a bridge, robbing the destination of its outstanding recovery potential. The complex extent to which this ill-disposition has been woven into the administrative fabric of society, requires a keen understanding of the full history of its embroidery to successfully negotiate its unpicking, but in as much as the people and communities are legislated components of the definition of environment, anything that was done to harm the local communities was definitively harmful to the local environment.

Ferry management reform

The Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009–2031, stipulates that rural residential developments north of the Daintree River are not intended to grow or increase in density and tourist development north of the Daintree River should be small-scale, nature-based and protect the unique ecological values and local character. The Plan states that the car ferry crossing on the Daintree River will continue to limit development north of the river, while the road between the Daintree and Bloomfield Rivers will continue to be a scenic/adventure drive. The ferry crossing at the Daintree River is maintained to protect the World Heritage and scenic values of the area north of the Daintree River. The Plan explains that the existing access configuration and lack of mains power are two major reasons why the area north of the Daintree River has remained in a relatively undeveloped state and maintained its heritage status and attractiveness to tourists. The Plan supports the elements of the DSC Planning Scheme that provide for limited infrastructure provision north of the Daintree River, with a strong preference for self-sufficiency using sustainable technologies, explaining that the Daintree River ferry crossing is an important element of the tourist experience and tourism economy, creating a sense of destination and emphasising the isolation and significance of the area. The ferry limits the number of vehicles that can travel into the area during peak periods, which serves to limit undesirable crowding on roads and at visitor facilities. In this regard, maintaining a car ferry, as opposed to constructing a bridge crossing, remains a Queensland policy for the region.

Nevertheless, within these Regional Planning constraints there is tremendous scope for the DSC to grow Tourism and Economic Development to achieve the status of world's leading sustainable tropical shire. The problem with the ferry is too many vehicles are arriving at the same time. The solution obviously requires redistribution of visitors across a broader portion of the day and indeed, the year.

The Daintree Futures Study (DFS) recommends:

- Self-drive vehicles be given a 30-day non-transferable pass, and
- ferry-fee changes that effect higher yielding expenditure and increased visitor nights north of the Daintree River

A priority access lane was also recommended, but only for local residents and business traffic and only at peak times and directions. DSC's original decision to increase the ferry fees and introduce the priority lane was justified by recommendations within the DFS.

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- Conversely, varying prices and management can influence the equity to local residents and businesses and also provide a means of influencing visitation types.

Indeed, the DFS acknowledged in section 2.8.2.2 Visitor fees and charges (p.129) that:

- There is a significant issue of competitive equity between the local community's provision and maintenance of nature-based tourism facilities and those on private lands.
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If some of this consumer surplus could be captured and added to the region's rent from its natural resources, significant efforts into managing and preserving the heritage and environmental attributes of the destination could be funded.

The CSIRO survey data indicated that if ferry fees were increased from \$7 per crossing to \$10, that 15% of respondents would not be prepared to pay this amount. The DFS subsequently recommended that ferry charges should be changed for:

- increasing the resource rent which the DSC can draw from tourism and thereby generating revenue for the management of this area, and

- managing the volume of self-drive traffic into the area.

As DSC has advised that the Queensland and Commonwealth Government-funded DFS establishes the appropriate policy framework for decision-making in respect to the management of the ferry, it is appropriate (particularly in this current debate) to consider the relevant implementation requirements of the DFS:

Recommendation 2:

DSC will revise both ferry fees and its Development Control Plan to increase the opportunities for local landowners to engage in tourism accommodation and commercial service provision.

Recommendation 22:

DSC will construct a (ferry) priority lane for local residential and business traffic. This would only be necessary in peak times and directions.

Recommendation 24:

DSC will change the ferry pricing structure to:

Self-drive:	\$20 per vehicle (30-day non-transferable pass)
Transfer buses:	\$4 per person
Tour buses:	\$4 per person
Residents:	Current pricing retained

As DFS Recommendation 2 requires ferry-fee changes that effect higher yielding expenditure and increased visitor nights north of the Daintree River and DFS Recommendation 24 specifies pricing, the only feasible scope for variation will be on an affirmative action per vehicle basis. Visitors contracted to overnight accommodation houses and providers of nature-based tourism facilities on private lands, should receive substantial discounts to their ferry-fee and also access to the priority lane. In respect to competitive neutrality (DFS 2.8.2.2 Visitor fees and charges p.129), visitors that have contracted to providers of nature-based tourism facilities on private lands should also be relieved of the conservation and infrastructure component of the ferry-fee. The effects of these two ferry-fee changes should achieve substantial increases in occupancy rates and visitor numbers at respective facilities, otherwise the magnitude of the discounts will require further increase.

Varying ferry charges has an effect on visitor willingness to pay for entry. According to CSIRO survey data, increasing the ferry charge to \$50 for a two-way crossing would reduce current numbers by 57%. It stands to reason that establishing penalty rates at peak times would discourage visitation for the respective periods, which would have effects on overall patterns of expenditure and visitation. If increasing ferry-fees at peak times were accompanied by decreasing fees for contracted clients of designated businesses within the area, changes to the style of tourism would follow.

Co-ordinated conservation management

The DFS recommended management arrangements that are critical to achieving the goals set out in the Terms of Reference, which are:

- conservation of the Daintree's outstanding biodiversity, natural and cultural values (especially World Heritage values) for current and future generations
- provision of appropriate services for residents
- provision of appropriate management regimes and infrastructure to support a high-quality tourism industry which maximises returns to the local community.

In addition, the model must:

- empower the community in its role of preserving and managing the Daintree for its World Heritage Values; and
- be a model of management which will be an example for the world in the management of a sensitive area for conservation and tourism.

The Daintree Coast community forum held in April 2000, reached a high-level of agreement with the following statement:

Develop an institutional arrangement that allows the local community to determine its own management priorities, through funds accumulated from tourism cost-recovery.

Three-decades of heedless and sacrilegious desecration of the Blue Pools Declared Indigenous Sacred Site and all its surrounding World Heritage values, was utterly disgraceful. For all of the succession of responsible officials who were dutifully paid for protective services, not one intervened to halt the degradation and allow rehabilitation, as the site's declared conservation status requires. To one extent or another, they all skirted responsibility by blaming jurisdictional limitations or tenure complexities for their frustrations.

For the greater importance and binding responsibilities of World Heritage-listing and Cultural Heritage registration, why were these statutory weaknesses not resolved when first revealed and reported upon and why was the greater portion of the area that is not Crown Land and declared for conservation purposes, denied even the most fundamental provisions of protection for addressing these critical threats? Withholding the tools and authority that would otherwise allow for protection, robs the people and communities within the area of the support they are entitled to expect under the policy provisions of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment 1992 and leaves them vulnerable to environmental criticism and further deprivation of rights to subsist.

To avoid any repetition of this wanton damage, an overlay of regulatory protection must be declared for the entire area. As decades of imposed disadvantage will have forged a legacy of mistrust, freehold landowners must be free to exclude their own properties, but all those that accept inclusion and all other managers of tenures that are currently unprotected, should never again be informed that nothing can be done to intervene and halt degradation on the grounds of jurisdiction or tenure weakness. Rate-relief could provide an incentive for increased inclusion and inclusiveness should remain open for freehold property owners into the future. Visitor-management unquestionably needs improvement. Rampant and desecrating trespass into sacred sites is not entirely the fault of visitor insensitivity. Encouraged by unfettered referrals and the evidence of well-worn pathways, the immediate rewards of access and the absence of any serious consequence, tends to override any appeals to desist, from either signage or rebuking land-owners. The provision of an area-wide protection and management authority should supply all the requisite tools for comprehensive management. Offences against the area should be punishable by on-the-spot fines or referral to court for contended infringements or more serious violations, such that any penalties would derive income for fulfilment of the authority's duties.

Ecotourism

There are currently too many visitors making too inadequate a contribution to cover the full-costs of their management. Admittedly, there will always be some travellers determined to harvest as much value as they can possibly derive from the least amount of expenditure, but in an absence of any other economy, the destination's formal conservation land-use constrains the resident community to ecotourism for its sole economy and yet the overwhelming dominance of visitation is currently subsidised to not contribute.

In 2002, the International Year of Ecotourism, the Executive Director of the Wet Tropics Management Authority proposed a Wet Tropics rainforest tax in his keynote presentation at the International Ecotourism Conference in Cairns. This presentation summarised that the annual costs of providing tourism with public access throughout the Wet Tropics was around \$13.5-million, whilst the only cost-recovery was from CAP-fees, accruing around \$325,000 per annum. Under such terms, the taxpayer effectively subsidises tourism in the Wet Tropics by more than ninety-seven cents in the dollar. Under such generous subsidisation, the string of publicly-funded, free-entry boardwalks and picnic facilities north of the Daintree River attract so many day-trippers that the ferry is often unable to cope, causing queues to develop and sometimes horrendously so. During peak visitation periods, the subsidised clients of the CAP-holders are provided with priority access onto the ferry, whilst independent travellers that have pre-

booked onto scheduled tours on unsubsidised, privately-held lands within the same locality, are denied priority and actually have to queue longer to allow for the priority access of the subsidised day-trippers. This discriminatory treatment undermines ecotourism within the destination.

Another disturbing outcome of this International Ecotourism Conference, was the strategic re-purposing of ecotourism in Australia. From early on in the proceedings, industry leaders seemed to have already resolved that ecotourism would be undergoing a definitive paradigm shift. Aspiring to drive the tourism industry as a whole towards a more sustainable future, rather than merely representing an elite subset of nature-based tourism that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people, delegates were asked to consider the greater global benefits of a major international accommodation chain being persuaded to replace their toilet tissue with unbleached, re-cycled products, over the relatively local influence of even the purest practitioner of genuine ecotourism.

Fearful that this surrendering of principle would lead to the validating of CAP-day-tours with formal ecotourism accreditation, when the well-being of local people is by-passed and conservation costs are almost entirely tax-payer subsidised, I lent my voice of opposition to the fight for ecotourism not to compromise its definitive principles. Through the formality of a plenary session, I contended that genuine ecotourism transcends nature-based tourism by providing a medium through which travellers express their willingness to pay for what economists define as non-use values. Benefits derived from knowing particular environmental values exist and valuing their bequest to one's descendants and future generations, including ecosystem health, bio-diversity, rarity, endemism, scenic amenity and continuity of human habitation. I explained that off-reserve ecotourism particularly relies upon visitor-willingness to pay for these non-use values. With alternate economies in such short supply and so much relatively undamaged landscape enriched with the intellectual and interpretive expertise of Indigenous and other local inhabitants just begging to be cultivated, Australia possesses a remarkable ecotourism potential and the responsibility to nurture as much as possible towards fruition. Articulating respectability through the principle of sustainability and encouraging participation through a culture of altruism, Australia's tremendous ecotourism potential, to supplement and moderate the fluctuations of fickle rural economies and provide recompense and dignity to Australians living in remote parts of the country, should be pursued as a matter of national significance.

Alas, the proportion of members whose income derived benefit from the subsidisation of public-facilities was overwhelming and at the conclusion of the conference, despite impassioned counter-argument for protecting the integrity of genuine ecotourism, the majority of votes gave Australian ecotourism a re-purposing mandate. However, the almost complete subsidisation of nature-based tourism upon public-reserves, which contributes so very little to conservation costs and by-passes the well-being of local people, under the assurance of a nationally moderated ecotourism accreditation scheme, should be very carefully considered for its exclusionary influences to fair-trade across tenure, as both off-reserve conservation and also the socio-economic support of Australia's Indigenous and other remote communities, are very much at stake.

In accordance with its presentation requirement as defined within the meaning of the World Heritage Convention, my family business opened up its freehold World Heritage property to the general-public, for limited-access, guided and interpreted rainforest walking-tours. In an absence of any other permissible form of income, cost-recovery had to be derived from the land itself and through user-fees as a basis for the management of public-access and other World Heritage responsibilities. We have subsequently acquired the greatest respect and gratitude for our genuine ecotourism customers, whom we think of as partners-in-protection, for their willingness and enthusiasm to pay for the privilege of guided-entry, under the rewarding expertise of a long-term World Heritage inhabitant. It irks us, however, that so many of our pre-booked clients have missed their scheduled tours over the years, waiting in a ferry-

queue so that travellers on tours that don't necessarily contribute to the well-being of the local people can have priority access to competing facilities that are taxpayer-subsidised by more than ninety-seven-cents-in-the-dollar. We take even more offence from that subset of travellers that seem determined to pay for as little as possible and yet, under the pretence of being lost or confused, trespass onto our unsubsidised, privately-held property, for a sneaking glimpse. After three-decades, even the most creative and well-rehearsed of excuses have long surpassed our amusement, but when those interlopers steal into the Indigenous sacred site that we promised to forever protect from entry, then they also intrude into our minds' custodial centre of protective sensitivity and we think of them in an entirely different light.

Conclusion

With the advantage of a ferry-entrance, great conservation and ecotourism advancements could be achieved through a world-class management. Cassowary fatalities could be drastically reduced, if dogs without a dedicated transit license were prohibited from ferry-travel and licensing was strictly limited to bona fide residents and owners of dogs for disability assistance.

Despite arguments to the contrary and the rationalising contortions of even the most eccentric theoretical accounting, overcharging on the ferry has long been an established practice and so too has the provision of priority access, at least for some of the northbound traffic during peak visitation periods. If variable charging and priority entitlements were reconfigured to deliver ecotourism improvements within the destination, redress could be made for past impairments and great strides could be taken towards a much more sustainable ecotourism future. Through a relatively simple pre-booking system, travellers who have pre-paid for activities that satisfactorily contribute to both conservation and also improvement of the well-being of the residents within the destination, could be rewarded with priority access and ferry-fee relief. Tour-operators that contract with dedicated ecotourism service-providers within the destination, could regain priority access, if they satisfy an acceptable level of ecotourism contribution, however, to ensure the sustainability of ecotourism, travellers that are predisposed to avoiding payment wherever possible, could be compelled to contribute through substantially increased ferry-fees, on the proviso that the surplus funds go to the protection and management authority within the destination and not into DSC's consolidated fund, which currently accrues some \$1,150,000 p.a. beyond the \$4-million reserve.

Now is the time for DSC to aim for top of the world and claim the prestige of world's leading sustainable tropical shire, just as its strategic investment in the TEDO position intended. To this end, the DRC has tremendous potential to be a powerful catalyst project of the utmost universal importance; just as it should!

1. Legislative Assembly Record of Proceedings (Hansard) 19 September 1984 - Matters of public interest - Daintree Rainforest - http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/1984/1984_09_19.pdf
2. Daintree Rescue Package - Deed of Agreement between the State of Queensland and the Commonwealth of Australia, 15 December 1995.
3. Cairns, Rainforest CRC. "Daintree Futures Study." (2000).
4. Wet Tropics Management Authority - Protection Through Partnerships - <http://www.wettropics.gov.au/site/user-assets/docs/ProtectionThroughPartnerships.pdf>
5. Douglas Shire Council - Notice to Ratepayer pursuant to Section 579(1) of the "Local Government Act of 1993" concerning differential general rates, 1995.
6. Douglas Shire Council - Finance, Environment, Community & Library Services Committee Meeting - Discussion Paper - Specific purpose conservation levy to provide funding for implementation of the Daintree Futures Study, January 2002.
7. Cairns, Rainforest CRC. "Daintree Futures Study." (2000).
8. Supreme Court of Queensland - Citation: Douglas Shire Council v Queensland Ombudsman [2005] QSC 207 <https://archive.sclqld.org.au/qjudgment/2005/QSC05-207.pdf>

Bridge Or Ferry Across The Daintree River

1. **There should not be a bridge and the single ferry should remain in place.**
2. **The current unsustainable nature of tourism in the Daintree must be addressed as a matter of urgency, prior to a discussion to increase the number of ferries.**

Comments

- a. **The chaos at the ferry in peak times is due to the buses and Independent travellers arriving at the same time on a day trip out of Cairns and Port Douglas.**
- b. **What is happening now is very bad for tourism.** The world's second most irreplaceable World Heritage site is at risk, yet this doesn't rate a mention in the discussion paper.
- c. The majority of tourists are doing the Daintree Rescue Program's funded option – the 1-day trip from Cairns or Port Douglas arriving between 9.30am to midday and departing for the return journey at 2.00pm to 4.30pm. Cars and buses speed up to Cape Tribulation, look at the Cape, perhaps have lunch at our free picnic areas, stroll around a free boardwalk and think they have seen the Daintree.
- d. This option, which requires a continuous supply of funds from our taxes, is accompanied by a policy, "that Tourism north of the Daintree River be directed to places south of the River."
- e. The "mass tourism model" is non-contributory, because the money is taken in Cairns or Port Douglas, very little comes into the community. It is also accompanied by large numbers of FIT's, Free Independent Tourists who create impacts and irreversible damage e.g. Sacred places that ought to be closed to tourism.
- f. Ecologically Sustainable Tourism, Eco-tourism has been identified as the most sustainable form of tourism for the Daintree. The International Ecotourism Society and UNEP Delegation agree that ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.
- g. It is noted that conservation and management of "off reserve lands" has resulted in extensive revegetation over the past 25 years and that this is measurable and cost effective. The local community members are the legitimate custodians.
- h. The day trip is the outcome of Government planning and subsidisation, funded by the Daintree Rescue Program. Too many people not paying user fees, have created over-crowded conditions and chaos at the ferry.
- i. The "Daintree Rescue Program" was launched in 1995, funded equally by Australian and Queensland governments with 23million dollars of taxpayer money. **The principal aim of the program was protection and conservation of off-reserve lands that were not part of the National Park system.** The decisions-makers were representatives connected with Local, State and Federal governments. Their bias tended towards increasing the area of national park reserve and constructing public facilities to better manage an out-of-control State Government permit system.
- j. Excessive numbers of non-contributory travellers are unsustainable and damaging to the environment.

Recommendation:

Change the style of tourism to one that is appropriate to the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet, promote the area for its true values, and include the custodial community, the landholders who are part of the environment, supported by government.

Remove the disgraceful policy of redirecting tourism away from north of the Daintree River and encourage more meaningful immersion in nature, with longer stays. Give the Daintree what it deserves, a first-class tourism industry that is a model of sustainability and best practice.

Excess revenue should be allocated to achieving the desired model of high-class eco-tourism and conservation thereby empowering the community to meet its obligations.

Background:

In 1993, Environment Minister, the Hon. Molly Robson MLA, ordered a moratorium on any further commercial activity permits (CAPs) north of the Daintree River. Approximately 70 commercial tour operators had been authorised to carry 700,000 visitors per year and under the ensuing \$23million Daintree Rescue Program (DRP), visitor facilities and infrastructure were duly constructed to accommodate this latent visitor-carrying capacity.

In 1995, the QLD Government strategically expanded Daintree National Park, to include the former Mossman Gorge and Cape Tribulation National Parks. This expansion has caused great confusion; so much so that signage to the Mossman Gorge has long had 'Daintree National Park' officially concealed. Nevertheless, a wide geographic range of commercial tourism interests has intently marketed various Daintree-branded products, adding to the confusion.

In the same year, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) established Visitor Opportunities Policies and Actions, including:

Future growth beyond the sustainable level of visitor use in the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area will be directed to appropriate areas south of the Daintree River.

We are discussing this same old problem, which has never been addressed. Rather it has been drip-fed public money to prop it up, but the same scenario of the majority of vehicles arriving together at the ferry exists, creating long queues and spoiling the Daintree Experience This policy must be removed and compensatory action taken to undo the damage.

The ferry itself is a feature that we would not like to lose, and the forest is incomparable and irreplaceable.

Tourism has been reduced to the one-day trip to Cape Tribulation, with a short stop at a boardwalk featuring secondary growth. Very few get to immerse themselves in old-growth rainforest. The Daintree is over-run with one-day trippers who are offered mediocrity, funded by the taxpayers.

- I. A bridge would facilitate more of this style of tourism and would extend the impacts over 24hours/day. **Acknowledge that this problem exists and change the style of tourism in the Daintree to create a sustainable tourism industry.**
- II. **Using the ferry as the control point, encourage longer stays in the Daintree through promotional material and by charging higher rates for the 1-day pass and reducing costs for people booked into local accommodation, restaurants and activities.**
- III. Tourism has to pay the full costs of the boardwalks, and services, just like private businesses. "User pays" means sustainability and equity. The custodial community will benefit from best practice eco-tourism and the rainforest will be conserved.

- IV. Improved transport and communication systems could be developed.
- V. Accurate and full promotion of the Area and education is required to ensure that the Daintree is not permitted to slide into oblivion, and lost forever as a global treasure.

Conclusion:

1. The Daintree Ferry is the only entrance to the Daintree Rainforest. It is immediately recognised as the commencement of the Daintree experience. The custodial community relies on ecotourism for its livelihood and offers sustainable accommodation, restaurants and a variety of rainforest activities, which educate and inspire appreciation and conservation of the Daintree Rainforest. The ferry offers security to an area with no police presence.
2. **Using the ferry as the control point, we can encourage longer stays in the Daintree through promotional material and** by charging higher rates for the 1-day pass and reducing costs for people booked into over-night stays with local accommodation, restaurants and activities. Sustainable Eco-tourism will benefit the local custodians and support their presentation, protection and conservation.
3. **A second ferry is not recommended** to cope with the current over-subscription to the one-day trip and to maintain a service in emergencies. The deplorable intrusion and impacts of a non-contributing style of mass tourism must be reduced immediately and a higher yield, more satisfying immersion in nature developed and supported by all levels of government. The National Landscapes Program is a model that can be used for the Daintree Rainforest. Transport of gas on the ferry should only occur in off-peak times.
4. A bridge would exacerbate the existing problem of high impacts and a mediocre style of tourism that does not do justice to the World's second most irreplaceable World Heritage Treasure. This is not recommended. A continuous flow of traffic with a bridge would affect the wildlife, in particular nocturnal wildlife. There would be a massive increase in road deaths.
5. The Daintree Planning Package offered a vision for the area. It is not unreasonable to aspire to this objective:
"With the right sort of control and definition of permissible development on freehold blocks, the area could become as important as an example environmentally harmonious human occupation, as the surrounding natural treasures." (Hill 1982 ii)
6. **The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment** provides a policy framework that advises all levels of government that the users of natural resources should pay prices based on the *full life cycle costs of providing the goods and services* and that biodiversity conservation on *all lands* should be pursued in the most cost-effective way, by establishing incentive structures, including marketing mechanisms, which enable *those best placed* to maximise benefits and/or minimise costs to develop *their own* solutions and responses to environmental problems.
7. Clearly, this Act, which is part of Queensland's Nature Conservation Act is being breached by government subsidisation of mass tourism on boardwalks, which were constructed in opposition to local rainforest enterprises. The exclusion of the local community as beneficiaries of tourism and the added burden of a policy of redirection of tourism to south of the Daintree River must be addressed immediately.
8. **World Heritage: National Protection and International Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage:** To ensure that effective and active measures are taken for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory, each State Party to this Convention shall endeavour, in so far as possible, and as appropriate for each country.

Article 5 adopts a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes;

9. **Daintree Futures Study**

"The best future for the Daintree is not for it to become just another part of Australia's semiurban sprawl but for it to be a unique Rainforest Community: to protect its unique natural values as a base for an economy and a community. This is an ecologically, socially and economically sustainable solution. "

Recommendation 4: Residents participation in land stewardship through involvement in planning and management processes and incentives for ecologically sound land management

Why: For the long-term benefit of both residents and the environment, it is essential to have maximum participation of local people in environmental management and economic development. The local community has strongly expressed its desire for greater participation in decision making.

How: By expanding opportunities for nature-based tourism ventures and by including community representatives on proposed management structures. Providing financial incentives for voluntary nature conservation on private land, especially through the DSC rates system. Recognise community identity and the community guardianship of natural values by coordinated signage and information that informs visitors about residential land use in the area and the need to respect privacy.

Summary:

It will be an environmental and social disaster if Douglas Shire Council fails to address the cause of the chaos at the ferry – the subsidised day trip. Numbers need to be controlled. We cannot sacrifice the Daintree to mass tourism that destroys and moves on.

Using the ferry as the control point, encourage longer stays in the Daintree through improved promotional material and by charging higher rates for the 1-day pass and reducing costs for people booked into local accommodation and activities.

The local community needs to be consulted as the land managers in the planning process that includes the ferry and the area north of the Daintree River.

Local Traffic Only

We are strongly opposed to either alternative, which we are of the view is without any vision or understanding of the Daintree environment. Either solution would open the Daintree to huge increase in traffic.

The roads in the Daintree are not built to sustain such an increase in traffic and any increase in traffic would contribute further to Cassowary deaths as some people have no respect and speed through these areas.

The Cassowary would become even more endangered.

We have a unique and beautiful environment on our doorstep which brings international and tourists here to see the rainforest in its pristine beauty.

Consideration should be given to preserving this area as a National Park and limiting traffic to locals and allowing only pedestrian traffic for visitors or providing a shuttle service to take people to either accommodation or to the walks.

No Clear Preference as to Single or Two Ferries

Daintree River Bridge Going Backwards

The question of a bridge over the Daintree River raises two main issues; expediency and convenience; the other, long term environmental obligations, first as a state National Park and secondly as a signatory to the World Heritage Convention.

On the convenience side, the coast road is shorter than the inland Road from Cairns to Cooktown although slower in speed. There certainly are those locals and workers who only need the road for transport and want to minimise travel time. While convenient at times, speed is a direct threat to the safety of wildlife, push bike riders, day visitors and tourists who are there to experience the ancient forests and walk or dive slow to take it in. The road is part of the attraction where Cassowaries often waltz across at leisure – and that's right! – don't feed them or they may be run over. Speed limits and compliance will have to follow a bridge. A bridge would also start a cascade of other bottlenecks further up the road and never ending road works leading to a completion between normal transit road users and tourists and environmental protection. The calls for widening and straightening will be on going.

On the other hand, the *outstanding natural and cultural values*, of the Wet Tropics was dutifully documented over a long through process, nominated and accepted for World Heritage Listing by UNESCO and subsequently joined a list of just over 1000 other countries, where nations declared *they would save their special places if we saved ours*. We must honour our pledge. All the statutory planning in the past has favoured reduced speed limits and a scenic, park style concept for the road. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been committed to conserve and expand the World Heritage values while attempting to integrate tourism and visitors with the natural environment.

Considerable investment from many sources has been made to present, support, protect and enhance the World Heritage Area over the last 30+ years which has created the true iconic Daintree attraction while at the same time, enhancing core environmental values. It is difficult to try compromising between different groups and views since the coastal strip is so narrow and all the public and private land from the Daintree River to Helensvale either has or holds the capacity to contain World Heritage values. We might ask 'if we can't protect our most important environmental landscape, what can we protect? Are we heading toward extinction tourism?

I think it's clear the commitment to conserve, protect, maintain and enhance the biological and cultural values that have been the overriding planning issue for decades, need to continue. Presently, I can see only more reason to keep environmental protection of the Daintree at the top of any future planning considerations. Options like park and electric mini bus travel need to be considered with other options. The bridge has to be viewed as a threat, a competitor to those well-defined World Heritage values.

Not many words are really needed.

An idea with no feasibility (I.e. costs v benefits v impacts) that will open up a 20 million year + forest to urbanisation pressures over the next 200 plus years (no matter who says they can protect it) and also disrupt the regional community like it has not been seen for 30 years.

Whoever is responsible for this should own up and accept responsibility publicly. And explain their motive and any vested interests.

If there are private vested interests driving this non feasible (clearly – without question) and community dividing idea who are connected to politics then this needs to be referred to Crime and Corruption Commission.

Definitely No Bridge

I would like to register my opposition to a bridge being built over the Daintree River. The plan was already rejected and should not be revived. DEFINITELY NO BRIDGE !!

This decision will define what we as a community value

This momentous decision by our Shire Councillors will define what we as a community value.

It is my hope as a long-term visitor, and now resident of four years that we embrace the natural environment north of the Daintree River. I propose we take a bold stand in declining the bridge proposal and choose to be "Gatekeepers to the Daintree".

I DO support economic development in the region, but I DO NOT support economic development in the Daintree pocket north of the river that may irreparably damage the area for future generations.

I WILL support empathetic economic stimulus to ensure business and residents of the Daintree can be viable.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION (NO MATTER WHICH OPTION IS FINALLY CHOSEN)

- a. Remove the current ferry ticketing options.
- b. Maintain free travel for residents north of the river.
- c. Continue Resident annual passes, but redefine them as an annual RESIDENT PERMIT.
- d. Maintain a northside priority lane.
- e. Introduce a southside priority lane.
- f. Provide free passage for suppliers via an annual COMMERCIAL PERMIT with council.
- g. Introduce a permit system for persons from outside of the shire (tourists/travellers).
- h. A permit system can provide control of numbers visiting the region and allows limiting of tourists should the area be in danger of too many visitors.
- i. The introduction of a PERMIT system would foster advance PERMIT purchases providing Daintree business, and regional Tour operators information of high and low traffic periods to assist staffing and stock purchase planning.
- j. Install a significant gateway entry on approach to the Daintree River crossing to enforce the significance of entering a special part of Australia within our shire.

Thank you for asking, and reviewing my submission.

Disappointment And Disillusionment

Hearing about your Shire's proposal for a bridge across the Daintree River, I cannot feel anything but disappointment and disillusionment with your Shire's ideas there so far. Having been asked to believe in everything that is World Heritage I'm puzzled as to why you would want to replace the punt across the river.

If persons enjoyment for living in the Daintree is not compensated enough by lowering the fee so they can feel and realise how their identities need believing in as pioneers as well as business opportunities within the area designated as the Daintree really well.

The Holy Spirit would not charge them any more than \$6 a vehicle, so they can cross the river by punt whenever they need to. To be within an environment idea such as World Heritage and as the Daintree National Park and its immediate and surrounding concerns is their most wanted identity.

As an environmental artist and chaplain, I'm also an experienced high school teacher, former builder, farmer, pilot as well as a story teller for movies and serials.

Residents of the Daintree perhaps don't really realise than in the needs of successful business requirements – identify is very much needed for mental wellbeing and is too often overlooked as vital.

Unwanted anxiety can start to manifest itself horribly to the detriment of the total wildlife community of themselves. Until they realise you won't want them very well in pandering to them!

Maybe your World Heritage status overwhelms them too much with what they see in tourists who visit them there. It will increase the speed as well as traffic into the Daintree area only to realise too many spoils and too many dead cassowaries, tree kangaroos and other birds and animals possibly not even seen by tourists also. It is amazing just to think of visiting the Daintree by punt across the river. This is so thrilling an adventure into total wonderment of itself cared for everywhere.

Needs are always to be in the environmental aspirations but market place ideas always want to dominate.

A bridge would be a disaster

I speak to the Forum from a 'recent arrival' perspective. A one week holiday turned in to a permanent residency eighteen years ago! During that time I've worked in a number of positions in the tourism transport industry including a six year stint as a driver/guide into the Daintree area. I've been able to gauge "what's hot and what's not" more from our visitors lately by being involved in passenger transport to and from the airport.

The following are my suggestions from that experience in an effort to satisfy the problems arising from too much congestion at the Daintree Ferry during the peak season. There are many possible solutions - a bridge should not even be on the table. The only group to benefit from such a move would be short sighted development obsessed landowners for obvious reasons.

It has been suggested that the main contributing factor to the congestion is the massive increase in self-drive i.e. couples in hire cars. A campaign needs to highlight the advantages of taking a group tour. It's proven time and time again by the feedback I've received that the advantages are indeed great and visitors are always pleased they had taken that option.

The ferry itself could operate a passenger bus that could board and alight passengers either side of the river to link up with tour companies operating two buses. Driver/Guides could either travel with a group parking buses or meet up and swap a northbound with a southbound group. The possibilities are endless and it has to be remembered, are only required during the busy time of the day ~ there is no need for replica office/depot facilities.

Alternately a separate small passenger ferry could be contracted to operate during busy times to do the same thing. This option could perhaps incorporate crocodile spotting. There are many ways other than a bridge to relieve congestion. A bridge would be a disaster. The private hire cars would have good access for a year or two, and then the same congestion problem will return, requiring further modifications to roads and car parks - and so on - and so on. Over visitation will kill the visiting experience!

Can I leave with a lesson learnt by a number of Australian world class tourism operations? I am referring to the six stars cutback experiences in and around Australia which is now being replicated in other locations globally. "The Top End" is a favourite and often booked out by gold and platinum class clients during the peak season. Their guests fly back from the top end with the coach and crew driving back over a night and a day to meet up with their charges back in Cairns from whence their journey began. Every year I ask the principles of these companies if they have weakened and considered taking bookings for a 'budget' return trip so that the efficiency of the vehicles and staff would be maximised? Their answer is always the

same; "You can't come back from the top end " you must go to the top end!" The pro- bridge lobby need to understand this kind of logic before a similar debasement threatens the uniqueness of the Daintree experience.

Do the right thing

Dear Mayor Michael Kerr, Surely your role is to protect the Daintree, not destroy it. Please, think deeply; do the right thing for your place and your community.

Preference for a bridge

Submission for a Bridge

This is an ongoing problem which has not been adequately resolved. The last review was in 2004. Sixteen years later, the problem has compounded with the increased fascination by tourists of this magnificent area.

Common law protects a person's property rights as fundamental for centuries. A bridge would allow free and unrestricted access particularly for emergencies after midnight when the current ferry does not operate.

There is an issue that has not been taken into consideration and that is of Public Health. Idling cars with their air-conditioning going for a length of time is a disaster waiting to happen with carbon monoxide poisoning being the silent killer. There is no alternative area for visitors to exit their cars and sit in a shaded spot whilst waiting for the ferry. Last month there was a death of a young lad who was water siding by carbon monoxide. The threat is real.

A bridge would be paid for by State and Federal government and a \$20 toll for visitors would cover any loss to the council according to reports. This is less than the current charge for vehicular crossing. Recently, in WA, the Bow River bridge cost (with a 260m span and 2.5km either end of the bridge for embankments and guide banks) was funded with \$30.79million by Federal Govt. and \$7.7 million by State Govt. The span for the Daintree at the current ferry location is about 290m so the cost would be more but not by a lot. The 2004 report by Guy Chester has the 2 lane bridge with a 9 year payback if a toll was used.

2 Ferries could be another option but this involves clearing of some mangroves, however growth in tourism over time or the peak season would soon see queues and delays as well as EPA approval for more dredging. Also there is a problem with Maritime Law in letting water craft through with 2 Ferries so this is not a solution to the existing problem. The 2004 report has an 8 year payback for 2 ferries. The local indigenous Elders regard the Daintree as part of their Dreamtime and dredging of the river in any Instance is considered an affront to them. The Elders also wish for a bridge.

A bridge is more environmentally friendly due to much less dredging. Security could be with 24 hr cameras, health of waiting persons would not be compromised as emissions from Idling cars would be eliminated on both sides of the river as there won't be any waiting times for emergencies during Ferry operating times. Many businesses in the Daintree rely on tourists and a bridge would enhance their business as long wait times certainly do not. Holiday memories matter and a long ferry wait time is not the positive impression we wish to leave on visitors. It is disrespectful to them.

We wish to thank the Council for the opportunity to put forward our thoughts and viewpoint in this ongoing saga and hope that logic and common sense will prevail, as it does not seem that this problem will be ultimately resolved without a bridge solution.

The Ferry Is Past Its Use By Date

As a ratepayer to this council I have long held the personal belief that a bridge crossing is the only way we can continue to service the northern side of the Daintree River. The ferry is past its use by date, and a bridge at that location is out of the question due the flood prone location.

To continue with the ferry is ridiculous because of the continual dredging tacking place this is not a 24 hr service and in this day and age people still fall ill have accidents between midnight and 6 AM causing emergency concerns.

The way forward is to join with the Wujul Wujul Aboriginal Shire and Cook Shire to promote a coastal trip north in the dry season, then an inland trip south for the tourist, locals can have less return traffic in the tourist season there by reducing maintenance on our roads as locals we cannot continue the way we are.

What many new community members (say the past 40 years) including the Shire Engineers in this report have not acknowledged is that as far back as 1966 a feasibility survey was done and two locations were determined one the east side of Virgil island (2874 Mossman Daintree Rd) and one to the west at Killkerries Point, The property was surveyed the proposal was to build an high level bridge due to the shortest crossing point and depth of the river with least length of flooding both sides. In looking at the site today with the help of modern satellite imagery you can only wonder now why no one has seen the possibilities of success.

The bridge will open walkways for pedestrian and cycle tracks greater than the millions of dollars presently being spent south of Port Douglas on the much discussed and funded costly walking trail to benefit very few locals.

The cost of underground power will be greatly reduced due to the tunnel? Adding great benefit to locals and businesses presently struggling with generators and poor solar systems. The option back then was to travel to forest creek and not back to the existing road from the ferry, and build a road over to Diwan and not use the now costly to maintain Alexander Range!! It was at the time too costly due to low population and terrain encountered.

Today the possibility of tunnelling the short distance from Forest Creek to Diwan and not disturbing the natural rain forest everyone comes to enjoy, other counties of the world in including our own in Brisbane employ this method this is my view without an engineering background!!

It should be noted of the commencement without fanfare, the section of railway line now known as the Kuranda Scenic Railway, was completed near 130 years ago. This supremely difficult feat of engineering had been accomplished at considerable cost to the Queensland Government treasury (more than £1 million) and in the lives of workers lost. The railway climbing the rugged terrain of the Barron Gorge required construction of 15 tunnels, 55 bridges and more than 150 cuttings. Hundreds of tons of rock and earth were excavated by men with shovels and wheelbarrows, aided by explosives, this was an achievement of significant importance to our lives as we know it today. If a similar project was constructed today with the modern tunnel boring equipment the whole project could be done without disrupting the day to day life as we know it over the river. If this project was costed and payback time over one hundred years was engineered we could start immediately.

Our rate base is too small to service the tourists who are damaging our roads in cars, in Buses and 4WDs by doing return trips to Cape Tribulation (Ex Cape Tribulation and now Daintree National Park) Unless we can achieve some form of tourist bed tax in the future.

We all know the cost of this project could never be funded by 12,000 rate payers, but if this was classed as a project of significance for the world to see I am sure we should be able to use some of the \$5 billion dollars that has been sitting for last 5 years in the volts of the Northern Infrastructure Fund operating out of Cairns.

Another type of funding could be found if politicians had the backbone to think to the future and just do it as they 130 years ago in Cairns, you can't lockup the rainforest you have to manage it sensibly, people come from all over the world to see.

The people on the northern side should be able to access normal services such as contractors (Plumbing, Electrical etc) due to not having to wait for a congested barge service. If we can get started now the possible build timeframe would at least 10 years so the barge will still be needed.

[A polluting ferry or two, diesel generators, feral pigs, and lack of infrastructure](#)

Two ferries will require significant clearing of mangroves and a greater amount of dredging, and depending on placement will require the boat ramp and or the new toilets on the north side to be moved or removed.

Council currently spends approx. \$270,000 per year for one dredging event for the current ferry. Two ferries, one larger one, will require more dredging of the river and the cost of this not just in monetary expenditure but also a cost in terms of environmental impact. There were three major dredging events in the 18/19 year when there was a prolonged wet season. Two paid for by council one by disaster relief funding. Cost approx. \$810,000. There appears to be minor dredging taking place on a regular basis as well. Note the dredging cost is dependent on the amount of sand taken out of the river. Dredging is not by suction and results in silt going into the Great Barrier Reef basin. The river floor takes a month or more to settle after each dredging and the disturbance brings acid sulphate soils up which degrade the water quality, once again flowing out to the reef and affecting the flora and fauna of both the river and the Great Barrier Reef Basin.

The Environmental Protection Act (Water and Wetland Biodiversity) Policy 2019 has responsibility for identifying environmental values for waters and wetlands, including monitoring and reporting on the condition of waters. Council could develop some management goals as prescribed by this act in order to maintain the composition and condition of the river bed, bank, and mangroves in order to protect the Great Barrier Reef Basin. The Daintree River Basin is known as basin 108 under the Act and the Basins Environmental Values and Water Quality Objectives to enhance or protect the environmental values of the Basin were last published by the Department in November 2014.

The current ferry, which under the two ferry proposal will be maintained, is diesel driven. This results in pollution from the diesel engine and ongoing dredging.

Both ferries will be required to undergo an annual maintenance check and inspection for AMSA Survey requirements in order to maintain their Certificate of Operation. This may result in them being out of the water for up to five, six or more days dependent on river and weather conditions or if they require repair or renewing of parts etc. (Cost \$ unknown, environmental impact unknown). It is also unknown whether AMSA, to reduce their costs, will require this for both ferries at once or whether they will allow them to be inspected at separate times. Last time this resulted in severe disruption and disadvantage to individuals and businesses. School children and residents had to be ferried across the river by a boat hired by Council and if they did not leave a car on the other side, needed to board a bus to take them into Mossman, catch a bus back to the ferry carrying their groceries or other purchases or having to make appointments that allowed them to meet the bus timetable. Businesses and their employees lost revenue for the closure days. An emergency would have required the use of a helicopter. Emergency personnel were accommodated on the north side for the duration at what cost is also unknown.

The solar driven ferry may require extra power during flood times and in the wet season. This may require a solar farm, extra batteries or diesel generators all of which are less environmentally friendly than a bridge and all of which will require more infrastructure surrounding the facility.

A second lot of infrastructure, i.e. ticket booths, gates, bollards, piers, a solar panel array or batteries or another generator to drive the second ferry to provide all weather access, another

or wider access road, wider or new ramps on either side of the river, more cables, more signage and will result in more maintenance, second Survey costs, another ugly entry to the Daintree, loss of habitat including mangroves and more obstacles for those who use the river, including the wild life.

Crocodiles and other fauna having to negotiate two ferries may also result in movement away from current territories and along with their own disruption, disrupt the livelihoods of those operating crocodile tours from the riverside near the ferries access points.

Children, babies, animals and the old are all required to sit in hot, stationary cars for the wait periods and the duration of the ferry crossing. Not to mention residents shopping deteriorating and resulting in less of a usable life span of perishable food. A bridge would alleviate this and the resulting pollution from those cars that sit with their engine running to maintain their air conditioner while in the queue.

One issue re the chaos at the ferry raised by others (Daintree Seniors Group) is the loss of an eco-tourism economy in the North Douglas community when the original DRP "Daintree Rescue Program" invested most of the funds received into National Park Facilities that cater to day tour operators from Cairns and Port Douglas, who arrive en masse at the ferry. The chaos at the ferry in peak times is due to the buses and independent travellers arriving at the same time on a day trip out of Cairns and Port Douglas. This is one cause of the delays at the ferry, disruption and increasing environmental damage that should be addressed and changed. Cars and buses speed up to Cape Tribulation, look at the Cape, the bus tours mostly provide a lunch at the free picnic areas, use the free boardwalks, use the public toilets and leave at about the same time of the day, once again forming long queues creating chaos at the ferry. This excellent and well informed submission offers several solutions to the problems outlined, one being to use the ferry as a control point and encourage longer stays in the Daintree by adjusting costs.

A different solution to the one offered by the parties who wrote the above could be that a bridge would allow day-trippers to choose their own times for arriving and leaving and a more steady flow of traffic accordingly and therefore a more pleasant experience than driving in a queue all the way along the road. The slow tourist will not feel so pressured that they have to maintain the speed of the queue, residents and employees may not get so frustrated and buses can meet their schedules without having to pressure drivers in front of them and then speed. Tourists can take their time and may also choose to stay for overnight or longer periods when they don't feel restricted by time and don't feel "locked in" once the ferry closes.

Commercial Activity Permits also appear to be over-subscribed. The number of bus tour groups is placing enormous strain on the environment and the current resources. The buses speed across the range and up and down Cape Tribulation road in order to meet their schedules, endangering other drivers and wildlife. They use the public facilities which are inadequate for the numbers of groups and are often left in a filthy state. They take over the picnic areas and car parks leaving little for other tourists and large numbers on the free boardwalks disturb and damage the flora and fauna. Most do not support community driven ventures, and are therefore non-contributory in terms of both community and environmental support. Perhaps a condition of a permit could be that they state which two (or more) community ventures they will support i.e. a rainforest guided tour, a visit to the ice cream factory, lunch at a restaurant, a stop at the Discovery Centre, etc.

Tour operators who are objecting to a bridge and suggesting a park and ride option appear to be undermining local businesses and therefore opportunities for local community activity, employment and business ventures.

Our Tourist and Development Officer perhaps could focus on all the offerings in the Daintree area and assist with a marketing campaign to support local businesses, advocate for the area

and provide opportunities for the local community to become involved and obtain local employment. This community relies on ecotourism for its livelihood and offers sustainable accommodation, restaurants and a variety of rainforest activities, which educate and inspire appreciation and conservation of the Daintree Rainforest. The area with the new micro grid and our sustainable life style and businesses could become a showpiece for the Douglas Shire if supported appropriately.

Eco-tourism is defined by several bodies as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. The Environmental Protection Act 1994 objective is to protect Qld's environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains ecological processes (Ecological sustainable development).

A polluting ferry or two, diesel generators, feral pigs, and lack of infrastructure smacks of hypocrisy and leads to campaigns such as "Save the Daintree Again" which are designed to undermine the community and create economic deprivation. Instead we should be supporting the local community as a responsible custodial community.

Groups such as the DSSG advocating for the two ferry solution have stated that a bridge would result in further development along the Daintree Coast in the World Heritage area. There is an award winning town development plan that prevents future development of those areas. They also state that it will result in 24hour traffic leading to a profound impact on the endangered cassowary and other wild life.

These are nothing but predictions but these groups choose to state them as facts. This is a constant theme which by repetition takes root in people's minds and results in myth and misinformation being presented as fact. Some people north of the river have been confused by receiving the Council Survey and a DSSG flyer advocating for the two ferry solution attached to each other in the mail.

Given there is now ferry access from 5.00am to 12midnight, with those needing to catch the early ferry for employment leaving the Cape through to Cow Bay in the early hours of the morning another possible four hours between midnight and 4am is probably not going to make quite such a profound impact as suggested by these groups with the early morning residents fully aware of possible wild life on the road. In fact, I would suggest there is more danger to the residents from possible feral pig strikes than anything else.

Feral pigs in the rainforest present more of a danger to the environment, cassowary and other wildlife than any of the local communities and tourists combined. Ferries or a bridge seem insignificant to the impact these animals are making to this World Heritage area.

A bridge would alleviate the chaos and disruption with regard to the above discussion points as well as prevent long queues and waiting times and allow residents more opportunities for employment, more access to over-time, evening shifts in hospitality, as emergency service personnel, as hospital workers and aged care workers. It could provide for pedestrian and cycle access separately.

Tourists and residents would not be required to make expensive overnight stays in order to take early morning flights from Cairns airport and waiting times for appointments for Cairns specialist doctors and hospital procedures would be reduced because they could travel at any time over a bridge and not be restricted by the ferry times, maintenance shut-downs, long queues and other delays.

Tradesmen and delivery vehicles would have better, quicker access resulting in improved services for residents and businesses over a bridge.

A bridge would require one set of minimal infrastructure and could provide a more attractive entry to the Daintree. The current ferry could become an historical artefact and be placed in a park alongside its current operating site, where tourists could see it and read about some of the history of the area. A little forethought could present a very attractive entry to a unique area.

A bridge would allow residents on the north side to make and keep appointments, arrive to work in the morning or for an evening shift on time and attend after school activities without having to factor in extra ferry times in case the petrol truck or gas truck or emergency vehicles or a peak season queue requires waiting for the ferry to make a second trip. Emergency personnel and vehicles could gain immediate access to the roads and reduce time to reach patients or other emergency call outs over a bridge. The fifteen to twenty minutes negotiating the ferry could be the difference between life and death for someone on the North side of the river, and because the ferry goes at full speed across the river with an emergency vehicle on board putting a strain on the ferry infrastructure it could break down mid-stream and increase the chances of further injury or a death.

[I Would Prefer To Have A Bridge Across The Daintree River](#)

As a resident of the Shire and a regular user of the ferry I would like to make the following submission.

- There would be significant Council costs involved in creating and maintaining the two ferry option. The on-going dredging would have a major detrimental impact on the environment. Would this meet the conditions of the Environmental Protection Act?
- Two ferries will require significant clearing of mangroves and a greater amount of dredging, which will cause more silt to be deposited on the Great Barrier Reef. They will need double the space of the current ferry with all its surrounding fences, cables, etc. They will cause more problems on the river bed, for wildlife, and businesses on the river.
- The current ferry, which under the two ferry proposal will be maintained, is run on polluting diesel and needs on-going dredging. Dredging is not by suction and results in silt going into the Great Barrier Reef basin.
- The river floor takes a month or more to settle after each dredging and the disturbance brings acid sulphate soils up which degrade the water quality, once again flowing out to the reef and affecting the flora and fauna of both the river and the Great Barrier Reef Basin.
- Both ferries will be required to undergo an annual maintenance check and inspection for AMSA Survey requirements in order to maintain their Certificate of Operation. This may result in them being out of the water for up to five, six or more days dependent on river and weather conditions or if they require repair or renewing of parts etc. The costs involved may be significant, the environmental impact will need to be assessed.
- AMSA, to reduce their costs, may require this for both ferries at once or they may allow them to be inspected at separate times. Last time this resulted in severe disruption and disadvantage to individuals and businesses.
- The solar driven ferry may require extra power during flood times and in the wet season. This may require a solar farm, extra batteries or diesel generators all of which are less environmentally friendly than a bridge and all of which will require more infrastructure surrounding the facility.
- A second lot of infrastructure, i.e. ticket booths, gates, bollards, piers, a solar panel array or batteries or another generator to drive the second ferry to provide all weather access, another or wider access road, wider or new ramps on either side of the river, more cables, more signage and will result in more maintenance, second Survey costs, another ugly entry to the Daintree, loss of habitat including mangroves and more obstacles for those who use the river, including the wild life.
- Two ferries may disrupt the crocodile tours at the riverside near the ferries access points. Crocodiles and other river dwellers having to negotiate two ferries may move away from current territories and establish themselves elsewhere.

- Waiting in hot cars while waiting at the ferry and having to turn off engines on the ferry has resulted in heat related illness in children, babies, animals and the old. We used to be able to open our cars and get out to speak to others on the ferry. It was much more pleasant and social trip. Now we are made to sit in airless, hot cars for the duration
- There is little or no contribution to the community, other than to create frustration, with cars and buses all arriving at about the same time from Cairns and Port Douglas for day trips who speed up to Cape Tribulation, use all the facilities provided for them, then leave at about the same time of the day, once again forming long queues creating chaos at the ferry.
- The large number of bus tour groups is placing enormous strain on the environment and the current resources. The buses speed across the range and up and down Cape Tribulation road in order to meet their schedules, endangering other drivers and wildlife.
- The tour groups use the public facilities which are inadequate for the numbers of groups and are often left in a filthy state. They take over the picnic areas and car parks leaving little for other tourists and large numbers on the free boardwalks disturb and damage the flora and fauna. Most do not support community business.
- A condition of a Commercial Activity Permit for these tour groups should be that they must be accountable for supporting the local community.
- Eco-tourism is defined by several bodies as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. The Environmental Protection Act 1994 objective is to protect Qld's environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains ecological processes (Ecological sustainable development).
- DSSG and associated groups advocating for the two ferry solution have stated that a bridge would result in further development along the Daintree Coast in the World Heritage area. Future development of these areas has been prohibited for a long time.
- They also state that a bridge will result in 24hour traffic leading to a profound impact on the endangered cassowary and other wild life. They state this as though it is fact but this is not necessarily going to follow. These groups have no empathy or consideration for the local communities and how their activities impact them and the human cost of the personal and economic disadvantages they cause.
- Currently ferry access is from 5.00am to 12midnight. The four hours between midnight and 4am is probably not going to have a profound impact. The early morning residents are fully aware of possible wild life on the road.
- Feral pigs present more of a danger to early and late drivers, the environment, cassowary and other wildlife in this World Heritage area. Residents travelling outside daylight hours see more feral pigs than any other wildlife.
- A bridge would prevent long queues and waiting times and allow residents more opportunities for employment, more access to over-time, evening shifts in hospitality, as emergency service personnel, as hospital workers and aged care workers.
- Tourists and residents would not be required to make expensive overnight stays in order to take early morning flights from Cairns airport.
- Waiting times for appointments for Cairns specialist doctors and hospital procedures would be reduced because residents could travel at any time over a bridge and not be restricted by the ferry times, maintenance shut-downs, long queues and other delays.
- A bridge would allow residents on the north side to make and keep appointments, arrive to work in the morning or for an evening shift on time and attend after school activities without having to factor in extra ferry times in case the petrol truck or gas truck or emergency vehicles or a peak season queue requires waiting for the ferry to make a second trip.
- Tradesmen and delivery vehicles would have better, quicker access resulting in improved services for residents and businesses over a bridge.
- A bridge would require one set of minimal infrastructure and could provide a more attractive entry to the Daintree. Wouldn't it be good to see the current ferry put in a park alongside its current operating site, where tourists could see it and read about some of the history of the area?

- An attractive entry to the Daintree could be created with something to reflect the uniqueness of the area.
- Most importantly emergency service personnel and vehicles could gain immediate access to the roads and reduce time to reach patients or other emergency call outs over a bridge. The fifteen to twenty minutes negotiating the ferry could be the difference between life and death for someone on the North side of the river, and a break-down of the ferry with an emergency vehicle on board could increase the chances of further injury or a death.

Low concrete causeway with architect designed drawbridge

Thank-you for inviting community members to have their say on the Daintree River crossing options and organizing the community consultations session to better inform residents on the options being considered.

There is a clear need to transfigure the current crossing. We need to reduce, or preferably eliminate, the waiting time. We also need to remove the visual pollution and confusion caused by the numerous road signs, flashing LED instructions and bollards as we approach the crossing.

Personally, I think the best solution is a simple, low concrete causeway style bridge with an architecturally designed drawbridge section at the northern bank of the river, for example the Slauerhoff Bridge – pictured right and below.



For more information see:

<https://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/infrastructure/a3888/4305522/>

The bridge should be built at the location of the current ferry. The other three possible locations for a bridge (see: The Daintree River Crossing Options Assessment Report -25th August) would direct traffic through areas inhabited by southern cassowaries (endangered), tree kangaroos (near threatened), spotted quolls (near threatened population decreasing) and other precious wildlife that I'd prefer not to see as road kill.

The drawbridge solution has the following benefits: eliminates waiting time; the Daintree River remains navigable; uses current road infrastructure; could include cycling and pedestrian lanes; increased safety; removal of visual pollution on approach to the crossing; improved environmental outcomes for the Great Barrier Reef as no dredging is required; and providing an iconic, architecturally designed gateway, which is fitting for the World Heritage listed Daintree Rainforest

If Council decides not to build a bridge then the access roads need to be upgraded to be double lane on the northern and southern approaches to the ferry so that locals can access the priority lane at all times.

If Council decides on the two-ferry option then I would prefer one ferry being dry docked and only put into service when the main ferry needs to be dry docked for inspections and maintenance. I wouldn't like to see more dredging and roads built through mangroves.

Preference for a two lane bridge

I have previously during this consultation period expressed my preference for a two lane bridge across the Daintree River.

The current ferry service is outdated. There needs to be a 24 hour service, 365 days a year to cross the Daintree River. Introduction of a two ferry service is not practical given the sand build up on the upstream side of the current ferry and the need for continual dredging to maintain the ferry channel to the detriment of the environment. One only has to view an aerial photography on a fine day to view the ferry channel and the relative sand build up. There has not been a flood event or normal wet season for quite some years to wash sand downstream and fill the ferry channel which effectively will stop the ferry from running.

Ticketing is also a problem with delays at the ticket booths or on-board the ferry. On the south bank the line-up at ticket booths and slowness of issuing tickets and handing out information often results in the ferry leaving the south bank not fully loaded. The delay would be alleviated by through traffic as in concessional card holders etc. to have access to go straight onto the ferry. The priority lane does not solve this problem as it is not open all the time and in the long line-ups you actually have to make it to the ticket booths to access the priority lane or risk police fines for jumping the line-up. Furthermore, there is no priority lane on the north bank so in normal years (no Covid) going from north to south, forget accessing the ferry during the afternoon of tourist season unless you wish to line up for long periods of time and duck into the forest for a bathroom break. Ticketing should be isolated from the ferry site to allow optimum flow of traffic. And also don't forget about the fuel and gas trucks.

All persons regardless should be able to cross the Daintree River without impediments and unnecessary delays. This is a monumental decision for the Douglas Shire Council not to be taken lightly.

Improve Accessibility and Introduce a Permit System to control numbers

I wish to submit my view for consideration on the Daintree River Crossing:

- Build a dual carriageway bridge to replace the ferry. This will improve accessibility to and from the area during normal weather events.
- To address concerns of 'over use' of the area, implement a "Permit" system for non-shire residents to enter the Daintree area.

My rationale:

Having a bridge connect the Daintree will improve accessibility to the area. This will allow easier and more cost-effective access and egress for:

- Daintree residents and business owners
- Essential services (e.g. deliveries of supplies, food, medical services etc)
- Emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance, SES etc)

Using a 'Permit' system for non-residents to enter the Daintree is a concept that is used in many tourist areas overseas. The advantages I see for having a system like this are:

- Limit "access" to the number of tourists into the area at any one time.
- Set a cap on the number of permits issued on a particular day.
- Provide a forecast of visitors into the area as they book their permits in advance. This can give business operators a good indicator of the level of business activity to be expected.
- Continuous review on the impacts of visitors on the area – environmentally and local business activity. If the area is 'overwhelmed' then the mechanism for cutting numbers is easily done with reducing the number of available permits.
- Able to adjust the number of permits issued in any particular time period.
- The cost of a permit to enter the Daintree replaces any 'toll' on a crossing a bridge.
- With the number of permits limited for a particular time period, tourists are more likely to plan their trip in advance. This will be able to provide a forecasted snapshot of upcoming activity into the area that can be shared with all stakeholders in real time.

I would like to thank you for considering my input during this consultation process.

Lower Impact Cost Effective Bridge Solution for Present Location

As you are currently evaluating the possibility of bridging the Daintree River, I urge you to consider the following option which I had investigated and partially priced for a possible submission into the previous Council's ferry tender process.

The suggestion is to consider a simple, low, concrete 'causeway style' bridge for most of the river width, with a raised drawbridge section of limited span at the northern landing of the bridge (where the deep river channel is). Principally this option would provide the following features:

- Keeps the river navigatable
- Smaller craft can always pass under the northern side of the bridge
- Yachts can pass "on appointment" when bridge is open
- No need for building new roads
- Retains equivalent or improved flood resilience as the ferry
- Drawbridge maintains some option to limit traffic flows if desired
- Lower bridge may be lower impact and less of an eyesore compared to other options
- A serviced drawbridge may help retain some road toll if desired.

In contrast to my original naïve impression, it turns out the construction cost of the drawbridge section is not prohibitive. I researched this during my last stay in the Netherlands in 2019.

Background research.

During a business trip I contacted a few specialist engineering firms to discuss the drawbridge option. They are willing to provide plans on a consulting basis and work with local Australian engineering and construction firms. The draw bridge designs are neither patented nor seen as licensed IP. The mechanical components are simple due to use of counterweights for lift, and are suitable for salt water environments.

In particular the Dutch province of Friesland has literally thousands of drawbridge constructions of various sizes, from pedestrian/push-bike to dual-lane road carriageways. In a low country with a lot of channels and even more sailing boats, cost effective bridge construction that maintains navigability of water channels is understandably a basic requirement.

Although I did not fully assess the cost for the drawbridge option, it appears to be below the numbers mentioned in the Options Assessment Report. If the Council would like to consider this option, I would be happy to connect Council engineers with my contacts in the Netherlands.

Not Sure About Diesel Ferries

In regard to the bridge the decision should rest on long term cost. And the environment. Not sure diesel ferries tick that box.

My preference = BRIDGE

- Under the two ferry proposal the current ferry will be maintained. This is diesel driven which results in pollution from the diesel engine and ongoing dredging.
- Two ferries will require significant clearing of mangroves and a greater amount of dredging, and will require more infrastructures, disrupting the river bed, wildlife, and businesses on the river and pushing silt onto the Great Barrier Reef.
- JCU may offer their expertise to determine which would be more environmentally acceptable.
- There would be significant costs involved in creating and maintaining the two ferry option. Dredging would have a major impact on the environment. Council will need to consider their environmental obligations in this regard to meet the conditions of the Environmental Protection Act.
- Dredging is not by suction and results in silt going into the Great Barrier Reef basin. The river floor takes a month or more to settle after each dredging and the disturbance brings acid sulphate soils up which degrade the water quality, once again flowing out to the reef, affecting the flora and fauna of both the river and the Great Barrier Reef Basin.
- Both ferries will be required to undergo an annual maintenance check and inspection for AMSA Survey requirements in order to maintain their Certificate of Operation. This may result in them being out of the water for up to five, six or more days dependent on river and weather conditions or if they require repair or renewing of parts etc. The costs involved may be significant, the environmental impact will need to be assessed.
- AMSA, to reduce their costs, may require this for both ferries at once or they may allow them to be inspected at separate times. Last time this resulted in severe disruption and disadvantage to individuals and businesses.
- The solar driven ferry may require extra power during flood times and in the wet season. This may require a solar farm, extra batteries or diesel generators all of which are less environmentally friendly than a bridge and all of which will require more infrastructure surrounding the facility.
- A second lot of infrastructure, i.e. ticket booths, gates, bollards, piers, a solar panel array or batteries or another generator to drive the second ferry to provide all weather access, another or wider access road, wider or new ramps on either side of the river, more cables, more signage and will result in more maintenance, second Survey costs, another ugly entry to the Daintree, loss of habitat including mangroves and more obstacles for those who use the river, including the wild life.

- Two ferries may disrupt the crocodile tours at the riverside near the ferries access points. Crocodiles and other river dwellers having to negotiate two ferries may move away from current territories and establish themselves elsewhere.
- Waiting in hot cars while waiting at the ferry and having to turn off engines on the ferry has resulted in heat related illness in children, babies, animals and the old.
- Cars and buses all arriving at about the same time from Cairns and Port Douglas for day trips speed up to Cape Tribulation, look at the Cape, the bus tours mostly provide a lunch at the free picnic areas, use the free boardwalks, use the public toilets and leave at about the same time of the day, once again forming long queues creating chaos at the ferry.
- A bridge would allow day-trippers to choose their own times for arriving and leaving and a more steady flow of traffic accordingly and therefore a more pleasant experience than driving in a queue all the way along the road. The slow tourist will not feel so pressured that they have to maintain the speed of the queue, residents and employees may not get so frustrated and buses can meet their schedules without having to pressure drivers in front of them and then speed. A toll bridge and a schedule of charges that reflected the time spent in the area with discounts or free travel for those who have proof of accommodation bookings or other paid activities may encourage more people to enjoy what the region has to offer and contribute to the community.
- The large number of bus tour groups is placing enormous strain on the environment and the current resources. The buses speed across the range and up and down Cape Tribulation road in order to meet their schedules, endangering other drivers and wildlife. They use the public facilities which are inadequate for the numbers of groups and are often left in a filthy state. They take over the picnic areas and car parks leaving little for other tourists and large numbers on the free boardwalks disturb and damage the flora and fauna. Most do not support community business. A condition of a Commercial Activity Permit could be that they must be accountable for supporting the local community.
- This community relies on ecotourism for its livelihood and offers sustainable accommodation, restaurants and a variety of rainforest activities, which educate and inspire appreciation and conservation of the Daintree Rainforest. The area with the new micro grid and our sustainable life style and businesses could become a showpiece for the Douglas Shire if supported appropriately.
- Eco-tourism is defined by several bodies as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. The Environmental Protection Act 1994 objective is to protect Qld's environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains ecological processes (Ecological sustainable development).
- Those advocating for the two ferry solution have stated that a bridge would result in further development along the Daintree Coast in the World Heritage area. Future development of these areas has been prohibited for a long time.
- They also state that it will result in 24hour traffic leading to a profound impact on the endangered cassowary and other wild life.
- Currently ferry access is from 5.00am to 12midnight. The four hours between midnight and 4am is probably not going to have a profound impact The early morning residents are fully aware of possible wild life on the road.
- Residents travelling in the early hours see more feral pigs than any other wildlife. Feral pigs present more of a danger to drivers, the environment, cassowary and other wildlife in this World Heritage area.
- A bridge would prevent long queues and waiting times and allow residents more opportunities for employment, more access to over-time, evening shifts in hospitality, as emergency service personnel, as hospital workers and aged care workers.
- Tourists and residents would not be required to make expensive overnight stays in order to take early morning flights from Cairns airport and waiting times for appointments for Cairns specialist doctors and hospital procedures would be reduced because they could travel at any time over a bridge and not be restricted by the ferry times, maintenance shut-downs, long queues and other delays.

- A bridge would allow residents on the north side to make and keep appointments, arrive to work in the morning or for an evening shift on time and attend after school activities without having to factor in extra ferry times in case the petrol truck or gas truck or emergency vehicles or a peak season queue requires waiting for the ferry to make a second trip.
- Tradesmen and delivery vehicles would have better, quicker access resulting in improved services for residents and businesses over a bridge.
- A bridge would require one set of minimal infrastructure and could provide a more attractive entry to the Daintree. The current ferry could become an historical artefact and be placed in a park alongside its current operating site, where tourists could see it and read about some of the history of the area. An attractive entry to the Daintree could be created with something to reflect the uniqueness of the area.
- Emergency personnel and vehicles could gain immediate access to the roads and reduce time to reach patients or other emergency call outs over a bridge. The fifteen to twenty minutes negotiating the ferry could be the difference between life and death for someone on the North side of the river, and because the ferry goes at full speed across the river with an emergency vehicle on board putting a strain on the ferry infrastructure it could break down mid-stream and increase the chances of further injury or a death.

Bridge would prevent long queues

- The current ferry, which under the two ferry proposal will be maintained, is diesel driven. This results in pollution from the diesel engine and ongoing dredging.
- Two ferries will require significant clearing of mangroves and a greater amount of dredging, and will require more infrastructures, disrupting the river bed, wildlife, and businesses on the river and pushing silt onto the Great Barrier Reef.
- There would be significant costs involved in creating and maintaining the two ferry option. Dredging would have a major impact on the environment. Council will need to consider their environmental obligations in this regard to meet the conditions of the Environmental Protection Act.
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- Waiting in hot cars while waiting at the ferry and having to turn off engines on the ferry has resulted in heat related illness in children, babies, animals and the old.

- Cars and buses all arriving at about the same time from Cairns and Port Douglas for day trips speed up to Cape Tribulation, look at the Cape, the bus tours mostly provide a lunch at the free picnic areas, use the free boardwalks, use the public toilets and leave at about the same time of the day, once again forming long queues creating chaos at the ferry.
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- The large number of bus tour groups is placing enormous strain on the environment and the current resources. The buses speed across the range and up and down Cape Tribulation road in order to meet their schedules, endangering other drivers and wildlife. They use the public facilities which are inadequate for the numbers of groups and are often left in a filthy state. They take over the picnic areas and car parks leaving little for other tourists and large numbers on the free boardwalks disturb and damage the flora and fauna. Most do not support community business. A condition of a Commercial Activity Permit could be that they must be accountable for supporting the local community.
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- Eco-tourism is defined by several bodies as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. The Environmental Protection Act 1994 objective is to protect Qld's environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains ecological processes (Ecological sustainable development).
- Those advocating for the two ferry solution have stated that a bridge would result in further development along the Daintree Coast in the World Heritage area. Future development of these areas has been prohibited for a long time.
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- Residents travelling in the early hours see more feral pigs than any other wildlife. Feral pigs present more of a danger to drivers, the environment, cassowary and other wildlife in this World Heritage area.
- A bridge would prevent long queues and waiting times and allow residents more opportunities for employment, more access to over-time, evening shifts in hospitality, as emergency service personnel, as hospital workers and aged care workers.
- Tourists and residents would not be required to make expensive overnight stays in order to take early morning flights from Cairns airport and waiting times for appointments for Cairns specialist doctors and hospital procedures would be reduced because they could travel at any time over a bridge and not be restricted by the ferry times, maintenance shut-downs, long queues and other delays.
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- Tradesmen and delivery vehicles would have better, quicker access resulting in improved services for residents and businesses over a bridge.
- A bridge would require one set of minimal infrastructure and could provide a more attractive entry to the Daintree. The current ferry could become an historical artifact and be placed in a park alongside its current operating site, where tourists could see it and read about some of the history of the area. An attractive entry to the Daintree could be created with something to reflect the uniqueness of the area.
- Emergency personnel and vehicles could gain immediate access to the roads and reduce time to reach patients or other emergency call outs over a bridge. The fifteen to twenty minutes negotiating the ferry could be the difference between life and death for someone on the North side of the river, and because the ferry goes at full speed across the river with an emergency vehicle on board putting a strain on the ferry infrastructure it could break down mid-stream and increase the chances of further injury or a death.

Significant Mangrove Clearing

Two ferries will require significant clearing of mangroves and a greater amount of dredging, and depending on placement will require the boat ramp and or the new toilets on the north side to be moved or removed.

Council currently spends approx. \$270,000 per year for one dredging event for the current ferry. Two ferries, one larger one, will require more dredging of the river and the cost of this not just in monetary expenditure but also a cost in terms of environmental impact.

There were three major dredging events in the 18/19 year when there was a prolonged wet season. Two paid for by council one by disaster relief funding. Cost approx. \$810,000. There appears to be minor dredging taking place on a regular basis as well.

Note the dredging cost is dependent on the amount of sand taken out of the river.

Dredging is not by suction and results in silt going into the Great Barrier Reef basin. The river floor takes a month or more to settle after each dredging and the disturbance brings acid sulphate soils up which degrade the water quality, once again flowing out to the reef and affecting the flora and fauna of both the river and the Great Barrier Reef Basin.

The Environmental Protection Act (Water and Wetland Biodiversity) Policy 2019 has responsibility for identifying environmental values for waters and wetlands, including monitoring and reporting on the condition of waters. Council could develop some management goals as prescribed by this act in order to maintain the composition and condition of the river bed, bank, and mangroves in order to protect the Great Barrier Reef Basin. The Daintree River Basin is known as basin 108 under the Act and the Basins Environmental Values and Water Quality Objectives to enhance or protect the environmental values of the Basin were last published by the Department in November 2014.

The current ferry, which under the two ferry proposal will be maintained, is diesel driven. This results in pollution from the diesel engine and ongoing dredging.

Both ferries will be required to undergo an annual maintenance check and inspection for AMSA Survey requirements in order to maintain their Certificate of Operation. This may result in them being out of the water for up to five, six or more days dependent on river and weather conditions or if they require repair or renewing of parts etc. (Cost \$ unknown, environmental impact unknown). It is also unknown whether AMSA, to reduce their costs, will require this for both ferries at once or whether they will allow them to be inspected at separate times. Last time this resulted in severe disruption and disadvantage to individuals and businesses. School children and residents had to be ferried across the river by a boat hired by Council and if they did not leave a car on the other side, needed to board a bus to take them into Mossman, catch a bus back to the ferry carrying their groceries or other purchases or having to make

appointments that allowed them to meet the bus timetable. Businesses and their employees lost revenue for the closure days. An emergency would have required the use of a helicopter. Emergency personnel were accommodated on the north side for the duration at what cost is also unknown.

The solar driven ferry may require extra power during flood times and in the wet season. This may require a solar farm, extra batteries or diesel generators all of which are less environmentally friendly than a bridge and all of which will require more infrastructure surrounding the facility.

A second lot of infrastructure, i.e. ticket booths, gates, bollards, piers, a solar panel array or batteries or another generator to drive the second ferry to provide all weather access, another or wider access road, wider or new ramps on either side of the river, more cables, more signage and will result in more maintenance, second Survey costs, another ugly entry to the Daintree, loss of habitat including mangroves and more obstacles for those who use the river, including the wild life.

Crocodiles and other fauna having to negotiate two ferries may also result in movement away from current territories and along with their own disruption, disrupt the livelihoods of those operating crocodile tours from the riverside near the ferries access points.

Children, babies, animals and the old are all required to sit in hot, stationary cars for the wait periods and the duration of the ferry crossing. Not to mention residents shopping deteriorating and resulting in less of a usable life span of perishable food. A bridge would alleviate this and the resulting pollution from those cars that sit with their engine running to maintain their air conditioner while in the queue..

One issue re the chaos at the ferry raised by others (Daintree Seniors Group) is the loss of an eco-tourism economy in the North Douglas community when the original DRP "Daintree Rescue Program" invested most of the funds received into National Park Facilities that cater to day tour operators from Cairns and Port Douglas, who arrive en-masse at the ferry. The chaos at the ferry in peak times is due to the buses and independent travellers arriving at the same time on a day trip out of Cairns and Port Douglas. This is one cause of the delays at the ferry, disruption and increasing environmental damage that should be addressed and changed. Cars and buses speed up to Cape Tribulation, look at the Cape, the bus tours mostly provide a lunch at the free picnic areas, use the free boardwalks, use the public toilets and leave at about the same time of the day, once again forming long queues creating chaos at the ferry. This excellent and well informed submission offers several solutions to the problems outlined, one being to use the ferry as a control point and encourage longer stays in the Daintree by adjusting costs.

A different solution to the one offered by the parties that wrote the above could be that a bridge would allow day-trippers to choose their own times for arriving and leaving and a more steady flow of traffic accordingly and therefore a more pleasant experience than driving in a queue all the way along the road. The slow tourist will not feel so pressured that they have to maintain the speed of the queue, residents and employees may not get so frustrated and buses can meet their schedules without having to pressure drivers in front of them and then speed. Tourists can take their time and may also choose to stay for overnight or longer periods when they don't feel restricted by time and don't feel "locked in" once the ferry closes.

Commercial Activity Permits also appear to be over-subscribed. The number of bus tour groups is placing enormous strain on the environment and the current resources. The buses speed across the range and up and down Cape Tribulation road in order to meet their schedules, endangering other drivers and wildlife. They use the public facilities which are inadequate for the numbers of groups and are often left in a filthy state. They take over the picnic areas and car parks leaving little for other tourists and large numbers on the free boardwalks disturb and damage the flora and fauna. Most do not support community driven ventures, and are therefore non-contributory in terms of both community and environmental support. Perhaps a

condition of a permit could be that they state which two (or more) community ventures they will support i.e. a rainforest guided tour, a visit to the ice cream factory, lunch at a restaurant, a stop at the Discovery Centre, etc.

Tour operators who are objecting to a bridge and suggesting a park and ride option appear to be undermining local businesses and therefore opportunities for local community activity, employment and business ventures.

Our Tourist and Development Officer perhaps could focus on all the offerings in the Daintree area and assist with a marketing campaign to support local businesses, advocate for the area and provide opportunities for the local community to become involved and obtain local employment. This community relies on ecotourism for its livelihood and offers sustainable accommodation, restaurants and a variety of rainforest activities, which educate and inspire appreciation and conservation of the Daintree Rainforest. The area with the new micro grid and our sustainable life style and businesses could become a showpiece for the Douglas Shire if supported appropriately.

Eco-tourism is defined by several bodies as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people. The Environmental Protection Act 1994 objective is to protect Qld's environment while allowing for development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains ecological processes (Ecological sustainable development).

A polluting ferry or two, diesel generators, feral pigs, and lack of infrastructure smacks of hypocrisy and leads to campaigns such as "Save the Daintree Again" which are designed to undermine the community and create economic deprivation. Instead we should be supporting the local community as a responsible custodial community.

Groups such as the DSSG advocating for the two ferry solution have stated that a bridge would result in further development along the Daintree Coast in the World Heritage area. There is an award winning town development plan that prevents future development of those areas. They also state that it will result in 24hour traffic leading to a profound impact on the endangered cassowary and other wild life.

These are nothing but predictions but these groups choose to state them as facts. This is a constant theme which by repetition takes root in people's minds and results in myth and misinformation being presented as fact. Some people north of the river have been confused by receiving the Council Survey and a DSSG flyer advocating for the two ferry solution attached to each other in the mail.

Given there is now ferry access from 5.00am to 12midnight, with those needing to catch the early ferry for employment leaving the Cape through to Cow Bay in the early hours of the morning another possible four hours between midnight and 4am is probably not going to make quite such a profound impact as suggested by these groups with the early morning residents fully aware of possible wild life on the road. In fact, I would suggest there is more danger to the residents from possible feral pig strikes than anything else.

Feral pigs in the rainforest present more of a danger to the environment, cassowary and other wildlife than any of the local communities and tourists combined. Ferries or a bridge seem insignificant to the impact these animals are making to this World Heritage area.

A bridge would alleviate the chaos and disruption with regard to the above discussion points as well as prevent long queues and waiting times and allow residents more opportunities for employment, more access to over-time, evening shifts in hospitality, as emergency service personnel, as hospital workers and aged care workers. It could provide for pedestrian and cycle access separately.

Tourists and residents would not be required to make expensive overnight stays in order to take early morning flights from Cairns airport and waiting times for appointments for Cairns specialist doctors and hospital procedures would be reduced because they could travel at any time over a bridge and not be restricted by the ferry times, maintenance shut-downs, long queues and other delays.

Tradesmen and delivery vehicles would have better, quicker access resulting in improved services for residents and businesses over a bridge.

A bridge would require one set of minimal infrastructure and could provide a more attractive entry to the Daintree. The current ferry could become an historical artifact and be placed in a park alongside its current operating site, where tourists could see it and read about some of the history of the area. A little forethought could present a very attractive entry to a unique area.

A bridge would allow residents on the north side to make and keep appointments, arrive to work in the morning or for an evening shift on time and attend after school activities without having to factor in extra ferry times in case the petrol truck or gas truck or emergency vehicles or a peak season queue requires waiting for the ferry to make a second trip.

Emergency personnel and vehicles could gain immediate access to the roads and reduce time to reach patients or other emergency call outs over a bridge. The fifteen to twenty minutes negotiating the ferry could be the difference between life and death for someone on the North side of the river, and because the ferry goes at full speed across the river with an emergency vehicle on board putting a strain on the ferry infrastructure it could break down mid-stream and increase the chances of further injury or a death.

One Shire for All.

I am a long suffering Cow Bay resident currently forced to use the unreliable Daintree Ferry up to four times a day several days each week for school & work responsibilities. The service is unreliable because you never really know how long it will take to go to or from town?

Sometimes it takes hours to get across the River, and a couple of years ago we had an entire dysfunctional week without any Cape Trib Road Ferry whatsoever. Council had known about the Queensland Maritime Safety mandatory slipping of the Vessel more than 5 years in advance, but did absolutely nothing to provide an alternative. What unfolded was a week-long deadlock affecting people's lives, seriously damaging private hardworking businesses, and farmers trying desperately to get their annual tropical fruit harvest to market.

I worked at the previous Daintree Ferry for several years, and managed the Ferry for Col Andreassen from 1997 to 2003. I was eventually forced to resign my position because Douglas Shire Council refused to address multiple safety issues despite profiting almost \$1million per year from excessive Ferry charges. Since I resigned over Council refusing to address safety issues there was a second horrible fatality on the Daintree Ferry in 2013.

None of the Ferry loading/unloading issues regarding pedestrians alighting from vehicles in the Vessel loading areas along the open road have been addressed by Council since the 2002 Avenet Report - and the whole dysfunctional chaos during busy times, especially on the north bank remains another disaster waiting to happen.

Douglas Shire Council was found guilty in 2005 by the Queensland Supreme Court of unlawfully overcharging users of the Daintree Ferry. The Supreme Court found that Ferry charges: "must be 'for' the relevant services and facilities." [DSC vs Qld Ombudsman 26/07/2005].

Under Queensland Law it is illegal for Douglas Shire to tax users of the Cape Tribulation Road - \$1.15million published profit last financial year. The Supreme Court 2005 made a

clear legal finding that taxing Ferry users to pay for Lagoons in Port Douglas is unlawful. The dodgy previous Leu Council, already breaking the law... voted to increase Ferry charges again last year from \$28 to \$30.

Our new 2020 Douglas Shire Council was elected with a mandate to finally solve the decades-long impasse at the dysfunctional Ferry: Long waiting queues for our precious visitors, exorbitant prices, poor service for locals, and a noxious diesel-powered environmental nightmare requiring constant dredging of the River.

What Council is doing to the Daintree River is an environmental disgrace to all of us here in our Shire. As custodians of one of the most biologically important ecosystems on Earth, we have a very real responsibility for its perpetual long-term welfare. The Daintree River is one Big Mama of a River - one of the vital primal arteries which feed, nurture, and keep the Great Barrier Reef lagoon alive & healthy.

We need to stop damaging it.

Two Ferries or a Bridge?

Two Ferries:

Cost: 25 year contract - \$75 million (minimum)

After the 25 year contract ends we will have: two more huge Ferries for our garbage bin, millions of litres of diesel burned into our drizzly rainforest atmosphere, 30 kilometres of Ferry cables coated with grease & zinc sullied into the marine environment taken rusting to the dump, 15.000 litres of used diesel sump oil, old motors, electric motors, batteries etc...

The only benefit Ferries have over a Bridge is that they require more employees.

The touted 'Solar Ferry Solution' is absolute fake news: The new bigger 36 car Ferry will be primarily diesel powered during its 5am to Midnight operation. Half its daily operation is during hours of darkness, and here in the drizzly Daintree - half our daylight hours are overcast. The bigger diesel engine in the bigger Ferry will burn even more fuel into our environment than the current Diesel Dinosaur Ferry. And the plan next year is to have them both operating under the touted \$75 million Two Ferry Solution.

But to operate the new Ferry, riverbank mangrove habitat will have to be permanently deleted, new concrete ramps pylons and cables put into the River, and massive multi-lane bitumen roadworks & infrastructure designed and constructed on both riverbanks. None of this has been designed or costed, or had any proper community Consultation whatsoever?

The \$3 million/year Two Ferry contract awarded by the previous Council cannot be feasibly implemented by June 2021? Not even Santa could make it happen. No-one even knows the actual design of the Ferry (apart from a cool picture!)... the design of the roadworks, how any of it will actually work, or whether necessary permits to destroy protected fragile mangrove habitat and dredge out an entire new section of the Daintree River will even be approved? Sounds like a Local Government back room deal to build an expensive ratepayer funded one-way no through road cul-de-sac roundabout, if you ask me???

The real problem with two Ferries is that they're twice as bad as one Ferry: will cost double, burn double diesel, create more noxious garbage (old cables, sump oil, batteries etc), and tragically most importantly - Will require constant excavation of an entirely new section of the Daintree River every year.

Our current Council dredging of the Daintree is environmental vandalism on a grand scale. This nocturnal activity happens every year, through several weeks or months removing

thousands of cubic metres of the ancient River substrate, releasing toxic acid-sulphate into the River delta & Great Barrier Reef lagoon during the most fragile time of the year. The dredging nightmare of the Daintree occurs covertly after midnight during hours of darkness for very good reason – shame.

Yearly excavation of the Ferry channel is performed during drier months: releasing silt & acid sulphate into the tidal estuary soup, floating up and down the River until it gets flushed out into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. The acid-sulphate mud once disturbed continues leaching into the marine ecosystem until it is covered over by a flood event. Every year after the wet season, Douglas Shire Council spends hundreds of thousands of dollars battling against the natural underwater profile of the River with huge machinery digging a channel to keep the Ferry floating...

And every year - Big Mama Daintree fights back again and restores itself.

Bridge:

(At the current location alongside the Ferry from the south bank grassy turfed area to the north bank boat ramp - using existing land & road infrastructure.)

Cost: \$60 million funded entirely by State & Federal infrastructure grant.
Money is currently available to Douglas Shire if we democratically decide we want it?

A 100 year concrete Bridge - is inert to the environment, doesn't create endless pollution, and very importantly will never require dredging. It will be user friendly on all levels and encourage increasing pedestrian, bike, and recreational usage.

Cape Tribulation Rd is a Douglas Shire road and our Council have a very real case for legally maintaining a toll for "relevant services and facilities" – like modifying the existing north Ferry ramp into a convenient boat ramp, with adjacent floating pontoon for larger boats & yachts to allay the problem of not passing under the 4m Bridge; and to fund infrastructure upgrade & maintenance, depreciation etc.

The entire precinct needs to be cleaned up and presented appropriately as the worthy world-class 'Gateway to the Daintree' it really should be? Get rid of the superfluous infrastructure, old pylons, south Ferry ramp & dunnies, and undertake restoration work of damaged riverbank riparian vegetation.

I have a question: Where is our long awaited visitor centre at the Daintree River Gateway? I believe a proper Visitor Centre providing information & ticketing etc would be a nicer entrance to the Daintree Rainforest than our current pile of annual dredge spoil we present to the world? All of this improvement will create quality local employment and enterprise.

And there is something else... Something which should be very carefully investigated as an option for our Douglas Shire Council to perhaps consider with appropriate Community consultation:

Do we want a generic square concrete utility structure, or should we build something truly in-keeping with the beautiful environment it will traverse? Should we ask people of the Douglas Shire whether we want a cheap functional Bridge... or a sleek aesthetically pleasing structure entirely at peace with Big Mama Daintree?

Someone will have to pay for an architectural Bridge, for example: 1/3 Federal 1/3 State 1/3 DSC? This considerable expense beyond the means of our Shire will trigger a real mandate for an ongoing Bridge infrastructure toll - which will then also prudently enable Council visitor traffic volume management through our Daintree Region if ever required.

Traffic facts: Despite the previous mis-information about Cow Bay & Cape Tribulation becoming the new Gold Coast – overall visitor numbers to the Daintree Region have actually remained broadly static for the past 20 years. What has really changed is the demographic that people (mostly couples) choose to now drive themselves with help from Google, comfortably in small increasingly hybrid/electric cars.

Back in 2000 we carried 118,000 cars(&mb) and 31,000 buses, in 2019 the Ferry carried 194,000 cars(&mb) and 17,000 buses. Through the past 20 years the approximate same number of visitors to our Daintree Region - are simply now choosing to self-drive rather than congregate in big smelly buses. Who can really blame them?

We need to observe facts, and seek proper comprehension of what people importantly want & need: residents, visitors, and our traditional cultural owners? I genuinely believe that if Council were to democratically build something sustainably at peace with its environment & inclusive with our important traditional culture, not only will visitors be happy to pay a small toll - they will come to specifically participate and immerse within the model of sustainability we are desperately trying to achieve here in our Daintree Region!

Any Queensland Government will be happy to condone and permit a legal toll for relevant infrastructure and facilities - if it is presented as a positive win/win outcome for everyone. But sadly... throughout this community Consultation, Wujal Wujal and Ayton have been arrogantly entirely ignored by an inwardly looking Douglas Shire Local Government as usual? The road across the Daintree River is a vitally important link to someone who lives at Ayton equally as it is to someone at Degarra? - and is way more important to them than it is for someone who owns a townhouse at Port Douglas. This fact needs to be recognised by Council if the deplorable decades-long politics of dividing our Shire at the Daintree River is ever going to be resolved.

And there is something else which hasn't been properly included at all within this community Consultation but needs to be formally recognised by Council...

Our Kuku Yalanji traditional cultural owners from Wujal Wujal have traversed across the Daintree River for tens of thousands of years, and still do.... caring for Country, visiting sacred sites, and inter-connecting with family groups.

Why aren't they being properly involved or included in any of this??? This is very much their River and road too. I heard that clever Wujal mob have built a good new concrete Bridge across their creek. I can't speak for them, but personally find it difficult to comprehend why in 2021 Port Douglas are still planning to build a second canoe for the Daintree??

People will always resist change, but after the improvement is implemented, find themselves feeling happily relieved. The bad old days of Diesel Dinosaur Ferries and constantly digging out the Daintree are finished. It's time for an Environmental Bridge.

Through this process of Consultation, our elected Council made a very clear directive to staff in the motion passed on 28 April: to explore options of a Bridge "and the possible economic benefits to the region;" and to provide "details of the costs of the two ferry solution provided for in the currently negotiated contract".

But this clear directive has deliberately not been carried out by staff at DSC HQ? At our community Consultation - no discussion whatsoever was made about potential economic benefits of a Bridge, nor were proper details of total costs associated with the 'Two Ferry Solution' disclosed. And none of this information appears anywhere in the DSC 2020 Daintree River Crossing Options Report?

I wrote to Douglas Shire staff several times seeking costing information but was denied.

I visited the front desk at DSC HQ asking for a copy of the community Consultation Report but was denied... twice. Information every ratepayer is entitled to see has been carefully deliberately secreted away into a digital pocket of the DS Dashboard, hidden among left-wing opinion pieces by Douglas Shire Sustainability Group and Compass Research – documents which have not been endorsed by Council.

Several factual DSC official documents which should have been provided such as the: Avent Solutions Ferry Traffic Management Report 2002; Daintree River Crossing Future Options 2004; Cape Tribulation Road Link Management Plan 2013; Roads of Regional Significance DSC Statement of Intent 2016; and Daintree Ferry Risk Assessment Report 2017 etc – have all been 'accidentally' omitted from the Dashboard Website... we can only wonder why?

It is disappointing to see individuals who have been malignantly working to divide our Shire for decades are still involved in community Consultation, seeking to derail community sentiment by hiding documents and using mis-information. Staff who can't read clear instructions from Council should be let out to greener pastures.

And why wasn't our important Douglas Shire Survey to finally decide the biggest question which has plagued our Shire for decades – sent out with a bit of factual DSC information including costings? Good old Compass Research from the Berwick divisive-era is conducting this Survey - commissioned by DSC and paid for by ratepayers... causing some feelings of disappointing doubt in my heart?

The inappropriately named 'Douglas Shire Sustainability Group' sent out some information during this process however... in fact they sent their information card in perfect synchronisation with the Survey sent out by Compass Research and both documents magically appeared in my letterbox on the same day!

- I really don't understand what is sustainable about promoting diesel Ferries which create endless noxious pollution, tons of annual garbage, and require regular massive dredging of the otherwise pristine Daintree River? Doesn't sound very green or sustainable to me.

Whatever the response returned by the poorly implemented Survey - Council are tasked with solving this hugely expensive problem for our Shire. But real consideration for the long-term health & welfare of our Daintree River ecosystem must always remain paramount. Any wonderful 'solution' that involves increasing regular damage to this otherwise pristine artery feeding & nurturing our Great Barrier Reef lagoon, should be taken with a pinch of acid-sulphate. We now know how important our marine ecosystem really is.

For decades our Shire has been divided at the Daintree River by unfortunate left-wing politics which clearly has absolutely nothing at all to do with the environment. But now the time has come to bridge this divide – One Shire for all.

I am only one voter among many... but ask for reasons above, for Council to carefully consider building a Bridge in quiet aesthetic harmony with our beautiful Daintree River.

Daintree Bridge - A 30 year plan – Angus Henderson

I propose Council takes a 30 year view to the problems of crossing the river.

It's obvious that the current one ferry plan no longer works. And a 2 ferry plan has lots of problems. And even if these problems were overcome, a 2 ferry proposal still has a limited lifespan before similar problems eventually arise.

The other problem is the increasing amount of traffic on the Alexandra Range road as a result of more tourism.

My plan addresses all of these issues.

My proposal would be that a bridge be built near Belcher's place, landing in Forest Creek, refer to map over the page. This would allow for the building of a modern, state of the art visitor's centre in the foothills of the Alexandra Range.

There is superb rainforest here, and excellent rainforest walks could be incorporated. (both at the visitor's centre, but also at other private properties as well, perhaps).

This would achieve several things.

Tourists short of time would be able to "see the Daintree" and go on Croc cruises **without having to drive over the range.**

If 50% of the self-drive market did not go over the range because there was a world class visitors centre / rainforest walk at Forest Creek, **think of how much traffic could be reduced.**

To the West of the Visitor's Centre, along the old Forest Creek road, other activities could be encouraged, including horse riding, farm stays, B&B s or "soft road adventures".

Having a world class visitor's centre would slow the traffic from the bridge, as tourists would naturally stop and park.

The bridge, car park and the visitor's centre, would all be above any flood levels.

There are plenty of prime cleared sites in Forest creek that would suit a visitor's centre, and there is mains electricity.

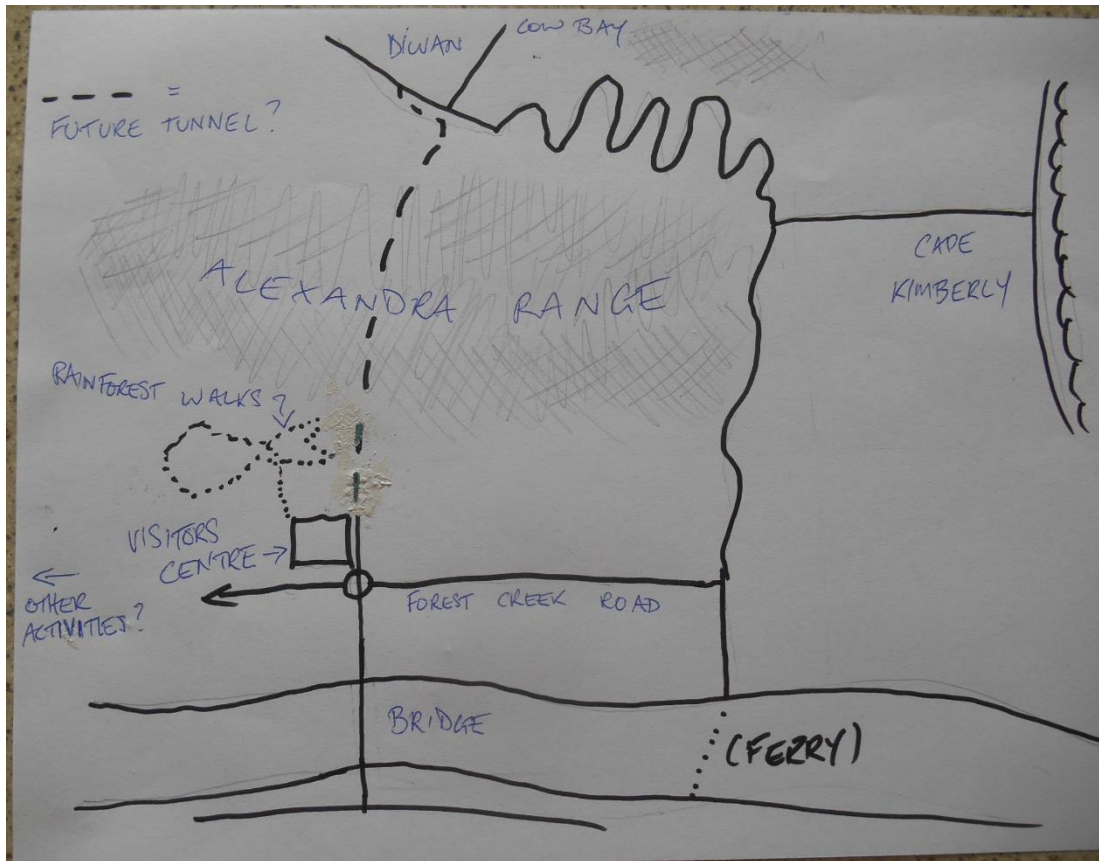
The existing southern ferry precinct could be converted into a top class boat launching area, with ample parking and a newer ramp to replace the existing ferry ramp.
No permits for clearing or dredging required.

The northern ferry precinct could be replaced with a "crocodile and wildlife viewing platform", which with no ferry present, would allow for the return of crocodiles and birds to the area.
No permits for clearing required.

Overall, a big plus for tourism and the way we present the region. So there's a plan that works.

If you wanted to go to the next step, in 15 to 30 years, it could look like this:

A tunnel could be built under the Alexandra Range, from the visitor's centre in Forest Creek to somewhere in Diwan. Where is unimportant, but the farm behind Pandanus Road, or the old council quarry site near the ice cream company are just 2 possibilities.



Don't laugh, tunnels are being built everywhere these days, and we are not talking now, just keeping an option open for later. Talk to the engineers..

What are the tunnel advantages?

Firstly, the obvious, which is that through traffic could travel north or south, through the tunnel, without having to use the range road. Particularly large trucks and heavy vehicles.

But the big gain would be that the Alexandra Range road could be made **ONE WAY** from the Cape Kimberley turnoff all the way north to the Environment Centre at Cow Bay.

This would allow for **the creation of one of the best scenic drives in the world**, with the road now one way it would allow for a leisurely pace with ample stopping, pull overs or photo stops; and wider single lanes where needed, such as through the tight bends.

And all of this without any major upgrades to the range road itself.

Camping, toilets and day rest/barbeque areas could be provided at Cape Kimberley.

The lookout could be upgraded with toilets and the job would be done.

Self-drive tourists could now use the bridge, check out the visitor's centre, take the scenic drive over the range, and then return south using the tunnel. This would basically keep the tourism based traffic going in a continuous one way loop.

This would probably be enough for most day trippers, and would make it unnecessary for them to make an aimless trek to Cape Tribulation. It would help manage the traffic from Diwan to Cape Tribulation.

The opportunity for the lucrative and growing four wheel drive market travelling north to Cooktown would be enhanced with the "tunnel / one way range" upgrade.

This all means jobs and money and visitors to the Shire with world class facilities like this.

I have owned my property in Diwan for 17 years.

I have no commercial interests anywhere north of the river.

I am not a member of any green group.

I'm just a normal, sane person..

So I make this submission in the general interest and benefit to the shire as a whole.

Thank you for the consideration.

No Preference Specified

More work needs to be done prior to deciding on two ferries or a bridge

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding a ferry or a bridge over the Daintree River. Below I've described the issues raised by concerned residents and ratepayers of the Douglas Shire that need to be addressed.

RISK ANALYSIS: A full risk analysis is what is missing in this debate. However I understand why Council is not conducting a comprehensive assessment until it is known if there is appetite for a bridge, as it costs a fortune to conduct a thorough risk analysis. But if the majority want a bridge then once we know the exact location, cost, land acquisitions, forest/mangrove clearing, etc; with eyes wide open, with all of the aspects known, the residents and ratepayers can then make an informed decision. Those that thought they wanted a bridge may then see the real cost of this decision and change their stance. I don't think a bridge at Humbug will help Daintree Village, people will not go the extra drive unless they already had intentions to do so.

WILDLIFE HARM MINIMISATION: Creating Forest Creek Road as a main road will be detrimental to the creatures that use this road as their track. Pademelons, bandicoots, snakes, cassowaries and wallabies have been seen crossing Forest Creek Road. Unless rumble speed bumps are installed like the straight from Noah's to Thornton's, the Forest Creek Road straight will be a speedway.

COMMUNITY AMENITY: Traffic noise and dust will increase for those residents living in Forest Creek.

CUSTODIAL RESPONSIBILITY: We should not just accept that our 180 Million year old heritage listed rainforest should just continue to have an increase in visitors numbers each year unchecked.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT: For residents using the ferry every day to get to work, it is very rare to wait more than 10 minutes. The problem is the way the ferry traffic is managed. There are few other areas in the world that attract the tourist numbers that our Daintree Rainforest does, without a pre-booking. We could cap half hourly tourist vehicle numbers and redirect tourists to the many other attractions in the Douglas Shire, while they wait for their booking. Priority bookings should be given to tourists that book accommodation or tours. There are many ways we can look to manage traffic at the ferry before having to think about two ferries or a bridge.

UNEMPLOYMENT: Those currently working on the ferry will lose their jobs if the bridge option is selected. In an area with very high unemployment, taking away 20 plus long term jobs for short term construction jobs needs to be addressed with re-placement or re-training.

COUNCIL REVENUE: The current arrangements bring a healthy revenue stream into Council coffers where the two ferry and bridge options don't, unless ticket prices are increased.

In summary, prior to deciding on two ferries or a bridge, work needs to be done to manage visitor numbers so we get higher value customers coming into the Daintree with an appreciation for the rainforest.

Regardless of solution, it must be self-funding

1. I would like to see a solution that solves the queueing issue. A two ferry solution or a bridge would achieve that.
2. I have always been suspicious about the two ferry solution; with no permits in place it is no more likely than a bridge. Once permits are sought for a second ferry, the various green groups will oppose this, and the queues will remain. We already seeing selfish greens online advocating a single ferry, despite clear data showing worsening queues. The Douglas Shire must obtain permits BEFORE signing contracts. I doubt they will be successful.
3. There are apparently no guarantees that either will in fact be solar ferries, so we must assume continuing diesel engine pollution will result from two ferries. Two ferries also result in the need for land clearing on the riverbank, and continued dredging of TWO channels for potentially 25 years.
4. Given the likelihood of a second ferry seems low, we must also consider a bridge. I cannot in good faith support a 'just like everywhere else bridge'; there is too much to lose in marketing and vibe. However, with a little thought, a bridge could be done, with one traffic lane controlled by traffic lights, and a second lane exclusively for pedestrians. The bridge could be made an attraction, with design elements in keeping with the jungle and river. Other localities overseas have done just this; the 'Buddha hand' bridge in Thailand being a great example. One lane with lights would alleviate queueing, keep the desired pulsing traffic, and still make it a thoughtful entrance to the Daintree. The wide pedestrian access would encourage people to stop and take the river in, and bring back the joy that people used to have in being on the ferry deck. The nonsense regulation re fuel trucks etc would disappear, as would the need for extensive damaging dredging and the diesel engine pollution associated with the ferry.
5. If two ferries are decided on, the 15 plus five plus five contract is way too long. This would lock us into a polluting and perhaps unsuitable contract for longer than needed. Ten plus five would be more than adequate. Twenty five years is simply acceding to the DSSG desire for long term strangulation of the Daintree.
6. Regardless of solution, it must be self-funding. I am not interested in seeing my rates increase to support a bridge or ferry.

In essence I would support either option, within the bounds of the above.

Douglas Shire Ratepayers Association

DSRA conducted a poll of its 240 members who were asked to select one of 3 options. A response rate of 20% was achieved equivalent to 49 respondents.

For all three options the following contingencies were applied:

- All options must have a toll system which will as a minimum cover costs
- Funding of the bridge build is contingent on State and/or Federal funding.
- Traffic flow into the Daintree can be managed if needed i.e. a boom gate system

The results below represents a percentage of total respondents.

Preferred Option	No. of Respondents
Bridge Option	25
One Ferry Option (no change)	13
Two Ferry Option	11
Total	49

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the views of our members.

We do not pay a toll to cross the Barron River

I have not returned my questionnaire because I do not agree with either of the options offered.

We do not pay a toll to cross the Barron River. Why should we pay a toll to cross the Daintree River?

Is it not the responsibility of the Council to build and maintain such roads as are necessary to allow the free flow of traffic throughout the Shire? I use the word "free" in both meanings of the term. That previous councils failed in their duty in regard to the Daintree is no reason for the present council to do the same. The crossing should never have been left in private hands.

That the council should propose a toll at all is bad enough. That they should propose imposing an additional levy as a fund-raising measure is unforgivable. I have never heard of such a thing, ever, anywhere! Traditionally, all citizens of the realm had the right to free use of the Queen's highway and I see no reason why traditional European practices should not be honoured and respected, as are Aboriginal, where possible.

Tolls were only allowed "down south" on the understanding that they would be abolished as soon as the expense of the work undertaken had been recouped. I have no idea whether that will actually happen, but, once again, failings by other authorities are no reason for the failing of our local authority.

The ratepayers collectively are responsible for the cost. As to the use of the bridge, let us have a "free-for-all" of the very best kind. I look forward to receiving a reply to this letter.

Strongly oppose the process

As listed below, we strongly object to the process conducted by council and the proposal being put forward.

1.0 Mandate:

- Council would be expected to put a major and emotive issue such as this forward as part of its mandate during the election process. This was not done and suggests of a lack of transparency around the motives of council in introducing this issue. We believe that the current council would not have been voted in if their intent in opening this issue as a major focus of council was transparently put forward as a part of their strategy.
- Major infrastructure matters such as bridges are not part of council's remit. As acknowledged in the Daintree River Crossing options report, and at consultation meetings, Council does not have the financial capacity to build a bridge and would be relying on state and/or federal government funding for this project. Compared to issues such as upgrades of the Western Developmental roads and the Bruce Highway the proposed bridge would seem to have limited economic benefit and be unlikely to attract funding. Council resources would be better directed towards council oriented matters.
- Conversely, the current council strongly put forward that there would be no water restrictions in Douglas Shire as a part of their platform. I am yet to see a single point in council minutes where a plan to solve the current issues with water supply has been considered. We believe that Council should focus the limited resources available to a small council on doing what they said they were going to do and actions which are more in line with the responsibilities of council and community needs.

2.0 Basis for the Change and Economic factors.

- Review of the Daintree Traffic Management Report (June 2019) shows traffic declining since 2015. Revenue and traffic modelling are based on 1% growth per year, which clearly was not happening even before tourism was effected by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Why

are we considering any change in the current environment with a massive drop-off in tourist numbers reported and an uncertain future for tourism? This appears simply illogical.

- Additionally, to the above, in talking to visitors to the area and even Cairns based friends, a major part of the Daintree experience is the ferry trip – i.e. That is the reason to drive to Daintree. It could be expected that replacing the ferry with a bridge would further reduce visitor numbers and reduce the economic benefit of the proposal further.
- As discussed during consultation meetings and flagged in the Daintree Traffic Management Report (June 2019), high demands for the ferry occur for 2 hours a day, over 2 months of the year. Again, even consideration of a bridge appears illogical.
- Difficulties in simultaneously running a ferry and building a bridge in the same location are flagged in the Daintree River Crossing options report. This suggests it is probable that the bridge would need to be constructed in another location, which may add up to 25 minutes travel time and negate any benefit from a bridge. Again, the bridge proposal appears completely illogical.
- No information has been released in council modelling regarding the cost of breaking or extending the contract awarded by the previous council. This needs to be transparent to the community and ratepayers of Douglas Shire.
- Charges and rates from Council appear to be rising despite the competent governance of the previous council which delivered a stable and strong platform. It appears that much of this is due to frivolous spending by council on issues such as the Daintree bridge proposal and Newell Beach foreshore proposals in an environment where sugar prices are depressed, tourist numbers are down and are unlikely to rise in the short term. Travel is also heavily restricted and this has had major ramifications on many small businesses and individuals in the Shire, including my own. Again, this seems to be against the best interests of the ratepayers of Douglas Shire and irresponsible.
- Douglas Shire has spent many years positioning itself as a green tourist destination with low key development. This is also treasured by residents. Yet council has jeopardised this by even tabling the Daintree Bridge option, without a mandate.
- As previously noted, there appears to be no growth in visitor numbers in the last five years. There appears to be no prospect of increasing numbers in the short term. In consultation meetings it was tabled that there was a lack of desire from Shire residents for increased numbers and this may in fact be detrimental to the area. Again, there appears to be no mandate for council to be considering this matter.

3.0 Environmental Issues:

- No Environmental study, even at a high level has been tabled on the impact of this proposal. As a key consideration in the issue, this seems to be a very poorly run process by Council. There has been considerable feedback in local press regarding these issues and a bridge appears to be a very poor option environmentally and may lead to further loss of habitat.
- As per previous, any increase in numbers appears unattractive on environmental grounds and there is an argument that council should be considering reducing numbers in peak periods.

4.0 Council Process

- The consultation process appears to have been extremely poorly run. Issues noted include:
 - Unanimous agreement at “Consultation Meetings” that inadequate options were presented. Options not included that were discussed:
 - Do Nothing and remain with a single ferry option.
 - Development of a priority lane on the North Bank for tradesmen and local residents.

- A quota system to restrict access to the area.
- No minutes were taken of the meetings. Surely, it would be expected that minutes would be taken in a "Consultation Meeting" and displayed on Councils' website; particularly given the limitation on numbers allowed to attend due to the pandemic?
- "On the hop" decision making – when questioned regarding the lack of options presented by Council, Gaye Scott (Community Consultation Officer) told people to write the other options on the survey!
- Shire Engineers behaving aggressively in "Consultation Meetings" and appearing to actively dismiss other options to a bridge which appear very sensible as above. Speaking to attendees after "Consultation Meetings" and during letter drops opinion was the Council is "railroading" the process and there is no real consultation process.
- Incomplete information – no environmental process and no information on the economic ramifications of the cancellation of the current 2 ferry option.

In summary, we strongly oppose the process being followed by council and request that limited council resources are redirected to matters of priority to local residents such as water infrastructure and keeping rates and charges at a reasonable level when many residents are suffering financially.

More information Required

Where would a bridge go exactly? It is not as simple as bridge or ferry.

To make a decision here, the public needs to be informed – where are the environmental impact assessments for both options?

- Traditional Owner Membership Card through Jabalbina should be accepted by Council and allow free ferry travel.
- Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment needed
- Comparative Environmental Impact assessments for both options → do this and let us make a decision that is informed!

Reasons For Two Ferries and/or Against a Bridge

Below are some, but not all of the reasons mentioned in the submissions from those who prefer the retention of ferry services.

- Opening the road to more traffic 24/7 would result in more road deaths of wildlife including Bennett's Tree Kangaroo, Quolls, Pademelons, Owls and Frogmouths.
- A bridge locks us in for 100 years, ferry gone forever. With a ferry, we always have the option to build a bridge in the future if we want to.
- The ferry is a unique visitor experience and is a contrast with other places
- A bridge will destroy our unique entrance to the Daintree National Park World Heritage area. A bridge will have little if any aesthetic appeal.
- A bridge removes an existing revenue stream to Douglas Shire Council.
- Cost of a bridge is well beyond the resources of Douglas Shire Council.
- A bridge is inconsistent with the existing Douglas Shire Council Planning Scheme.
- A bridge is not in keeping with the State Government Regional Plan which also advocates retention of the ferry service.
- Increased risk of feral animals crossing the bridge in the middle of the night - rats, foxes and cats. The ferry provides a natural barrier to feral animals.
- Negative impact to the Daintree brand.
- Increased traffic will threaten Heritage Listing.
- Cumulative impact – biggest fear is increased development, widening Alexandra Range Road, sealing of the Bloomfield Track, micro grid power, bridge over Emmagen Creek – so it becomes a highway.
- Second ferry allows for continuation of services when main ferry is required to come out of the water for three yearly inspection.
- Ferry provides jobs for 24 people and a second ferry will increase this to 30 jobs.
- Second ferry will relieve waiting times during the peak periods, a bridge is not needed.
- Do not want non-stop traffic on Forest Creek Road [applies to 3 bridge options.]
- Creating Forest Creek Road as a main road will be detrimental to the creatures that cross this road: pademelons, bandicoots, snakes, cassowaries and wallabies.

Reasons Given For Preferring a Bridge

Below are some, but not all of the reasons, mentioned in the submissions from those who prefer a bridge.

- A bridge guarantees no waiting time – the issue being addressed.
 - It is a better option because regardless of whether there is one ferry or two there will always be delays and cars will be banked up waiting for the next ferry.
 - A bridge is more environmentally friendly as there will be less emissions from cars as they won't have to sit idling waiting.
 - A bridge eliminates carbon emissions generated by ferry operations.
 - Annual dredging is a concern:
 - The river floor takes a month or more to settle after each dredging
 - The disturbance brings acid sulphate soils up which degrade the water quality, once again flowing out to the reef and affecting the flora and fauna of both the river and the Great Barrier Reef Basin
 - More silt to be deposited on the Great Barrier Reef
 - A second ferry will increase the amount of material required to be dredged
 - Dredging takes sand out of the system, leading to erosion further downstream
 - AMSA may require both ferries to be out of the water for inspection at the same time
 - Enables 24 hour access
 - If 24 hour access is an issue, the bridge can be closed.
 - Better for emergency services to access north of the river
 - Crocodiles and other fauna having to negotiate two ferries may result in movement away from current territories and along with their own disruption, disrupt the livelihoods of those operating crocodile tours from the riverside near the ferries access points.
 - Two cable ferries will disrupt river cruise operators and fishing tour operators in the area
 - A bridge or an additional ferry is not going to change the volume of traffic over the Daintree River; the number of visitors to the area is a result of the level of destination marketing, international and domestic travel trends, and pandemics.
 - A bridge will not mean over development as DSC's planning scheme prevents this.
 - Tradesmen and delivery vehicles factor in waiting time into their costs. A bridge would eliminate this reducing costs for residents and businesses north of the river.
 - Two ferries will require significant clearing of mangroves.
 - \$18 one way is a rip off.
-