



CARPENTARIA SHIRE  
*Outback by the Sea®*

***Designing our tourism future  
Submission***

*September 2021*

*It's a great place to work,  
live and play*



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Carpentaria Shire Council would like to respectfully acknowledge the Gkuthaarn, Kukatj and Kurtijar peoples as the traditional owners of the lands and waters that form the Region. Council pays its respect to elders' past, present and emerging and welcomes the ongoing role that indigenous people play within the Carpentaria community.



## Introduction

Carpentaria Shire is located on the Savannah Way in North Western Queensland in the south eastern region of the Gulf of Carpentaria. The region is uniquely placed to offer residents and visitors opportunities and experiences in lifestyle, holidays, employment and investment opportunities. Carpentaria Shire has a friendly, laid-back lifestyle and is a place where children still ride their bikes down to the river to go fishing after school without parents having to worry as they would in larger towns and cities.

Carpentaria Shire is the traditional country of many Indigenous groups and the townships of Normanton and Karumba are the traditional land of the Gkuthaarn, Kukatj and Kurtjar people.

The Shire covers an area of approximately 65,000 square kilometres and has a population of 1,974. The countryside ranges from vast inland plains to mangrove forests, deltas and salt pans along the coastal areas of the Gulf.

Carpentaria Shire has a diverse industry base with agriculture, fishing, mining, tourism and government administration providing the majority of the Shire's income. Normanton is the region's government and administrative centre.

Much of the Shire's commercial activity comes through Karumba, which has an active port based around export of zinc and lead and previously live cattle to Asia. It also has a substantial fishing industry that targets prawns, barramundi, Spanish mackerel, salmon and mud crabs.

The region offers good infrastructure and facilities, with sealed access roads, well-serviced airports, developed freight routes, primary and secondary schools, medical services, recreational and sporting facilities and the standard infrastructure expected in a modern community.





## Executive Summary

Tourism contributes a significant portion to the local, regional and national economy. It is also one of the pillars of our local economy and our small to medium businesses in the local Shire rely on the trade that comes to the Shire during the tourist season each year.

Those same businesses were hit hardest during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on trade was felt by every one of them during that early time between February 2020 through until July / August 2020 when some restrictions were lifted within Queensland. A different year was experienced in 2021 when we saw many tourists coming to the Gulf. Most of our Caravan Parks were full of no vacancy and travellers were spending well in the Shire.

All of them did however find it hard to attract staff to assist with the additional patronage. Most small to medium hospitality businesses all struggled with obtaining staff during this period. Some promotion of working within the industry has started through the State Government's Work in Paradise tourism and hospitality jobs website [www.workinparadise.com.au](http://www.workinparadise.com.au) and this may need to continue in the immediate future to encourage people to continue to apply for work in this often "seasonal" industry.

The immediate opportunity in our part of the world is the continued promotion of "holiday at home" encouraging Australians to holiday and see what Australia has to offer. From all reports it appears that caravan and 4WD sales are at an all time high and we should be doing all we can to promote the self-drive holidays available in Australia. Most of our holiday trade in the North West and across Outback Queensland is from drive tourism.

Council believes that the current Regional Tourist Organisation (RTO) boundaries do not reflect the behaviours of the new traveller and realignment of these boundaries will allow Carpentaria Shire to leverage greater benefits from the RTO's destination marketing initiatives.

Aussies are being encouraged to enjoy a "Staycation" and we have a great opportunity to work and promote this within our shores to assist in the survival of this important industry until our International visitors are once again welcomed into Australia as the world opens from the Pandemic.



## Tourism Issues impacting the Carpentaria Shire Council

### Regional Representation

Carpentaria Shire Council has two communities, Normanton and Karumba, that are located on two significant tourism drive routes, the Savannah Way (Cairns to Broome) and Matilda Way (Cunnamulla to Karumba). Our Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) is Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ), and their focus is to attract people to visit Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef. As a result, we as Council see very little benefit from the RTO which also relies heavily on the workings of a Local Tourism Organisation (LTO) which lacks the financial and resources necessary to be highly efficient.

In contrast the North West, Central West and South West Queensland, making up the majority of Outback Queensland, has representation through the local Member Councils on three separate Regional Organisations of Council (ROC's) providing a good additional advocacy voice for tourism in the Outback. However, we are split across several RTO's.

In recent months the Council has been in discussions with Outback Queensland Tourism Authority to facilitate a move to representation from OQTA rather than TTNQ. More travellers are making their way to Carpentaria, travelling through Outback Queensland up to Normanton and Karumba, rather than travelling across the Savannah Way from Cairns. We see an opportunity to align RTO's boundaries with the ROC's boundaries during the current review.

### Promotion of attractions

Karumba has a multi- award winning, world class facility in Karumba, the Les Wilson Barramundi Discovery Centre and the majority of the promotion for this attraction and the surrounding destination is conducted by Council employees or contractors with little to no promotion through our RTO. TTNQ appears to be very proactive with the promotion of the Reef and Rainforest and have significantly reduced the emphasis on the promotion of the Gulf Savannah, and other areas and attractions that fall within the current RTO footprint.

### Attendance at Trade Shows

Often when we attend the Trade Shows we do so in conjunction with TTNQ and OQTA however we also attend on an independent basis, promoting the Les Wilson Barramundi Discovery Centre and the destination,

### Sufficient Accommodation – Caravan Park capacity etc.

With the increase in drive tourism, we found in the recent season that caravan parks were at capacity with others staying in "free" camps or suggesting establishment of overflow facilities. Due to the seasonal nature of the industry, we will find it difficult to encourage further investment in infrastructure to cope with an increased demand if the increase is likely to continue, and we are talking about increasing tourism, so we guess it will increase.



## Consultation Questions

### 1. What could be done at a local level to increase the benefits to tourism?

Identification and development of new attractions and the training for First Nations people in the Tourism Industry, cultural tourism in Outback Queensland is still in its infancy and has so much more potential with the right development, support and tools for it to continue.

Industry development initiatives that allow business owners to better understand tourism and how to drive benefits from this industry.

Funding for the development of additional attractions in rural and remote (Outback) Queensland should be a priority to facilitate more product into the market while the drive tourism experiences continue to grow and wanting to visit the Outback.

### 2. How do you want Queensland tourism to be defined in the 2020's?

With the impact of the Pandemic on world tourism, 2020's tourism in the early years will be defined with the continuation of the Staycation. With the ideal of vacating locally, this will require additional investment in our road networks (to allow people to move about safely, in greater numbers) and tourism product in Regional Centres away from the more populated centres on the Queensland Coastline.

Better education in relation to travelling on our road networks and travelling with large transports (road-trains in Outback Queensland). Education for "first time" caravan owners and how best to prepare for that new adventure drive and holiday.

### 3. How do we make the best of our tourism assets? In your own words, what is missing?

Through promotion of what is available within the various Regions around Queensland. We have many natural and built attractions to tempt the travellers looking to have an exciting Staycation.

The missing component is the appropriate representative body as the RTO for the Regions within Queensland. Some thought should be given to alignment of the RTOs with the ROCs to ensure appropriate representation.

### 4. What practical measures can and should be taken to ensure tourism helps regenerate natural environments, and bring greater awareness as well as economic benefit?

Provision of access to our National Parks using technology to register and pay for visitation to the National Parks in Queensland. Some States are doing this very well and could easily be adapted to improve the visitor experience when visiting the sites in Queensland.

Creating awareness of what can be done to reduce the impact of visitors on the natural environment in relation to waste management and management of water and wastewater when visiting some of the natural wonders in the State. The "Leave No Trace" philosophy adopted by some of the caravan and motorhome users should be adopted by all visitors to our natural attraction.





5. Do you see additional trends or emerging challenges that we must also consider?

The paper highlights some of the current trends and these should be further explored in the Queensland context as we have highlighted in our submission. The use of technology (we have recently heard of Geocaching and the number of people starting to adopt this in their travels) in promoting the area, its attractions and lifestyle.

Most tourism businesses are owner operated. The owners have been working for many years and now wish to sell their business and retire however there is no wave of new business owners to buy their business and continue the business operations.

6. What are your ideas for the future of Queensland tourism industry?

Until COVID-19 restrictions on International Travel are lifted and we are again free to once again experience world travels the opportunities all lie within Australia. We do have so much to offer visitors to Queensland.

7. What do you see as the obstacles to progress?

We see obstacles to identifying and progressing current and new product into the market if RTOs continue to rely on Local Tourist Organisations (LTO) to do the heavy lifting.

Often the membership and representatives of the LTO's lack the full capacity and skill of staff working full time in the RTO. Often small committees and Councils are left to manage and promote the area covered by the LTO with limited to no support from the RTO.

8. What should Queensland be doing to re-set, transform and embrace the opportunities a post COVID-19 world presents?

Making the most of current attractions, development of new adventure tourism product, working with First Nations groups to increase Cultural Tourism product in the Queensland Market and ensuring the right Regional Tourist Organisation is assigned the most appropriate Region to represent.





