

Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree (TPDD) Position Statement

Daintree Ferry Contract Renewal Community Consultation

OVERVIEW

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

BACKGROUND

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, long ferry queues during peak periods are a major deterrent to visitation in the Daintree and will continue to undermine the tourism industry in the Douglas Shire.

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

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

These objectives should include:

- optimising visitor numbers north of the River
- creating an outstanding traveller experience
- optimising longer overnight stays north of the River
- minimising wait time and the frustrations and negative impact on business and community
- streamlining queuing, boarding and ticketing
- providing helpful travel information in conjunction with DMC
- providing safety advice during blockages and emergencies

RECOMMENDATIONS/SUPPORTED INITIATIVES

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

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

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

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



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