



Great Keppel Island
REVITALISATION PLAN

ABSTRACT





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Located 12 kilometres off the Central Queensland coast, Great Keppel Island (GKI) is one of 16 islands collectively known as the Keppel Group, located within the southern part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA).

Fourteen of the Keppel Islands are designated National Parks and do not present opportunities for tourism development. Pumpkin Island (approximately eight hectares) and GKI (1,308 hectares) are the only Keppel Group Islands not designated as National Parks and permitted to provide tourism development where it does not significantly detract from the natural values of the Island. Of the over 900 Great Barrier Reef (GBR) islands and coral cays, currently 28 comprise island based tourism resorts.

Tourism activities in the GBRWHA are important to enable people to experience, learn and understand the wonders of this world heritage area. Through appreciation and education, tourism activities can enhance the conservation and protection of these inherent world heritage values. Within the Southern GBR there is currently very limited tourism activity with only three islands that offer resort opportunities to tourists - Heron Island, Lady Elliot Island and GKI.

The Queensland Government's Central Queensland Tourism Opportunity Plan 2009-2019 (CQTOP) resulted from a high level of stakeholder engagement regarding the future growth and tourism potential of the Central Queensland Region. Revitalisation of GKI was clearly identified in the CQTOP as a key "catalyst" regional tourism project and "a key tourism asset for Central Queensland that is vital to its continued international market growth". The purpose of the CQTOP is to provide direction for the sustainable development of tourism in the Central Queensland Region over the next ten years and reinforces the importance of this project.

GKI has had a long history of occupation given its accessibility to the mainland. Significant grazing activities were undertaken on the Island from the 1860s until the 1970s, with a peak operation of up to 4,000 sheep. In addition, cattle, goats, pigs and other livestock were introduced to the Island to diversify agricultural pursuits. As a consequence of these agricultural activities, large tracts of the Island were altered, including by vegetation clearing and the proliferation of a feral goat population which still exists today.

Tourism activities commenced on the Island in the late 1950s, by way of modest cabin type accommodation. Between 1960 and 1990, the tourism activities on the Island were popular and in particular with the advent of the successful advertising campaign “Get Wrecked on Great Keppel Island” in the mid-1970s. During this time, significant tourism infrastructure development occurred; including an airstrip, jetty at Fisherman’s Beach (which was later destroyed by a cyclone), 190 guest rooms, 200 staff accommodation units, swimming pools, golf course and bars, including the Wreck Bar.

Prior to its closure in 2008, the occupancy rates of the former resort were in significant decline for a period of some 15 years, over which time the operational costs of the Resort had also become excessive. The ultimate closure of the former resort is attributed to:

- a significant lack of new capital investment in resort facilities and an associated failure to appeal to and attract new and emerging tourism markets;
- the Island’s poor accessibility for the contemporary traveller (by air and sea); and
- unreliable service infrastructure (including water supply, waste water treatment and electricity supply).

GKI Resort Pty Ltd (the Proponent) is now seeking to create an environmentally-focused tourism resort, implemented through the proposed Great Keppel Island Resort Revitalisation Plan (hereafter referred to as the GKI Revitalisation Plan or the Project). The GKI Revitalisation Plan’s major focus is to exceed environmentally sustainable tourism guidelines (EarthCheck Precinct Planning and Design Standard, based on Agenda 21 principles) and to set a new benchmark for environmental management practices in the GBR.

The GKI Revitalisation Plan will deliver an exciting brand new tourism resort on the doorstep of Central Queensland and will be one of the most environmentally sustainable resorts in the Great Barrier Reef. The new resort will include a new beachfront hotel at Fisherman’s Beach, several styles of low-rise resort accommodation, a marina, retail village, day spa, Greg Norman designed golf course, upgraded airstrip, Research Centre and a 575 hectare Environmental Protection Area. The new tourism resort will also significantly improve access to the Island for children, teenagers, families, the elderly and disabled.

The primary design tenet of the GKI Revitalisation Plan is to create a built-form which complements the natural environment and topography of the Island. In this regard, the GKI Revitalisation Plan comprises low rise (three-storey maximum) tourist infrastructure that is predominantly below the height of existing tree canopies and on previously disturbed land.

The Proponent recognises the important values of the GBRWHA and the need to ensure that the proposed action does not result, or have the potential to result, in unacceptable environmental impacts, including on Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) matters of State and National significance and / or ecological and biological processes on the Island or surrounding marine waters. The GKI Revitalisation Plan seeks to ensure that the biodiversity of the GBRWHA is not adversely affected by the Project and that any identified potential environmental impacts are capable of being avoided, mitigated to an acceptable degree, or offset.

The Proponent has also adopted an ambitious sustainability strategy to position the GKI Revitalisation Plan as Australia's first carbon-positive island resort that will produce more energy than it consumes per annum. While many eco-resort destinations around the world have sought to achieve sustainability, there are very few that have established this environmental goal as the cornerstone of a comprehensive sustainability strategy. Embracing one of Australia's most significant natural resources – its abundant sunshine – the Resort is committed to achieving a carbon positive energy status through the installation of over 24,000 solar photovoltaic panels on the rooftops of resort infrastructure that will generate enough electricity to offset and surpass the emissions resultant from the operation of the Resort. This will represent one of the most significant applications of roof top solar power in Australia.

Other principal environmental initiatives of the GKI Revitalisation Plan include:

- rigorous environmental constraints-based approach to site planning to avoid or minimise environmental impacts;
- design objective to retain the entire resort as low-rise (maximum three storey);
- dedication of 575 hectares of the Island as an Environmental Protection Precinct, to be rehabilitated and protected in perpetuity;
- establishment of the Great Keppel Island Research and Historic Centre which will be the first of its kind within the Keppel Group Islands;
- significant buffers to the Island's sensitive environmental areas;
- beneficial reuse of all dredge material and the avoidance of any sea dumping;
- a sustainable water cycle management strategy which will not interfere with the Island's natural hydrological system and will not require the use of desalination processes; and
- the first resort in the GBR to be subject to the scrutiny of the EarthCheck third party certification process to ensure that the design meets international guidelines for Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD).

From a tourism perspective, the proposed GKI Revitalisation Plan will constitute the most significant new tourism investment in Queensland for over 20 years and will provide Australian tourists with a genuine destination alternative to travelling overseas.

The GKI Revitalisation Plan, inclusive of its range of tourist accommodation options and supporting tourist infrastructure, will attract significantly more tourists to the Capricorn Region and a much broader range of visitors to the Island and encourage lengthened stays. Further, the proposed marina, airstrip (capable of accommodating direct flights from Brisbane, Cairns, Sydney and Townsville), and on-Island mobility network will improve the accessibility of the Island, and open it up to a greater number of visitors to appreciate and enjoy the Island's World Heritage values. The ability of the Island to increase the 'presentation' of these values to the public is particularly important from a world heritage perspective.

The proposed GKI Revitalisation Plan will add significantly to the variety of Queensland's GBR and coastal island attractions, improving the economic diversity and social opportunities of the Region. The GKI Revitalisation Plan is forecast to provide substantial economic benefits including the direct capital investment of almost \$600 million. Job creation resulting from the Project will include on average 427 (direct and indirect) annual full-time-equivalent construction jobs over the 12 year construction period and 1,055 (direct and indirect) full-time, part-time and casual operational jobs. The Project will be one of the largest employment generators in the whole Capricorn Region.

The Project will have the potential to re-invigorate the struggling Queensland tourism industry, through product diversification and strength.

This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) provides information on the nature and extent of potential environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts (direct and indirect) arising from the construction and operation of the Project, and the strategies to avoid, minimise or control these potential impacts.

The EIS has found that the proposed GKI Revitalisation Plan can be undertaken without significant unacceptable environmental, social, cultural or economic impacts, if the nominated design, construction and operational commitments are met by the Proponent.