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Draft North Queensland Regional Plan Feedback
Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
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**Submission in response to
Draft North Queensland Regional Plan**

Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation Incorporated (QORF) is the peak body representing the interests of the outdoor sector in Queensland, incorporating non-competitive outdoor recreation, outdoor sports, outdoor/environmental education activities, health and lifestyle improvement, adventure therapy, and nature-based tourism.

QORF is a member-based, not-for-profit association charged with representing a coalition of outdoor recreation groups to advocate on behalf of the outdoor community. A key reason for establishing QORF in 1996 was to facilitate communication between different user groups and levels of government on outdoor recreation related issues.

We note that the vision stated in the North Queensland Regional Plan is that “*North Queensland thrives as diverse, liveable and innovative tropical region, set around the emerging capital of northern Australia.*”

QORF supports the four regional goals set out in the draft North Queensland Regional Plan:

- *A leading economy in regional Australia*
- *A rich and healthy natural environment*
- *Liveable, sustainable and resilient communities that promote tropical living at its best*
- *A connected and efficient North Queensland*

QORF notes the explanatory wording for each of these four regional goals on page 32 of the draft North Queensland Regional Plan. QORF submits that the wording under “*A rich and healthy natural environment*” could be expanded to include the words “and enhance” as follows: “*to protect and sustainably manage the region’s natural assets, and the ecological processes that support them, to maintain **and enhance** a unique environment*”

Planning for improved opportunities for outdoor activities will contribute to delivery on all four of the regional goals for North Queensland – a thriving outdoor economy, with a rich and healthy natural environment that is accessible for all people, making communities more liveable, sustainable and resilient, and connected in many possible ways.

QORF members consist of outdoor industry stakeholders including state based organisations representing individual pursuits, not-for-profit community organisations, club-based outdoor recreation providers, commercial outdoor recreation service providers (including equipment manufacturers and retailers), independent recreation participants, private and public schools, outdoor recreation and education centres, and nature-based tourism operators. The **economic benefits of outdoor recreation in Queensland are over \$3.5 billion per year** (source “*Economic, Social and Health Impacts of Sport and Active Recreation in Queensland*” by Adept Economics – May 2019).

Outdoor activity is an economic force that is dispersed in time and in location. This results in the advantageous situation whereby revenue is generated across a wide range of stakeholders in the landscape, rather than only benefitting major players. Outdoor activities improve lifestyles of individuals, families and communities and deliver positive outcomes to local areas within a region. The outdoor sector provides jobs for locals, as well as facilitating healthy options for things to do in local areas, keeping people (including youth) engaged in their local communities.

The inherent values of natural areas and the appeal of nature-based activities must be recognised in the development of the North Queensland Regional Plan. These values and their appeal, apply to make the region more liveable for residents and for attracting new residents and visitors to the region. This appeal is shared across the islands, beaches, national parks and bushlands, mountains, ocean, bays, lakes and rivers.

While the outdoor sector touches on many aspects of the draft North Queensland Regional Plan, QORF will restrict comment to the regional outcomes and regional priorities of direct relevance to outdoor activities.

Leading Economy

Tourism

Tourism is recognised in the draft North Queensland Regional Plan as a major industry in the region. It is pleasing to see that the draft North Queensland Regional Plan recognises the need to support appropriate and sustainable tourism planning and development opportunities, and the protection of the social, cultural and natural values underpinning tourism (page 47). Outdoor activities in natural areas



underpin the NQ tourism industry, so support and protection of these outdoor activities must be included in the planning processes.

We suggest “promotion of outdoor activities as tourism attractors for people across the region and visitors to the region” could be included in the dot point list of tourism opportunities for the region on page 48.

QORF supports the focus on the creation of high quality visitor experiences set out in regional outcome 1.3, and particularly supports regional policies 1.3.3, 1.3.4 and 1.3.5.

Agriculture and value add industries

It is submitted that the North Queensland Regional Plan should include a **mechanism to better address the use of freehold land for outdoor activities**. For example, agricultural land could be utilised for outdoor recreation and outdoor education activities, generating a supplementary income stream which could then be dispersed across communities. This could be included within regional outcome 1.1, with a regional policy saying “*Maximise opportunities for co-existence of outdoor activities, resource and agricultural land uses.*”

QORF submits that where outdoor recreation activities are temporarily (e.g. for a maximum of seven (7) consecutive days in any six (6) month period) located on a property, or properties, a Material Change of Use process should not be required.

Similarly, the development application process for infrastructure that supports outdoor activities in spaces other than the protected area estate could deal with outdoor recreation as a land use to compliment agricultural use of the land. Introducing this mechanism into the North Queensland Regional Plan could be a great opportunity to measure the difference that this innovative approach could make to the region.

Natural Environment

It is submitted that the North Queensland Plan should **recognise that nature-based activities help create advocates for nature to be preserved and sustained**. Outdoor recreation activities helps create connections between people and places and playing an important role in fostering a sense of value for our natural areas within the community.

Access to natural assets has been included at page 28 of the draft North Queensland Regional Plan, with recognition of the key role of balanced long-term planning.

QORF supports the inclusion of regional outcome 2.1, and we support regional policies 2.1.1 through to 2.1.7 with the addition of the word health to 2.1.4 to acknowledge the contribution that the regional landscape and biodiversity values make to the health of people, the environment, the economy



QORF suggests that regional outcome 2.2 could be amended as follows to recognise the importance of all waterways across the region: *“New or changing land uses do not adversely affect long-term water quality of all North Queensland waterways including waters of the Great Barrier Reef”*.

QORF supports regional outcome 2.3 regarding response to the potential impacts of climate change, which will directly affect opportunities for outdoor activities.

QORF supports regional outcome 2.4 *“Identify, protect and manage the region’s unique Indigenous cultural heritage, including places and landscapes of cultural significance.”* QORF acknowledges that the outdoor sector must recognise and respect native title rights, land rights and interests, and ensure that outdoor activities accord with the cultural and natural values of these areas of significance.

Liveable Communities

Planning for outdoor opportunities can make key contributions to achieving Goal 3: *“Liveable sustainable and resilient communities that promote tropical living at its best”*.

QORF submits that **outdoor recreation should be recognised as a planning policy matter in its own right**, due to the impact on what people do, the places people value, and its direct and indirect economic contribution.

The increasing move toward housing diversity that is identified in the North Queensland Regional Plan exacerbates the need for public spaces, whether that be sports fields, parks and protected areas. A critical component in planning for these public spaces is the **connectivity for humans and for nature**. Population growth and increased density will create equal demand upon outdoor infrastructure as on transport, housing, health, education and sporting infrastructure. The needs of the community in relation to outdoor infrastructure should be considered on an equal basis with other critical infrastructure.

The provision of isolated pockets of greenspace within urban and peri-urban areas through allocating land to be used as parkland does not meet the needs of outdoor recreation as a stand-alone measure. As the region’s population increases, **more usable natural areas will be required** to accommodate appropriate outdoor activities, and it is critical that a whole of landscape approach is taken.

Many outdoor recreation activities and events are temporary and secondary uses of land for which the primary use is one, or more, of the following - agricultural production, forestry, water catchment and storage, nature conservation, and/or eco-tourism.

Access to government owned/controlled land plays a vital role in outdoor activities. The summary information provided in the draft North Queensland Regional Plan indicates that 4.2% of the region is National Park, which is significantly lower than the statewide average of 5.2%. An undersupply of public land can dramatically affect the opportunities for outdoor activities across the region.



The need for public open space, which will only increase with population growth, will not be satisfied through access to government owned land alone. Unfortunately, restrictions can be placed on temporary and secondary uses of land, causing increased pressure on public land.

While information is available based on tenure for reserve land that is held for community purposes and for most of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife estate, issues arise in relation to freehold land that is acquired by local government and State government. **Connections to government owned freehold land** may be lost both to other government agencies and for the community only because it is not known that the land is owned by government. It is suggested that this issue should be examined, with a mechanism developed to address the problem.

Page 73 sets out some of the downsides of urban sprawl, but does not include the fact that urban sprawl can lead to loss of important land and areas for outdoor activities, and thus reducing the liveability of these communities.

QORF supports regional outcome 3.1, and particularly supports regional policies 3.1.8(c) and 3.1.9.

QORF supports the principles set out regarding liveable communities on pages 79, 80 and 81, and supports regional outcome 3.2, and particularly regional policies 3.2.1 and 3.2.2. QORF suggests that regional outcome 3.2.5 could be amended as follows: *“Maintain and improve natural assets that can mitigate risks associated with natural processes and hazards such as flooding, salinity and bushfire, while providing access for healthy outdoor opportunities”*.

QORF supports regional outcome 3.3, and regional policies 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, however QORF suggests that 3.3.1 could be reworded as follows: *“Ensure new development delivers buildings designed to contribute to the quality and character of the streetscape with a **primary focus on pedestrians and cyclists.**”*

QORF would like to offer assistance to work with the Government to determine a measurement of baseline, current and preferred trends for greenspace in neighbourhoods in order to take into consideration the land needs for outdoor recreation in an rural, peri-urban and urban environment. Trends relating to the activity of various communities need to be taken into account in the drafting of the North Queensland Regional Plan. We draw attention to the trends identified in the versions of the research report titled “Queensland Sport, Exercise and Recreation Survey Adults” (QSERA), prepared by Colmar Brunton for the Queensland Government (Sport and Recreation) and trends identified in the Federal AusPlay participation reports released by Sport Australia.

QSERA and AusPlay reports confirm that Queenslanders are trending toward outdoor recreation for their physical activity needs, rather than organised sports. The Executive Summary of the QSERSA report concludes with a statement regarding reducing the key barriers to physical activity by increasing awareness and availability of affordable options (including those that are free for participants), increasing awareness and availability of physical activities appropriate for the elderly or less



physically able, and motivating people to start participating. The North Queensland Regional Plan is an avenue to directly address the availability barrier.

Connected North Queensland

We note that active transport modes have been included in the context of the Transport connections section of the draft North Queensland Regional Plan, however there is no expansion of that important topic in its own section or within the Road section.

The road network and stock route network is publicly owned land that significantly contributes to outdoor activities in Queensland, including in the North Queensland region. Unconstructed roads provide spaces for long-distance trails and also provide connectivity for animals to move between locations. The current system for permanent road closures is that the proposed road closure is gazetted and the affected local government is notified. The local government examines the need for the road in the context of its local transport plans, but may not look at the impact of the proposed road closure through the lens of the broader landscape or possible impacts on outdoor activities. To reduce the potential impact on connectivity between otherwise isolated places, **a more transparent system with a whole of landscape focus should be implemented in relation to proposed permanent road closures.**

QORF supports regional outcome 4.2. We note that regional policy 4.2.5 refers to “future public and active transport corridors within Townsville, as identified in Figure 15”. Figure 15 identifies “potential future linkages” but does not clearly identify public transport and active transport corridors”. QORF submits that more detail on these potential corridors should be provided.

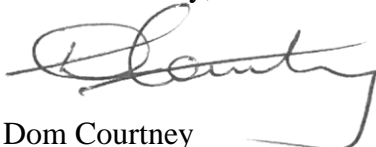
QORF acknowledges the measures set out in the draft North Queensland Regional Plan. QORF submits that these measures could be improved through the inclusion of an additional measure within the Liveable communities section – **“LC5. Increased physical activity figures”**, which would align with the Queensland Government’s *Activate! Queensland 2019-2029* strategy.

A summary of our suggested amendments is provided in Appendix 1.

QORF commends the development of the draft North Queensland Regional Plan, and we look forward to further involvement in this important project.

If there are any queries about any aspects of this submission, please contact Dom Courtney, Executive Officer, by telephone on 07 3369 9455 or by email eo@qorf.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Dom Courtney
QORF Executive Officer



Appendix 1 - Suggested amendments

1. QORF notes the explanatory wording for each of these four regional goals on page 32 of the draft North Queensland Regional Plan. QORF submits that the wording under “A rich and healthy natural environment” could be expanded to include the words “and enhance” as follows: ***“to protect and sustainably manage the region’s natural assets, and the ecological processes that support them, to maintain and enhance a unique environment”***
2. We suggest ***“promotion of outdoor activities as tourism attractors for people across the region and for visitors to the region”*** could be included in the dot point list of tourism opportunities for the region on page 48.
3. It is submitted that the North Queensland Regional Plan should include a mechanism to better address the use of freehold land for outdoor activities. For example, agricultural land could be utilised for outdoor recreation and outdoor education activities, generating a supplementary income stream which could then be dispersed across communities. This could be included within regional outcome 1.1, with a regional policy saying ***“Maximise opportunities for co-existence of outdoor activities, resource and agricultural land uses.”***
4. QORF submits that where outdoor recreation activities are temporarily (e.g. for a maximum of seven (7) consecutive days in any six (6) month period) located on a property, or properties, a Material Change of Use process should not be required.
5. QORF supports the inclusion of regional outcome 2.1, and we support regional policies 2.1.1 through to 2.1.7 with the addition of the word **health** to 2.1.4 to acknowledge the contribution that the regional landscape and biodiversity values make to the health of people, the environment, the economy.
6. QORF suggests that regional outcome 2.2 could be amended as follows to recognise the importance of all waterways across the region: ***“New or changing land uses do not adversely affect long-term water quality of all North Queensland waterways including waters of the Great Barrier Reef”***.
7. QORF supports the principles set out regarding liveable communities on pages 79, 80 and 81, and supports regional outcome 3.2, and particularly regional policies 3.2.1 and 3.2.2. QORF suggests that regional outcome 3.2.5 could be amended as follows: ***“Maintain and improve natural assets that can mitigate risks associated with natural processes and hazards such as flooding, salinity and bushfire, while providing access for healthy outdoor opportunities”***.
8. QORF supports regional outcome 3.3, and regional policies 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, however QORF suggests that 3.3.1 could be reworded as follows: ***“Ensure new development delivers buildings designed to contribute to the quality and character of the streetscape with a primary focus on pedestrians and cyclists.”***
9. QORF submits that these measures could be improved through the inclusion of an additional measure within the Liveable community’s section – ***“LC5. Increased physical activity figures”***, which would align with the Queensland Government’s Activate! Queensland 2019-2029 strategy.

