

5.7. WANGETTI TRAIL CONCEPT

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DEPARTMENT: Sustainable Communities

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Notes the Wangetti Trail interim feasibility report and supports the ongoing development of the concept; and**
- 2. Agrees to participate in a joint Project Working Group with staff from Cairns Regional Council and nominates the Manager Sustainable Communities as Council's representative on the group; and**
- 3. Supports the participating in preliminary evaluation proposed by the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Douglas, in partnership with the Cairns Regional Council, developed a Concept Plan and Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the proposed Wangetti Trail.

The Wangetti Trail is a proposed iconic mountain bike and hiking trail in the coastal ranges between Palm Cove and Port Douglas. The proposed trail showcases the beauty of the World Tropics and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage areas and is a priority recommendation within the FNQROC Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy. Douglas also promoted the Wangetti Trail concept as a regional priority for the FNQROC Board at the FNQROC Board meeting in October 2016.

The economic study concludes that the trail has the potential to be a major economic stimulant to Far North Queensland. An estimated 28,000 mountain bikers and walkers will use the trail annually, generating an additional estimated direct input into the community of \$10.4M per annum. The capital cost of providing the trail is estimated to be \$21 Million and 74 additional jobs will be created.

Council recently notification from the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (DILGP) that the Wangetti Trail concept was successful in being selected for further attention under the Maturing the Infrastructure Pipeline Project (MIPP). DILGP, in partnership with Douglas, will progress these proposals by engaging professional service providers to undertake early stage assessments. These assessments will be in line with the Queensland Treasury Project Assessment Framework and the Queensland Treasury Corporation Project Decision Framework.

The preliminary feasibility report provides a positive outlook for the project and the ability to further assess the project through the MIPP process provide sound grounds for recommending that Council continue to support the concept through the next phase of development.

BACKGROUND

The Wangetti Trail is the vision of Glen Jacobs, Cairns local, founding Director of World Trail and internationally known trail design and construction expert. For the past twenty-five years Glen has dreamed of an iconic long distance linear trail connecting Palm Cove and Port Douglas, that showcases the diverse and unique natural environment in the region and rivals the best overnight trail experiences in the world. In June 2015 staff from Cairns Regional Council and Douglas met to discuss the Wangetti Trail idea, in October of 2015 Glen Jacobs met with Mayor Julia Leu to further discuss support for the trail concept.

Staff from Douglas and CRC continued to discuss the progression of the concept and in the 2017/18 budgets both Council's allocated funds to allow a concept plan to be developed and a economic study to be completed. Officers from both CRC and Douglas subsequently engaged World Trail to produce a concept plan in association with Cummings Economics who undertook economic and social impact assessment. The final concept plan was presented to Council by World Trail in March 2016.

The Wangetti Trail has been a focus of Council's vision for priority regional projects and has been championed by the Mayor at the State and Federal level.

The proposed trail showcases the beauty of the World Tropics and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage areas and is a priority recommendation within the FNQROC Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy. Douglas promoted the Wangetti Trail concept as a regional priority at the FNQROC Board meeting in October 2016.

Cairns Regional Council considered an officer report in late May 2017. As part of that report officers advised that *in order to successfully progress this project an independent group with a degree of autonomy or the State Government itself are best placed to drive the project through the next phase. It is therefore recommended that a Project Working Group be formed consisting of officers from Douglas and Cairns Councils as well as state government officers, Traditional Owners and other relevant stakeholders. Future steps involving the working group will include:*

1. *Identifying and partnering with a primary driver to lead the project through the final design, construction and management phases;*
2. *Investigating funding opportunities;*
3. *Developing and recommending an appropriate management model; and*
4. *Developing a suitable trail name and brand*

In October 2016 the Wangetti Trail was submitted to DLGIP for consideration for funding under the Maturing the Infrastructure Pipeline Project. Douglas has recently (July 2017) been advised that the Wangetti Trail project, based on the Douglas submission, has been chosen by DILGP for preliminary evaluation.

COMMENT

The Wangetti Trail is a two way trail and can commence at Port Douglas or Palm Cove, alternatively users would be able to sections of the trail as day walks as they choose with access and egress points along the trail. The trail will be shared use and available to mountain bike riders and walkers, providing a wilderness walk experience with outstanding views over the coastline and the Coral Sea and access to waterfalls and features along the way.

Various accommodation options including five huts located at overnight campsites and access to local communities for users looking for a more comfortable or luxurious nights rest is proposed. The trail is designed for use by hikers and mountain bike riders. The trail is divided into sections which represent an achievable daily distance for walkers and consists of:

- Section 1 (14 km) Palm Cove – Ellis Beach – Simpson Point
- Section 2 (14 km) Simpson Point – Wangetti – Hartleys Creek waterfall
- Section 3 (16 km)) Hartley's Creek – Pretty Beach – Oak Beach
- Section 4 (10 km) Oak Beach – Spring Creek Falls
- Section 5 (10 km) Spring Creek – Yule Point
- Section 6 (12 km) Yule Beach – Port Douglas

Optional links to existing trails is also proposed such as a link from Spring Creek to the Twin Bridges Trail and through to the Bump Track. Attachment 1 gives a general overview of the concept trail.

This study developed a demand assessment into the likely extent and pattern of trail walking and mountain biking applicable to the region. The economic study concludes that the trail has the potential to be a major economic stimulant to Far North Queensland.

An estimated 28,000 mountain bikers and walkers will use the trail annually, generating an additional estimated direct input into the community of \$10.4M per annum. The capital cost of providing the trail is estimated to be \$21 Million and 74 additional jobs will be created.

Demand Assessment

- Estimated number of walkers: 9,000 pa
- Estimated number of walker days on the trail: 16,000 pa
- Estimated number of mountain bikers: 19,000 pa
- Estimated number of mountain biker days on the trail: 27,000 pa
- Estimated total users: 28,000 pa
- Estimated total user days: 43,000 pa

Total Expenditure

Total expenditure generated by trail users is estimated at:

- Estimated expenditure by walkers: \$6.0M pa
- Estimated expenditure by mountain bikers: \$12.3M pa
- Estimated total: \$18.3M pa

Council's Manager Sustainable Communities met with officers from CRC in May and June 2017 in relation to forming the Wangetti Trail Working Group (WTWG). Officers have also met with a consultant to assist in developing an operating framework for the WTWG and the development of a stepped process for the WTWG to progress the project to the next stage including determination of the:-

- WTWG terms of Reference
- Funding for administration of the WTWG
- Benefit cost analysis/business case development) for the Wangetti Trail
- Recommended Ownership and Management model
- Funding opportunities for detailed design for trail implementation

(Prepare a detailed trail alignment for each segment and prepare generic construction details across the three segments (trail, boardwalk, bridge crossing, signage, camping sites, toilets, segment car parking, etc.).

Council has now received notification that the Wangetti Trail has been selected for Preliminary Evaluation (PE) under the MIPPs. The PE is an assessment of the priority and affordability of the project options and seeks to identify a preferred option for progression.

The key activities undertaken during the PE stage are to:

- re-confirm the outcome sought identified in the SASR
- re-assess the prioritisation of the project and alignment with strategic government priorities.
- define the options to be evaluated in the PE
- evaluate the costs, risks and benefits associated with the identified project options
- determine the extent of private sector involvement and/or potential for private sector investment (including as a potential PPP project) for the project
- develop a detailed plan and budget for progressing to the next stage in the project lifecycle (business case development).

The PE appears to address a number of the requirements for progressing to the next stage in the Wangetti Trail project.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed that Council agrees to support the ongoing development of the concept and to participate in a joint Project Working Group (Wangetti Trail Working Group) with staff from Cairns Regional Council. The Manager Sustainable Communities is proposed as the Douglas Council representative on the group. It is believed that the Wangetti Trail will become a trail of international appeal and to successfully progress this project an independent group with a degree of autonomy are best placed to drive the project through the next phase. It is therefore recommended that Douglas Shire Council participate in a Project Working Group with officers from Cairns Regional Council as well as state government officers, Traditional Owners and other relevant stakeholders. Future steps involving the working group will include:

- Identifying and partnering with a primary driver to lead the project through to the final detailed design, construction and management phases; and
- Investigating funding opportunities; and
- Developing and recommending an appropriate management model; and
- Developing a suitable trail name and brand.
- The working group will not be a decision making body and is proposed to be jointly hosted by Cairns and Douglas.

It is further proposed that Council supports the preliminary evaluation proposed by the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning and works with CRC staff and the DILGP to further progress the development of the trail.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Council allocated \$25, 000.00 in the 2016/17 budget towards the development of the Wangetti Trail concept. Approximately \$20,000.00 of this money remains with CRC as part of budget for the of the ongoing development of the concept. CRC allocated an additional

\$30, 000.00 in their 2017/18 budget as the CRC contribution to the next stage of feasibility development. Total budget from Douglas and CRC is \$70, 000.00 with funds to be sort from other partners/agencies. At this stage resources are limited to the Manager Sustainable Communities.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Risk	Likelihood	Control Measure/Treatment
Stakeholder and community interest	Low	The concept has gained high interest and wide acceptance from key stakeholders and the community as a result of media exposure.
Funding	Medium	It is expected that external funding is sourced and local government funding is minimal. Similar projects in Australia have gained support from all three levels of government. Partnerships with private enterprise is also possible as a whole or for separate facets of the project.
Timing	Medium	Is dependent on securing funding for future stages
Land Tenure	Low -Medium	Further investigation is required to establish any tenure or acquisition issues. Currently the majority of the concept trail is located on public land as National Park or Reserve.
Project Driver	High	Establish a management model to progress the development and completion of this project

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: The economic study confirmed the trail can provide a major economic stimulus to Tropical North Queensland. It is estimated that the trail is likely to attract in the order of 28,000 users per annum. Increased opportunities for employment and new businesses will result from the project. The trail will provide flow on benefits to existing businesses in food, supplies, accommodation, transport and tours. Funds generated just by the trail coming into existence is estimated to be in the vicinity of an additional \$10.4M per annum. The capital cost of providing the trail is estimated to be \$21.25M and result in an additional 74 jobs. Annual maintenance costs are estimated to be \$500,000 - \$1M per annum which will be covered by user pay charges to stay overnight at the camp grounds.

Environmental: The Wangetti Trail must be sympathetic to the terrain and topography – It must blend into the landscape and create a sense of purpose and movement through the landscape.

The Wangetti Trail will:-

1. Use/follow existing roads, vehicle tracks or walking tracks if they provide the right experience and are sustainable – This principle ensures good value for money and improved environmental outcomes by preventing unnecessary trail construction.
2. Showcase the beauty of the terrain – The trail must take riders and walkers to the best places and provide access to the most scenic features possible.

3. Avoid areas of highest environmental significance where possible – In practice, this is best achieved in the ground-truthing stage, when the exact trail alignments are being determined, by engaging qualified ecologists to assist in determining the best alignment, to ensure that the trail avoids areas of concern.
4. Be built to modern best-practice standards for sustainable trail construction and will be designed to minimise environmental impacts through careful alignment of the trail and through ensuring that all trail construction activities are carried out in line with best practice sustainable trail construction practice.
5. Provide an opportunity to educate and inform people about the natural and cultural values of the area through which it passes, through interpretive signage and value-added guided tours.

Social: Social benefits include increased opportunities for employment and new businesses including special and unique opportunities for indigenous and cultural employment. Physical and mental health benefits for the local users and visitors will result from this project.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2014-2019 Initiatives:

Theme 1 – Celebrating Our Communities

1.1.4 - Support and encourage a healthy, active and capable region through sporting, cultural and recreational opportunities, and community wellbeing initiatives.

1.3.4 - Provide and enhance community facilities and opportunities that cater for the arts, recreational and cultural pursuits.

Theme 2 – Building a Sustainable Economic Base

2.2.1 - Develop business initiatives to support commercial development and investment within the Shire.

2.2.5 - Expand tourism and agricultural business opportunities and benefits through collaborative planning and promotion.

2.3.2 - Investigate opportunities for sports and cultural tourism.

2.3.3 - Support and explore appropriate commercial uses of Council - controlled land, adding to the visitor experience and supporting the local economy.

2.3.5 - Develop and promote Douglas as the “bicycle capital of Australia” through the planning and construction of a network of bicycle trails, traffic separation and management arrangements.

Theme 4 – Engage, Plan, Partner

4.2.2 - Provide leadership to secure beneficial social, environmental and economic outcomes for the Shire.

4.2.3 - Work with regional, state, national and international stakeholders to promote beneficial partnerships to support strong, resilient and sustainable communities.

4.2.4 - Identify opportunities to form partnerships with the Traditional Owners.

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:

Advocate Supporting communities and groups by advocating for certain actions from other organisations (usually other levels of government)

Facilitator Bringing people together to develop solutions to problems

CONSULTATION

Internal: Sustainability Officer

External: Cairns Regional Council
Councillors
State and Federal Members

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The concept of the Wangetti Trail has been promoted via Council's digital networks and in local media.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Wangetti Trail Concept Plan Overview Map **[5.7.1]**

Attachment 1: Wangetti Trail Concept Plan Overview Map

