

Items for Consideration of the Trust

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1. ORIGIN: Recreation Services Unit

FILE REF: Jack Evans Boatharbour

REPORT TITLE:

"Scuba-doo" Dive Operation

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

The Trust has received a proposal to establish an artificial reef in Jack Evans Boat Harbour to conduct a "Scuba-doo" dive operation. Prior to providing owners consent to the Development Application, the Department of Land & Water Conservation requires the consent of the Trust to do so.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Trust supports the Department of Land & Water Conservation providing owners consent to the lodging of a Development Application for a "Scuba-doo" dive operation proposal provided:

1. All statutory and regulatory requirements in relation to the proposal are satisfied.
2. The Trust is indemnified against all liabilities that may arise from the proposal.
3. Appropriate consultation with the Kombumerri people regarding the Native Title Claim is undertaken.

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REPORT:

The Trust has received a proposal to establish an artificial reef in the Jack Evans Boat Harbour Lagoon to conduct a “scuba-doo” dive operation. Prior to lodging a Development Application, owners consent is required of the Department of Land & Water Conservation (DLWC). Prior to providing owners consent, DLWC require the consent of the Trust.

The proposal as received by Council is reproduced below.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE ARTIFICIAL REEF AND THE PROPOSED USE OF THE AREA AT THE JACK EVANS LAGOON TWEED HEADS

We would like to establish an artificial reef in the Jack Evans lagoon to conduct a Scubadoo (S/D) dive operation (copies of S/D brochures enclosed)

This could be a major tourist attraction for the area and with the use of wet suits could operate all year round. It is aimed at the person who would like to go scuba diving but feels hesitant to wear the cumbersome scuba gear and may also not be a strong swimmer. It is suitable for all members of the family from ages approx 12 years through to the older age group.

Scuba diving is very popular with both overseas and Australian tourists but the only area suitable for introductory dives on the Gold Coast is off Wave Break Island but this is governed by the tide times and can only be used at full tide for approx 2 hours so is not feasible

The S/D can also be used by disabled persons depending on their disability. As long as they can use their arms and sit on the machine they can experience the pleasures of scuba diving which they cannot do on a normal introductory dive.

The reason we require the reef is to attract fish and marine life to the area. At present there are fish in the lagoon but they are concentrated around the sea rescue pontoon.

To enable us to operate the S/D as a tourist attraction we need to be able to show them the fish and marine life. At present the area where we would like to locate the reef has a sandy bottom with no rocks or coral to attract the fish.

The lagoon is adjacent to the Tweed river and is flushed out daily by the tides which results in clean and reasonably clear water.

I feel that we can attract the fish that are in the river to the reef by feeding them and once the marine growth forms on the reef they will be attracted naturally and in time will form a natural reef environment in which they can live and will improve the fish life for snorkellers in the lagoon.

The area we would like to locate the reef is adjacent to the rock wall separating the river from the lagoon. The bottom is sandy and has no marine life or sea grasses growing there.

The smaller floating pontoon used by the sea rescue will be used to launch the S/D.

The divers are then taken down by qualified dive instructors for a ride around the reef to see and feed the fish and marine life as if they were on the Barrier Reef.

As it is a public area we can not fence the area off from the public who could swim down and damage the artificial coral. The reef will need to be constructed of solid material.

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I suggest the reef be constructed of cement render and mesh to give it a free form appearance similar to the reef in the pool at the Marriott Hotel in Surfers Paradise. This will enable it to be constructed on land and lifted into place by crane and anchored to the sea bed by mooring blocks. The reef could then be easily removed at a later date if required.

I have enclosed a copy of a map showing the approx location of the reef and pontoon. This is not to scale and the exact locations will be determined by yourselves and the marine authorities.

The map shows the lagoon and the river are one but in fact it is seperated by a rock wall. The size of the reef will not need to be large more like a bombie that the diver can drive around and have the impression they are diving on a natural coral reef.

At all times the S/D is tethered by an attached buoy which limits its depth preventing it touching the bottom or interfering with the sea grasses.

I have completed the development application but found a majority of the questionnaire does not relate to this project.

We feel sure that the operation of the S/D will become a major tourist attraction and an asset for the Tweed area and are both keen and excited to get this operation started.

I have enclosed more detailed descriptions of the reef and our operations to enable you to better understand the overall picture.

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Operation Of Scubadoo Site

The S/D site will operate during normal working hours from approx 9am to 5pm 7 days a week with possibly later hours during summer months to allow for daylight saving.

There is no noise, fumes or smell associated with the S/D as they are battery powered. The batteries used are gellcell which cannot spill or emit fumes. No petrol or oil is used with the S/D.

The S/D will be launched from the pontoon and the divers taken on a 20-30 min dive around the reef showing them the sea life and possibly feeding the fish.

It is important that we have a varied sea life and fish for the visitors to see, this is the reason for the rock.

The S/D is tethered to a buoy floating on the surface. This keeps the S/D at a set depth so it can not touch the sea bed or damage existing sea grass beds or other marine life.

We anticipate using 4-6 S/Doos giving up to 100 dives per day but realistically more likely 50-60 dives.

The S/Doos will be removed from the site each evening and stored in the vacant shed attached to the shower block across the road.

As discussed, we would like to use the shed for storage and the showers as change rooms. We would undertake to bring them up to standard and maintain them during the period we use them.

We would employ approx 4 staff per shift at the site and as this is a 7 day a week operation we would employ approx 12 staff taking into account that we would be working 7 days per week and that the dive staff are limited in the number of dives they can do in a given period.

There would also be staff employed off site promoting the S/D etc which will help create more jobs for the region.

Artificial Reef

The reef would be made in a free form using ferro cement this will allow us to form cavities and shapes similar to the reef in the Marriot Hotel in Surfers Paradise. This gives the fish and marine life areas to hide as though they were on a natural reef.

Anticipated size at the base, approx 6-7m long 3-4m wide by 2.5m high depending on the depth of the water. It will be manufactured on a frame on land and lifted into place by a crane with mooring blocks to keep it in place. This will allow it to be easily

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removed at a later date if required. As it will be below the surface a buoy will be attached to make people aware of its location.

Artificial sea anemones, coral, and marine growth will be attached to the reef to attract fish and marine life and to give it a realistic appearance. After a period of time real marine growth such as oysters, barnacles, weed, etc will start growing on the reef forming a natural reef providing both food and shelter for a large variety of fish and marine creatures. This will be able to be appreciated by snorkellers using the lagoon as well.

The area we would like to locate the reef is on the sea bed between the sea rescue pontoon and the rock wall.

The sea bed area has a sandy bottom with no sea grasses, rocks or marine growth present. No existing sea grass beds or marine growth will be affected but in fact could encourage marine growth in the area .

There will be no toxic materials used in the construction and there will be no pollution due to decay or breaking up of the reef.

It is in our own interest to ensure the reef is properly maintained and is attractive to fish and marine life so we can have as natural an environment as possible for the divers as it will be promoted as similar to the Barrier Reef without having to travel to Cairns to see it.

We will be promoting the site throughout Australia and overseas which will in turn promote the Tweed area encouraging more tourists and their dollar.

We appreciate that there is a land title claim over the area and that the facilities that are there now may need to be demolished but are prepared to accept this and will make alternative arrangements if and when this happens and will abide by any rulings as they occur.

Pontoon From Which To Launch The S/D

I have spoken to a Mr Ray Wells of the sea rescue and as they rarely use the smaller pontoon they do not see there would be a problem with us using it in conjunction with their operation. We would contribute to the maintenance of the pontoon and pay a fee for its use. This alleviates the need to discuss the operation with people claiming title to the land as we will not be fixing any extra walkways or pontoon to the land and the reef will be sitting on the sea bed not attached by piles etc so it can be easily removed if required.

It may be prudent to speak to the people who have lodged a land claim so they are aware of our intentions.

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Carparking

As there will be no more than 4-6 divers under water at any one time we will not need a large number of car parking spaces and anticipate that the car parking area adjacent to the sea rescue site will be sufficient.

Also a large number of divers will be in tour groups who will be transported to the dive site in coaches and mini buses that can be parked away from the site.

Staff will be encouraged to park away from the site so they will not be taking up parking spaces.

There is also the Council car parking available at Chris Cunningham Park where families who wish to use the beach as well as take a S/D dive can park and walk to the S/D site.

As a number of divers will use the showers as changing rooms they will park nearer the shower building and walk across the road to the dive site. This will reduce the number of cars using the car park adjacent to the site.

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Through the Development Application assessment process, issues raised by NSW Fisheries or Waterways will be dealt with, as will issues of parking, etc.

As it is proposed to use the existing pontoon and design the artificial reef so it is easily removed if required, it is recommended the Trust consents to the Department of Land & Water Conservation providing owners consent to the lodging of a Development Application for a “scuba-doo” Development Proposal.

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