

## **Restoring Wetlands, Strengthening the Shire, Tourism, Farming & Replanting: Finding the Balance in the Douglas Shire**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for Rainforest Rescue's Development Application. Please accept this written notice as a properly made submission in support of the proposed Permanent Plantation development in the Lower Daintree (Council Ref: MCUI 2025\_5809/1.)

I have been working on the Daintree River almost half my life (28 years) and am constantly promoting this area through social media (240K Facebook and 114K Instagram followers). We have recently been listed on Tripadvisor as #13 in the whole world of things to tick off your bucket list, this is a big bonus for our shire.

All rivers meander, and the Daintree River moves quicker than most due to the high rainfall. When the lowland rainforest was first cleared and wetlands filled in, riparian buffer zones were left to protect the banks and slow erosion. Over the years I have watched the area covered in this proposal degrading severely. As the river moves, the riparian zones have becoming increasingly smaller and many areas totally disappeared altogether, and much of the area where most of the tour boats operate is just eroded bank and sugarcane. The trees can no longer grow back as there is no buffer zone just river and farmland.

While the Daintree name itself has a fantastic reputation, the value of the river as a product for eco-tourism, is not living to this reputation. Not just the look but the lack of wildlife due to habitat loss, the birdlife on the river in my time again has dramatically decreased. This is the marine park section of the river, the gateway to the oldest rainforest on the planet which we are all so proud of. But this area no longer an experience that it once was at the very least the riparian zones should be being maintained.

Just last week I took out a National Geographic film crew scientists and again they reiterated a now common theme, surprised at the lack of riparian vegetation and said 'no wonder it is hard to find fish and birds here'; it was not what they expected in a marine park. I now have people telling me they will go to the Northern Territory next time which for someone that has spent almost half of my life promoting this area is very hard to hear. But it is undeniable, the impact.

In fact, many tourisms Queensland advertisements don't show the area where we all operate but instead now use downstream footage where no tours go (due to distance

from the wharf) as this area is still intact. This is upsetting for me as I feel I am not meeting the expectations that the visitors have of a pristine wild area.

One of the most common concerns raised when we talk about replanting land is the “loss of farmland.” It’s an understandable worry — agriculture has been the backbone of this region for generations, and farming families are rightly proud of that legacy. However: not all farmland in the Douglas Shire is equal. Some areas — especially low-lying land around the Daintree River is swampy ground that has never been truly productive. Heavy floods, salt intrusion, and poor soils mean those paddocks are often unproductive and with the sugar cane industry winding down, much of that ground is no longer viable for conversion to cattle. Combine this with the added risk of increased floods in the area, last two floods we had here, many cattle were killed and washed away. So, when we talk about restoring wetlands along the Daintree River, it’s important to clear this up. Farming is a proud part of the Douglas Shire story, and productive land will always have its place.

This isn’t about farms versus forests. It’s about using land wisely: farming the best land productively and restoring the least productive land so it can serve another purpose — one that strengthens our economy, protects our environment, and keeps the Douglas Shire thriving. This isn’t about reducing the Shire’s assets — it’s about adding to them. Productive farmland remains farmland, while marginal land is turned into something that works better for everyone: healthier ecosystems, stronger flood protection, and an even more vibrant tourism industry.

These photos below represent a changed landscape, and they can be greatly improved in every way by restoring them to wetlands. I am incredibly proud of this area and proud of the farmers and proud to live in an area that produces the very food we all eat. But I am also proud to showcase this area and that is getting increasingly difficult.

By restoring wetlands, this initiative will deliver wide ranging benefits for the Douglas shire:

- Protect the riverbanks – wetlands slow erosion, filter sediment, and keep the Daintree clean and healthy. But not just the Daintree, this in the kidney to the reef and this in turn helps protect the great barrier reef by reducing sediment run off and absorbing nutrients. A regenerative alternative to cane farming that strengthens biodiversity, climate resilience, and long-term land care.
- Local job creation, with all planting and maintenance done by the Douglas Shire community. Support for local employment through seed collection, nursery propagation and land management roles alongside the increased benefits for eco-tourism.
- A strong alignment with Council’s goals for sustainable regional development and nature-positive solutions.



- Boost flood resilience – wetlands act like giant sponges, soaking up floodwaters and easing pressure on farmland, homes, and infrastructure.
- Create wildlife habitat – restoration of more than 400 hectares of former cane restored to wetlands bring back birds, fish nurseries, and all the life that makes this region unique. An increase in fish populations which I don't think anyone in this shire will disagree with, this is a direct benefit to everyone in the shire that enjoys fishing.
- Add value for tourism – visitors already bring in hundreds of millions of dollars a year to the Shire. Replanted wetlands add to that draw, showcasing the Daintree's wild beauty.
- The proposal responds to the Regional Plan's call for climate-responsive land use, by restoring degraded land, improving flood resilience, and supporting biodiversity corridors. These actions contribute to regional adaptation and align with broader sustainability goals with enhancement of biodiversity corridors, carbon sequestration, improved water quality flowing to the Daintree River and Great Barrier Reef, and resilience to climate change impacts.
- Planning Act 2016 Compliance – The development supports the purpose of the Planning Act 2016 by facilitating ecological sustainability through the integration of environmental protection, economic development, and community wellbeing. Specifically, it: Restores degraded land and protects Matters of State and National Environmental Significance.
- Rainforest Rescue has a 25-year history of conservation leadership in the Daintree, and this project is a transformative step in aligning land use with Council's vision for a sustainable and resilient Shire.
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We urge Douglas Shire Council to approve this Development Application and enable the restoration of these lands for the benefit of the environment, community, and future generations.

Yours sincerely,













