

ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING 7 OCTOBER 2014	5.7
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DAINTREE RIVER FERRY – DOUGLAS CARD

Darryl Crees: General Manager Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council resolves to:

- continue the economic incentive previously described as the “Smart Card” under the banner of the “Douglas Card”;
- continue this incentive is to occur on an annual basis for the period 1 November to the end of February;
- extend the eligibility criteria to the following councils:
 - Mareeba Shire Council
 - Tablelands Regional Council
 - Cairns Regional Council
 - Cassowary Coast Regional Council
 - Cook Shire Council
- Issue the card free of charge with the use of the card restricted to the ferry fare categories of Motor Car & Utility (which may include a trailer), Pedestrians & Bicycles and Motor Bikes.
- delegate authority under section 257 of the Local Government Act 2009 to the Chief Executive Officer to finalise any and all operational requirements to progress this matter.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

An economic incentive known as the “Smart Card” has been in practice for the last two years providing free travel on the Daintree River Ferry for eligible residents of neighbouring local governments for the period 1 November to 28 February. This incentive was initiated to support businesses north of the Daintree River in the tourist low season.

Partnering Council in this initiative has been Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree who have arranged various promotions and the feedback received from participating businesses has been positive.

Considering this is the first year of the new Douglas it is recommended that Council formally resolves to continue the program under the new name of “Douglas Card”.

BACKGROUND:

In early 2011, submissions had been received from tourism bodies and businesses north of the Daintree River to extend travel concessions for the Daintree River Ferry to the whole of the Cairns Regional Council (CRC) local government area.

Whilst this request was not approved, CRC granted a “one off” economic stimulus by waiving all fares on the ferry for the period 16 April to 2 May 2011 inclusive. Included in this period were the school holidays, Easter weekend, ANZAC Day and May Day long weekend.

When considering revenue foregone and other factors this “one off” economic stimulus cost CRC in excess of \$198,000. It was subsequently determined that there would be no further “total free” periods for the ferry.

At its Finance & Administration Committee meeting on 21 September 2011, CRC resolved to introduce the “Smart Card” for local residents of the whole CRC local government area. The card would be valid, for restricted fare categories, from 15 November 2011 to 15 January 2012. A further “Smart Card” period was approved for the Easter Holidays being 30 March 2012 to 9 April 2012 inclusive.

Following the success of these trials, on 19 September 2012, CRC approved an annual “Smart Card” period from 1 November to 28 February. The eligibility criterion was extended to Tablelands Regional Council and Cassowary Coast Regional Council.

COMMENT:

The intent of the “Smart Card” incentive was to attract local Far North Queensland residents who would not normally travel north of the Daintree River to do so in the tourist low season. Partnering Council with this incentive has been Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree (TPDD) who has established a promotional brochure of offers from participating businesses. TPDD are supportive of this incentive and the following advice has recently been received:

“Each year we run the Smart Card offer, we hear more positive feedback from operators. Each year varies, different operators do better one year than the next, often depending on the type of offer they are presenting. Businesses are keen to participate, judging by the volume in each brochure.

Big picture speaking, we would support the continuation of this program, as it is a way to highlight the diversity of accommodation and activities that are available in the area. The program creates media opportunities for us to promote, it raises awareness/educates consumers on the Daintree via the brochure (taking into account there isn't another brochure like it in market) and the free ferry travel is a prompt for people to take a trip there during the low season.

The longer the program runs, the more people will know about it, tell people about it, etc. We also believe it is essential to keep it open to residents of neighbouring/regional councils as it has previously.”

PROPOSAL:

It is therefore recommended that this economic incentive continue on the following basis:

- The “smart card” is rebadged as the “Douglas Card”.
- Eligibility is extended to bona fide local residents of Mareeba Shire Council, Tablelands Regional Council, Cairns Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council and Cook Shire Council.
- Use of this card will be restricted to the following fare categories – Motor Car & Utilities (private use), Pedestrians & Bicycles and Motor Bikes.
- Photographic identification and additional proof of residency, if required, needs to be furnished with application to confirm local status.
- Continuation of an annual period being 1 November to 28/29 February.
- Card be issued free of charge.

As this is the first year of the new Douglas Shire Council, all existing holders of the “Smart Card” will be need to lodge an application for the “Douglas Card” to enable Council to establish its own database of users.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE:

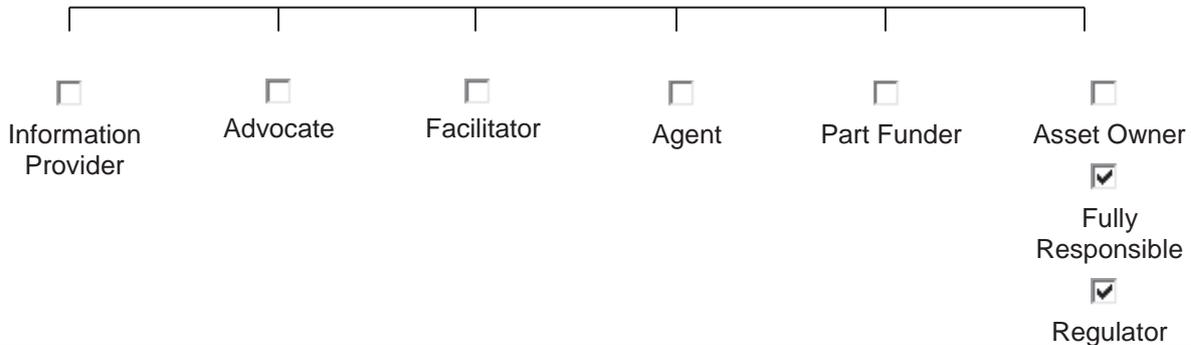
This report has been prepared in accordance with:

- 2.3.4 *Develop positive partnerships with economic development organisations and work proactively towards achieving mutually agreed goals and objectives.*
- 2.4.2 *Collaborate with communities in the north of the Shire to identify and pursue opportunities for increased tourism market share.*

COUNCIL'S ROLE:

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:



Fully Responsible: Funding the full cost of a program or activity.

Regulator: Meeting the responsibilities associated with regulating activities through legislation or local law.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Any additional costs associated with implementation of the "Douglas Card" will be met through the Daintree River Ferry operational budget. Statistics demonstrate that the use of the "Smart Card" is increasing without any detrimental affect to ferry income.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

Council is continuing with an incentive to increase visitor numbers north of the Daintree River in the tourist low season and accordingly there are no major risks associated with this proposal.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

ECONOMIC: This incentive is to encourage visitors from neighbouring shires that would not normally travel north of the Daintree River to do so. Coupled with the promotional activities undertaken by Tourism Port Douglas & Daintree, the intent is to promote businesses in that area in the tourist low season.

ENVIRONMENTAL: Nil

SOCIAL: Nil

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Whilst feedback has been received during the CRC years, Douglas has not independently undertaken community engagement on this incentive and this proposal will fall within the “inform” category of Council’s Community Engagement Framework.

ATTACHMENTS:

Nil