

Cook Shire Tourism Strategy

Phase II Consultation Report

Final
May, 2012

A leading Australian consulting group recognised through the success of our clients



- Economics, Planning & Development 
- Business Strategy & Finance 
- Community Research & Strategy 
- Design, Marketing & Advertising 
- Information & Knowledge Management 

Document Control

Job ID: 15972
Job Name: Cook Shire Tourism Strategy
Project Director: Carey Ramm
Project Manager: James Dunbar
Company: Cook Shire Council
Job Contact: David Barker
Document Name: AECgroup Cook Shire Tourism Strategy Phase II consultation report
Last Saved: 23/7/2012 12:49 PM

Version	Date	Reviewed PM	Approved PD
V1	8/12/2011	JD	TL
Final	29/05/2012	TL	CR

Disclaimer:

Whilst all care and diligence have been exercised in the preparation of this report, AEC Group Limited does not warrant the accuracy of the information contained within and accepts no liability for any loss or damage that may be suffered as a result of reliance on this information, whether or not there has been any error, omission or negligence on the part of AEC Group Limited or their employees. Any forecasts or projections used in the analysis can be affected by a number of unforeseen variables, and as such no warranty is given that a particular set of results will in fact be achieved.



Table of Contents

DOCUMENT CONTROL.....	I
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	II
1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 BACKGROUND	3
1.2 PURPOSE OF REPORT	3
2. PHASE II CONSULTATION APPROACH	4
2.1 CONSULTATION PROCESS.....	4
2.2 KEY THEMES FOR CONSULTATION PHASE II	4
2.2.1 CRUISE SHIP INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT.....	5
2.2.2 MOUNTAIN BIKING PRODUCT OPPORTUNITIES	5
2.2.3 TOURISM AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE	6
2.2.4 SIGNAGE AND RELATED POLICY.....	6
2.2.5 SKILLS AND TRAINING	7
3. RESULTS FROM PHASE I CONSULTATIONS.....	8
3.1 CRUISE SHIP MARKET.....	8
3.2 MOUNTAIN BIKING	10
3.3 TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE	11
3.4 SIGNAGE AND RELATED POLICY.....	13
3.5 SKILLS AND TRAINING	14



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2009, the Cooktown Chamber of Commerce with the support of the Cook Shire Council, commenced the preparation of a marketing action plan, which was later published in 2010. The marketing plan recommended that further research be undertaken to develop the long term sustainability of tourism in Cook Shire. The Cook Shire Council adopted this recommendation and has commissioned AECgroup to develop the Cook Shire Tourism Strategy, which will provide strategic direction for tourism in Cook Shire over the next 10 years. The Cook Shire Tourism Strategy has the following desired outcomes and key aims:

- Strategy for the successful management of the 'grey nomad' and cruise ship tourism markets;
- Development of appropriate measures for estimating and recording tourism visitation numbers and associated statistics in the region;
- Sustainable use of resources in relation to tourism development;
- A long term marketing action plan;
- Identification, analysis and prioritisation of tourism product and infrastructure development;
- Comprehensive consultation with community members, regional tourism industry operators and tourism planning representatives.

1.2 Purpose of Report

The Phase II consultation report represents the second phase of the two-phase community, industry and government stakeholder consultation process for the development of the Cook Shire Tourism Strategy. This report details the format, structure, key consultation topics and results from the Phase II consultations.

The topics discussed during Phase I consultations were prioritised as the most critical issues, and included:

- The cruise ship market;
- Mountain biking;
- Tourism and related infrastructure development;
- Signage and related policy; and
- Skills and training opportunities.

2. Phase II Consultation Approach

2.1 Consultation Process

Community, industry and government stakeholder consultation has been a major component in preparation for the development of the Cook Shire Tourism Strategy. The consultation program was originally designed to be delivered in two phases, primarily due to considerations with project timing and the availability of tourism operators during the peak tourist season in June and July.

Phase I consultations were completed in July 2011 and included face-to-face individual consultations with key industry and government stakeholders and a community workshop for Cooktown, and individual telephone consultations with industry stakeholders for regional Cook Shire. Telephone consultations were also undertaken with regional planning agencies based in Cairns and Brisbane, and relevant national tour operators.

Key themes for Phase I consultations were based on those suggested by the Cook Shire Council in the project terms of reference. AECgroup adopted these consultation issues and developed a framework for each issue, with the aim to generate discussion on each topic. The key themes for consultation Phase I included:

- Tourism product development;
- Camping policy;
- Grey nomads policy;
- Regional collaboration options;
- Marketing options; and
- Operating / industry issues.

The results from Phase I consultations are detailed in the Phase I Consultation Report. The report includes key issues and opportunities relevant to each discussion topic.

Phase II consultations were undertaken in November and December 2011 and included a fresh set of key discussion topics. Phase II consultations include:

- **31 October – 4 November:** Site visit to Cooktown;
- **2 November:** Industry focus group; and
- **7 November – 6 December:** Telephone consultations.

Consultations undertaken during the site visit to Cooktown included individual face-to-face meetings for select Council staff and businesses, and a focus group for key industry operators in Cooktown. Following this, individual telephone consultations were undertaken for industry operators in remote Cook Shire, greater regional planning organisations and relevant national based tourism operators.

2.2 Key Themes for Consultation Phase II

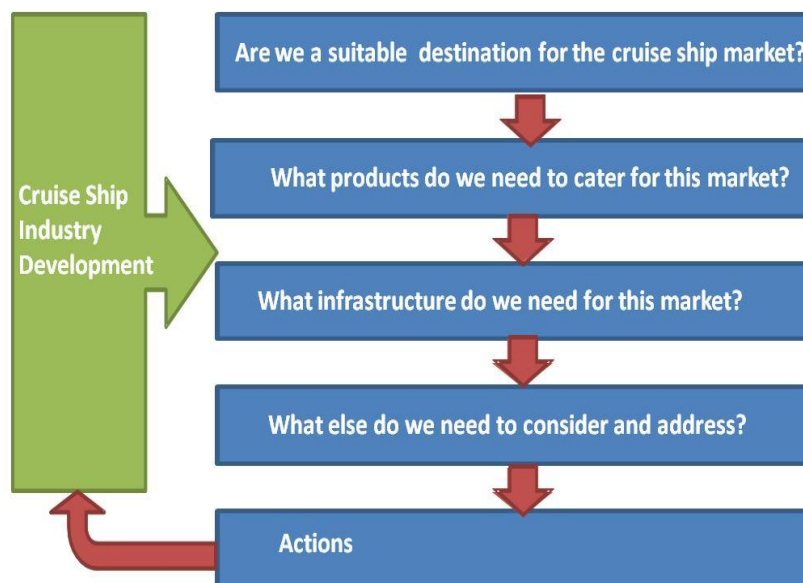
Key themes for Phase II consultations were based on those suggested by the Cook Shire Council in the project terms of reference. AECgroup adopted these consultation issues and developed a framework for each issue, with the aim to generate discussion on each topic. The key themes for consultation Phase II include:

- The cruise ship market;
- Mountain biking market;
- Tourism and related infrastructure development;
- Signage and related policy; and
- Skills and training opportunities.

2.2.1 Cruise Ship Industry Development

The cruise ship key consultation theme considers stakeholders opinions regarding the further development of the cruise ship market for Cooktown. It is generally understood that the cruise ship market is an area for potential development in Cooktown, however, there are several major impediments for this market, including the lack of appropriate docking facilities and rough sea conditions reducing the reliability for tending passengers ashore. The framework has been designed to determine whether the costs of overcoming these impediments are achievable and are outweighed by the potential benefits that are generated by further development of this market.

Figure 2.1: Cruise Ship Industry Development Consultation Framework

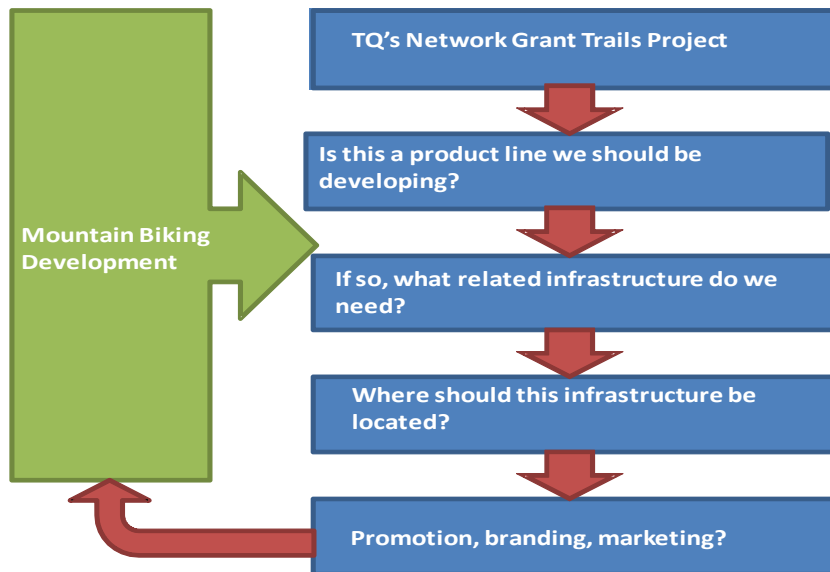


Source: AECgroup

2.2.2 Mountain Biking Product Opportunities

This consultation topic considers the potential for developing mountain biking related products in Cook Shire and capturing this associated market. Mountain biking product development has been considered in several research reports for Cook Shire and is strongly supported by a select local mountain biking community living in the Shire. The consultation framework is designed to ask stakeholders to consider whether developing the required infrastructure and designing specialised routes will result in significant visitation from the mountain biking market, in consideration of Cook Shire's remote location. If stakeholders establish that there is significant opportunity in this market, a number of discussion points that ask stakeholders to consider various measures for achieving positive development in this market are considered.

Figure 2.2: Mountain Biking Product Opportunities Consultation Framework

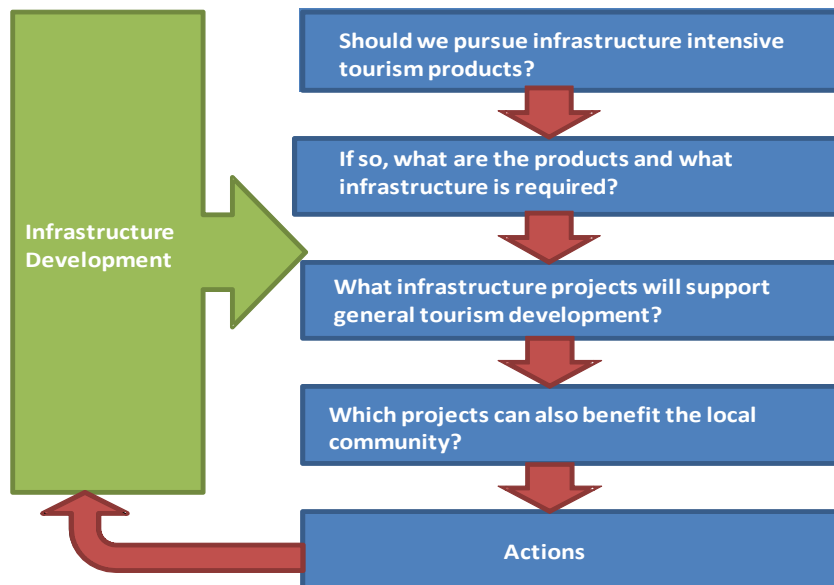


Source: AECgroup

2.2.3 Tourism and Associated Infrastructure

The tourism and associated infrastructure consultation framework aims to identify opportunities with existing and potential infrastructure developments with reference to the tourism industry. Stakeholders were also questioned about the possible impact that the ongoing sealing of the Peninsula Development Road may have the four-wheel-drive / adventure tourism market for the shire.

Figure 2.3: Tourism and Associated Infrastructure Consultation Structure

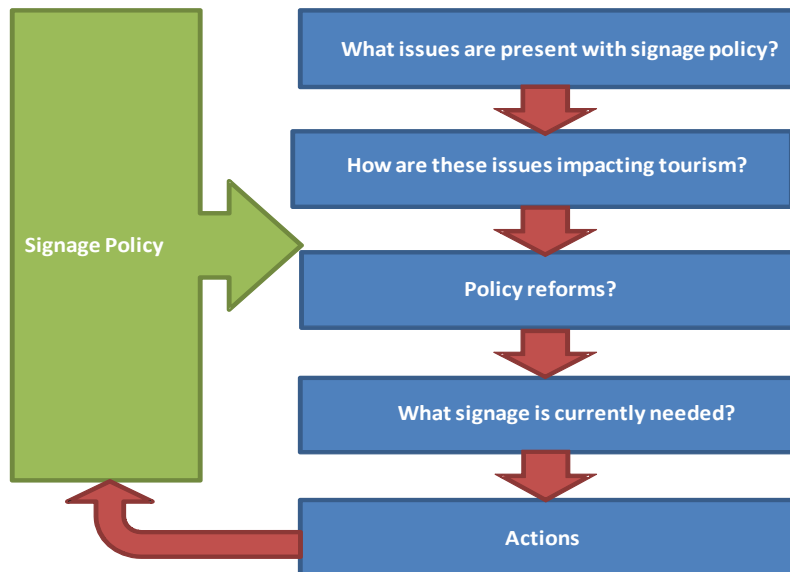


Source: AECgroup

2.2.4 Signage and Related Policy

This consultation topic aims to encapsulate any issues that stakeholders may have with signage or Council's signage policy and identify potential remedies for addressing any identified issues.

Figure 2.4: Signage and Related Policy Consultation Framework

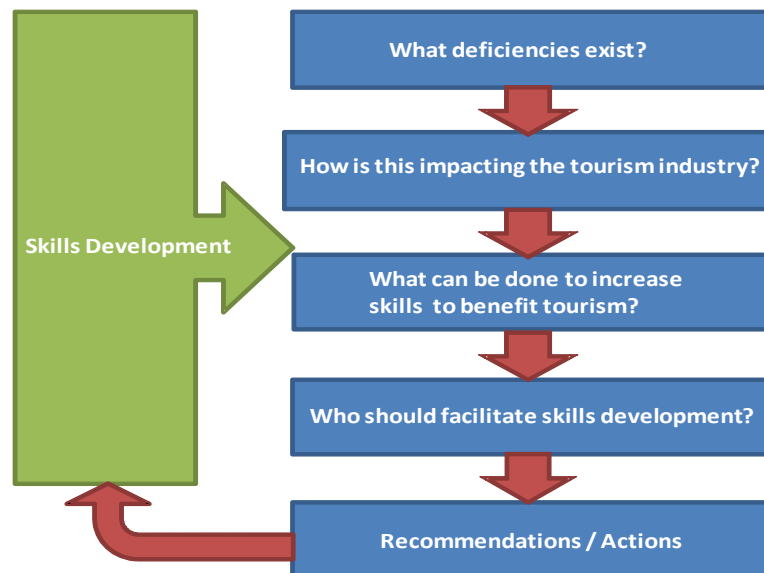


Source: AECgroup

2.2.5 Skills and Training

Skills and training has been considered by many other planning documents and associated research as persistent issues to address in Cook Shire. Given that this is an issue that is currently addressed by several Federal Government policies, the consultation framework aims to identify potential opportunities to address issues in skills and training at a regional level.

Figure 2.5: Skills and Training Consultation Framework



Source: AECgroup

3. Results from Phase I Consultations

3.1 Cruise Ship Market

The cruise ship market consultation topic is Cooktown centric, as Cooktown is the only major pinpoint in cruise itineraries in Cook Shire. No other places in Cook Shire have appropriate tendering capability for larger cruise ships, which allow passengers to access the shore.

In terms of the cruise ship market in Cooktown, most stakeholders recognise the significance of visiting ships and the economic stimulus it provides the town. However, the market is riddled with issues, first and foremost accessibility. Larger cruise ships are unable to directly access the shore, due to a lack of deep water port facilities, which means passengers are tendered to shore. Industry stakeholders noted that due to rough sea conditions, 50% of large cruise ships visiting Cooktown are unable to tender passengers to shore. The capacity of the town's tourism industry (in particular guided tours) and the infrequent scheduling of cruise ships are also noted as major constraints. Given these constraints, most stakeholders do not believe the cruise ship market should be actively pursued for tourism development, primarily as the costs of improving access will be very high and the economic benefits will likely be irregular and subject to scheduling.

Several ideas were noted in terms of alternative maritime tourism related products, including the development of a marina at Cooktown, cruises to / from Cairns, cruises to Lizard Island and reinstalling the Portland Roads jetty. A full list of consultation discussion points is noted in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Cruise Ship Market Consultation Results

Cooktown Stakeholders	Regional Cook Shire Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooktown is an iconic destination • Cruise ships want to visit the town • Weather and sea conditions are almost 'show stoppers' • Should time the cruise ships to come in the summer (later December to early April) when the weather is calmer – this will also help with tourism industry's high seasonality • Improved access would likely lead to increased visitation • Need to make tender point closer • Cooktown has strongly aligning products with the Cruise Ship market (history, fishing, nature) • Potential to establish the Indigenous draw card • Capacity of the town during these visits is an issue • Spending significant amount on infrastructure will not be worth the economic benefit pumped through the town • Loading on and off tender boats is difficult, particularly for elderly passengers • Possibility to anchor in Archer Point / Bay and bus passengers into town • Can we lease larger tender boats from Port Douglas or Cairns to overcome the weather / access issues • Some bus companies and tours for cruise ship passengers are being provided from Cairns – how can we stop this and get passengers on local tours? • Not worth chasing, just seen as added bonus when they come • Spend considerably in the town – Souvenirs, food, tours, etc • A huge boost when they come to the town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cruise shipping is fairly minimal throughout the rest of the Shire • Cooktown is really the own place where boats can tender people to shore (and even this is very problematic) • Cruise ships stop at a few of the islands and dock off of Portland Roads (expedition cruise ships) • There's not a lot of reason for them to actually come to shore (not much for passengers to do) • Would need a jetty or similar infrastructure installed to access the shore reliably • Re-establishing the jetty at Portland Roads would cost somewhere around \$4 million – still would require tendering, which is proven to be problematic in Cooktown's case



Cooktown Stakeholders	Regional Cook Shire Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cairns to Cooktown day trips (via catamaran) • Linkages with Lizard Island – can we do trips there via sea or air link • Cruise ship passengers provide a strong word of mouth affect (for attracting new visitors to the region) • Need to determine what exactly appeals to the market and identify whether Cooktown has the right ingredients to further pursue the market • Some cruise ship passengers want lots of retail and entertainment options – Cooktown cannot provide this • Need to dredge harbour to allow ships to come into the bay • Industry should not be chased as a life blood for the tourism industry – should be considered cream on the top • Products provided in Cooktown are appealing to cruise passengers • There are some great tours – the Shire should work on what it's got rather than rapidly developing new tours • Capacity is an issue, but it can be worked around (multiple trips with buses, etc) • Cooperation among the industry, local businesses and Council is excellent and is helping develop the industry nicely • Possibly develop more 4WD tour options 	

Source: AECgroup Phase II Consultations



3.2 Mountain Biking

There is a relatively sizable mountain biking / cycling community in Cook Shire who are keen to develop tourism products and associated infrastructure for this market. The benefit of providing such tourism experiences is that it will provide local riders with facilities, as well as act as tourism products for the region's tourism industry. The initiative has the most support in Cooktown and the surrounding communities of Laura, Lakeland and Bloomfield, which is fairly suitable as the tracks should be relatively accessible for riders visiting the region.

Stakeholders in Cook Shire's tourism industry frequently noted the success of the Shire's cycling events (including the Croc Trophy and Cairns to Cooktown events) in terms of attracting visitors and tourism related expenditure to the region. Based on the positive economic benefits generated from these events, it may be worthwhile looking to expand / further develop these events or consider adding new events to the cycling calendar.

Developing the defunct Cooktown to Laura rail line into a mountain bike track was mentioned as a potential catalyst project for the region. There has been several similar old rail lines that have recently been developed as mountain bike tracks in Australia, which have been supported by funding from various intra-national governments. The rail line is nestled in a land reserve, which means the project surpasses potential land tenure constraints that often kill projects of this nature. There is an old railway house approximately halfway along the track, which is owned by a local Indigenous family. The family may be interested in being involved and setting up a mid-point camp site for the trail. Balkanu is currently investigating this track as a potential inclusion to their 'Dreamtime' project, which means potential synergies may exist here.

Table 3.2: Mountain Biking Opportunity Development Consultation Results

Cooktown Stakeholders	Regional Cook Shire Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of Australia's fastest growing markets • Also potential to further develop road racing • Concept should be rephrased to include other specialist sports and activities • Events are key for this market • Potential to build on existing events and attract new events • Potential to run tours following events • Tracks must be extra-ordinary to make people want to travel up here – it's a long way, hot and dusty • Activity is potentially hazardous as people are often a long way from medical support and are exposed to nature and it's elements (including predators) • Many mountain biking opportunities already exist – local riders use old logging trails and existing dirt tracks • Good idea to have flat tracks (for more leisure mountain bikers) and downhill tracks (for the enthusiast) • Cooktown loop track (track circumnavigating the trail) – some work has already been done here in terms of mapping out a potential route • Tablelands have invested significantly in Mountain biking tracks – we can be piggy back off this and work with them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited potential for mountain biking • Is a very long way to attract riders – would not be sufficient demand • Some potential tracks: Shipton Flat Road, Hope Vale To Calan Beach, Battle Camp Road to Lakefield, Lakefield National park, Cape Melville, Laura to Maytown Road, Creb Track • Potential to develop a track following the old Laura to Cooktown rail line (120km track) • The rail line has a reserve so it does not go through private property • Similar rail trails have been funded by Governments in other regions in Australia – potential to have a similar arrangement here • Normanby Station has Indigenous owners that are keen to be involved – potential to set up a camp site here

Source: AECgroup Phase II Consultations

3.3 Tourism Infrastructure

In terms of tourism infrastructure projects, the foreshore development was most frequently mentioned by stakeholders from Cooktown, with almost all stakeholders supporting the project. Several ideas were mentioned as potential inclusions in the foreshore development, including the development of a historical village and a provision of short-stay camping facilities.

There was considerable discussion among stakeholders regarding the ongoing upgrades to roads, in particular, the Bloomfield Track and the Peninsula Development Road. Stakeholders would like to see the Bloomfield Track maintained as an unsealed road, so as to appease the 4WD tourism market. Consultees generally believed that no community amenity would be achieved through upgrading the road (in terms of travel time savings to Cairns), as the Mulligan Highway is currently adequate. Cook Shire Council notes that the Federal Government has indicated that they will seal the Peninsula Development Road to Weipa by 2020. Most stakeholders were sceptical about the time line being fulfilled, however, recognised that this was a positive development. The only concern raised regarding the sealing of the Peninsula Development Road is the impact it will have on the 4WD tourism market. Stakeholders would like to see other tracks heading up the Cape and side loops off the Peninsula Development Road maintained as 4WD tracks for use by this market.

There are ongoing issues with the camping ground at Chilli Beach near Portland Roads. The site is far too small for the number of tourists it caters for during the tourism high season. Many tourists are currently being turned away, which generates a relatively poor reputation for the region as a destination. There are several keen residents from Portland Roads actively seeking to address the noted capacity and infrastructure issues at the camp site.

Table 3.3: Tourism Infrastructure Consultation Feedback

Cooktown Stakeholders	Regional Cook Shire Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreshore is an excellent idea • Cooktown marina – would need to be picked up by a private developer • Foreshore historical village • Larger scale accommodation development • Sealing the Bloomfield track will not improve accessibility to the region or quicker times – will reduce enthusiast travel on the road • Mulligan Highway is very good and only floods for a few days per year • Environment needs to be carefully considered if any new infrastructure is to be developed • Federal Government has made a huge commitment to fund the sealing of the PDR by 2020 (\$1.1 billion @ \$90 million per year) – this project is unlikely to be completed by 2020 • By 2020 it is expected that the road will be sealed to Laura • By 2020 PDR will most likely have 5km sealed every 30km for overtaking • By 2020 Laura to Musgrave will probably be done • The sealing of the road will probably not impact on the 4WD market – 4WD market does not come here to drive the PDR – this is just a smooth dirt road • Cook Shire Council will endeavour to keep side tracks for 4WD enthusiasts – it will almost be possible to get all the way to the tip on these tracks • Sealing the road will probably rub the shine off travelling to the Cape for the 4WD market, however will drastically improve safety for the local community • Foreshore development is currently being masterplanned - a list of concepts is being refined • The masterplan will turn into a concept map which will be released for community consultation (24 Nov) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sealing of the PDR will have a huge impact in terms of the 4WD market heading up the Cape • Need to make sure the loop routes are maintained so this market is still considered and catered for – for eg. Kakadu National Park has sealed roads, yet it still works as a 4WD destination (because of certain tracks being maintained as such) • Potential to put additional loop routes in to make it possible to 4WD the entire way to the tip of Cape York – eg. Lakefield to Port Stuart • Redeveloping the old Jetty at Portland Roads • Extending camp sites • Providing basic amenities (toilet, shower, potable water) in National Parks • Chilli Beach camp site – toilets currently being upgraded – this needed to happen – need to consider disabled access also • Need to neaten up existing camping area at Chilli Beach – the overcrowding and overuse is taking its toll • Need to extend Chilli Beach camp site in terms of number of camp sites, overflow capacity and car parking • People are being turned away and it's providing the region



Cooktown Stakeholders	Regional Cook Shire Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masterplan will be finalised in January and funding will be sort from various Government programs • Current key ideas include a saltwater tidal pool, water park, improved signage, new path ways and bike ways, interpretative material for historical monuments, revitalising the park area, improved disability access, short stay caravan / RV park (southern end) • Short stay caravan park will incorporate cost covering fee and a limited stay 24 – 48 hours • Caravan area will be able to cope with bigger rigs and RVs and will include only a dump point (and possibly a water fill station) • Need tourism products to support any infrastructure or tourists will get bored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> with a very bad reputation • Need showers and toilets at Chilli Beach • Continual upgrades to local roads around Coen • Continual upgrade to road from Coen to Port Stewart • The ongoing development of the Peninsula Development Road could decrease the number of 4WD visitors passing through Coen, however, the improved access would open up the town to the grey nomads market or general car travel tourism, which would provide economic benefits

Source: AECgroup Phase II Consultations



3.4 Signage and Related Policy

Signage and related policy is considered to be a problem by many business operators in Cook Shire. Stakeholders noted that the procedure required to develop a business related signage is complex and expensive. Stakeholders generally agree that Cook Shire’s signage policy should be revised and simplified to make it easier for businesses to understand and comply with the appropriate regulation.

A business signage scheme has been proposed from stakeholders in Cooktown. The scheme would involve designing and uniform signs (at the expense of participating businesses), which can be attached to existing street sign posts throughout the town. The signs would provide the opportunity for businesses to promote themselves and also improve the directional signage for visitors in the town.

Stakeholders also mentioned problems with directional signage on local roads and highways in the Shire. There is a shortage of official directional road signage on the Peninsula Development road. The absence of directional signage for Coen and Portland Roads were specifically mentioned by stakeholders.

Table 3.4: Signage and Related Policy Consultation Feedback

Cooktown Stakeholders	Regional Cook Shire Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage is extremely important for businesses (promotion and marketing) • Many pages of forms to complete • Very costly (often need engineering and qualified builders, environmental impact report, cultural and heritage report) • Current process is to complete a Material Change Use or a Development Application, which is extremely complex – need a simplified stand alone application which can include size, construction, liability, aesthetics, content and number of desired signs • Heritage overlay requirements for signage are very difficult to comply with, particularly for larger, branded businesses • Check-list style signage application document would work well • Council is slow at processing • No help is provided to businesses • Different rules between State owned and Council owned land • Because of these difficulties people are sticking up signs on their own volition • Need to start adopting international signage (ie. brown and blue colouring) • Need to provide better signage for tourists – they don’t know where to find anything • Could use uniform signage for businesses on existing signage posts in alphabetical order • Don’t want big billboards like Mareeba 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretative signage in Portland Roads – to include a little trail, information on environment / wildlife, local culture, local history and local Indigenous culture / history • Community in general has backed the initiative • We have a local graphic designer that could do the designs to save costs • Coen needs road signage on the Peninsula Development Road leading up to the town • Interpretative signage in Coen and at Port Stewart

Source: AECgroup Phase II Consultations

3.5 Skills and Training

Skills and training are issues that are considered frequently in past literature and research, as the region has relatively high unemployment, low participation rates and a shortage of skills. This is typical of remote areas in Queensland and Australia and not just a Cook Shire problem. Stakeholders acknowledge all of these issues, with most having experienced or seen these issues in the community first hand. Businesses note that finding workers / labour can be very difficult, with businesses often recruiting tourists and workers from overseas. Accommodation is also noted as a problem, as when businesses recruit workers from out of the region, there is no housing for them to live in. Businesses note that they generally have to personally host regional workers. Stakeholders generally suggested more training / employment programs be run to help the long term unemployed get back into the labour force as a potential remedy for this issue.

Table 3.5: Skills and Training Development Consultation Results

Cooktown Stakeholders	Regional Cook Shire Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese language school • No problems in terms of shortage of labour – there is plenty of labour here – just no one wants to work • Very high welfare population • Most workers employed are from out of the regions (even a lot from overseas) • This is a result of federal policy – it is difficult for us to change the system and provide incentive to work • So many training courses – some people do the courses for a living and never actually use the skills developed • State School is difficult to deal with – business provided prizes for encouragement which were never handed out • Seasonality for many workers is an issue – most tourism associated roles are only available in the winter – train up and then let go • Careers training at the high school needs to be improved • Careers Expo • Training centre • Education for adults • We should attract and hold more training events at the Events Centre for the local community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For regional areas, most places are too small to provide anything more than in-house / on-the-job training for employees • Job Find is an excellent initiative that is currently being provided in Lockhart River – potential for this program to broaden content and operations • Hospitality courses are also being held in Lockhart River • Small labour base is a major constraint in smaller areas • Getting people in to work is also difficult is that there is no housing for them • Have to basically house people you get in to work for you • Need to be creative in finding staff – can look to use tourists, Grey nomads, people on yachts • Balkanu has recently purchased the Coen Guesthouse and is aiming to make it an Indigenous managed business – great opportunity for training in Coen and providing employment for Indigenous people

Source: AECgroup Phase II Consultations

PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK





Brisbane	Level 5, 131 Leichhardt Street Spring Hill QLD 4000	PO Box 942 Spring Hill QLD 4004	T F	+61 7 3831 0577 +61 7 3831 3899
Melbourne	Level 13, 200 Queen Street Melbourne VIC 3000	GPO Box 4500 Melbourne VIC 3001	T F	+61 3 8648 6586 +61 3 8648 6480
Sydney	Level 3, 507 Kent Street Sydney NSW 2000	PO Box Q569, QVB Sydney NSW 1230	T F	+61 2 9283 8400 +61 2 9264 9254
Townsville	233 Flinders Street East Townsville QLD 4810	PO Box 5804MC Townsville QLD 4810	T F	+61 7 4771 5550 +61 7 4771 5152
Perth	Level 18, Central Park 152 - 158 St Georges Terrace Perth WA 6000		T F	+61 8 9288 4456 +61 8 9288 4457