The Coordinator-General

Ella Bay Integrated Resort

REPORT SUMMARY

The Coordinator-General has released his evaluation report for the Ella Bay Integrated Resort. The report includes an assessment of, and draws conclusions about, the environmental effects of the project and associated mitigation measures. The Coordinator-General has granted approval of the project, subject to the conditions of his report and Satori Resorts Ella Bay Pty Ltd (the proponent) gaining all statutory state approvals and meeting its commitments listed in the report. The project will need separate approval under Australian Government law.

This document summarises the main issues covered in the report. For a full copy of the report, visit **www.dsdip.qld.gov.au**

What happens now?

Copies of the report will be provided to the proponent, the Commonwealth Environment Minister, entities responsible for ensuring compliance with conditions and relevant advisory agencies.

Introduction

The proponent proposes to construct a $1.4 billion integrated tourism and residential community within Lot 320 Crown plan N157629 at Ella Bay, approximately 10 kilometres north-east of Innisfail. The site is situated within the Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) area. Of the approximately 470-hectare site, the proponent proposes a development area of 132 hectares. The remainder of the site will consist of 61.1 hectares of open space, golf course and parkland; 155 hectares of conservation covenant (protected corridors throughout the site providing connectivity for wildlife but excluding setbacks and easements of 58.9 hectares) and 62.8 hectares of land to be transferred to National Park.

Work to develop the property into a master planned tourism/residential community will occur over a 15-year period, along with an upgrade of Ella Bay Road and the construction of a new bypass road to connect to Ella Bay Road.

The development will incorporate a range of short-term tourist accommodation such as resort hotels and holiday villas for approximately 2000 tourists (at full capacity). There are also plans to have 540 permanent residences, housing approximately 1400 people (at full capacity) at this location. The

community design also includes educational and village precincts, beach access (people and emergency vehicles only), an 18-hole golf course, retail outlets, relevant public infrastructure and leisure facilities for local communities.

Impacts and mitigation

Social and economic

The Ella Bay development is expected to inject over $256 million per annum in tourism expenditure into the Queensland economy when fully operational. The development is also expected to generate a peak construction workforce of just over 400 people around year eight of the development schedule. Once fully operational, just over 800 full time jobs are expected to be created for the operation of the new resorts, golf course, retail and associated facilities. The development is also expected to provide other jobs including 240 part time peak season jobs. The project would also benefit the local community, given its close proximity to Innisfail and the inclusion of public facilities such as walking tracks and other passive recreation opportunities.

Infrastructure

The Ella Bay development requires substantial infrastructure to be established, including the access road and site roads, water supply, wastewater, power and telecommunications. The proponent has committed to provide and fund all necessary infrastructure for the development at no cost to local or state infrastructure providers.

The proponent is required to undertake a more detailed transport impact study to investigate the traffic impacts of the project on the local road network from the development site to the Bruce Highway. Subject to the outcome of the transport impact study the proponent may be required to enter into an infrastructure agreement with CCRC to contribute to the mitigation of impacts on the local road network.

The upgrade of Ella Bay Road will occur at the beginning of stage 1 of the development schedule. The bypass road proposed to avoid long-term impacts on the residents of Flying Fish Point will be commenced once vehicular traffic through Flying Fish Point reaches 1000 vehicle movements per day or prior to the commencement of stage 2 of the development schedule, which ever is sooner. The potential temporary impacts on Flying Fish Point residents will be managed through proposed mitigation measures included in the proponent's transport management plan.

Ecology and offsets

Flora surveys identified four state-listed threatened flora species, one endangered regional ecosystem and 13 'of concern' and four 'least concern' regional ecosystems. Queensland database searches identified 36 state-listed threatened flora species likely to occur in the project area.

13 state-listed threatened fauna species were recorded in the Ella Bay development area and access road including the endangered southern cassowary (cassowary) and common mist fog. 21 state-listed threatened species were also identified as likely to occur in the project area, based on suitable habitat, local records and Queensland database searches.

Activities associated with construction and operation of the Ella Bay development and access road are likely to disturb some habitat of these threatened species. Of these species the cassowary is likely to be the most affected by the Ella Bay development through loss or isolation of habitat, increased human presence and interaction with traffic. The majority of impacts on fauna are likely to be associated with vegetation clearing activities and works during the construction stages of the project.

Construction activities are expected to disturb approximately 3.75 hectares of vegetation comprising 0.95 hectares for the development of the integrated resort and 2.80 hectares for the access road. This would include 'non remnant', 'of concern' and 'least concern' regional ecosystems and vegetation classified as essential cassowary

habitat. In addition to the loss of habitat, clearing is also expected to isolate around 2.02 hectares of cassowary habitat. No endangered regional ecosystems and critically endangered threatened ecological communities have been included in the disturbance footprint. These ecosystems occur in areas marginal to the development site and adjacent to the proposed access corridor and would be appropriately protected through the use of setbacks and buffers along the boundaries of the development area.

The proponent is required to implement a variety of management strategies to mitigate potential construction and operational impacts on fauna, flora and communities. This includes an offsets strategy, environmental management plans, protected area management and species specific management sub-plans. Management sub-plans have been developed for the southern cassowary, stream dwelling rainforest frogs, spectacled flying-fox, marine turtles and significant flora. These sub-plans identify impacts of the Ella Bay development on these fauna and flora and also provide a number of strategies to manage or mitigate these impacts. Any loss of regional ecosystem, or loss or isolation of essential cassowary habitat will need to be offset by the proponent in accordance with State and Australian Government legislation and policies.

The proponent has prepared and submitted an offsets package that includes the purchase and transfer of land to the State for National Park, a five year commitment to the management of revegetation and removal of weeds, implementation and revegetation of conservation covenants over fauna corridors and nature conservation areas, and flora and fauna research programs.

As part of this package the proponent has purchased 63.62 hectares of land identified in *Recovery Plan for the Southern Cassowary Casuarius casuarius johnsonii* (EPA 2007) as a strategic regional habitat connectivity corridor; providing key ecological functions, broad movement corridors and suitable habitat for rehabilitation.

The proponent has committed to revegetating 50 hectares of land across the Ella Bay site and rehabilitation of 64.3 hectares. All development would be set back a minimum of 100 metres from National Park areas and riparian borders of watercourses to further minimise impacts to Ella Bay National Park, Wet Tropics World Heritage areas, riparian areas and watercourses.

A large portion of vegetated habitat and habitat connectivity areas within the Ella Bay property will be protected and managed through conservation management zones. These zones will be revegetated and rehabilitated to support and assist the *Recovery Plan for the Southern Cassowary*.

A higher level of protection will be provided to these zones through the transfer of 68.2 hectares of land to surrounding National Park and registering 155 hectares of conservation covenanted land under the *Land Title Act 1994*. This includes strategic land parcels that have been identified as key linkages or habitats for cassowary. The primary purpose of conservation zones will be to protect endangered vegetation and essential cassowary habitat, providing buffer between sensitive environmental areas and the development, and improving habitat connectivity across the Ella Bay site. Overall, there is expected to be a net increase in essential cassowary habitat of approximately 238 hectares.

Each precinct and the internal roads within the precincts will be fully fenced to exclude cassowary and other fauna moving through conservation management zone corridors, thereby limiting fauna and human interactions.

All main internal roads servicing the resorts will also have elevated bridges/ fauna underpasses, culverts and low speed gated crossings to allow connectivity of fauna corridors. Unfenced roads with low volumes of traffic will include restricted speed limits and traffic calming devices, signage and/or raised speed platforms to reduce impacts on fauna.

Other impacts associated with road construction will be managed through the use of fauna sensitive road design, fauna management strategies and management plans for weeds, erosion and sediment control, drainage and stormwater.

Management plans for erosion and sediment control, drainage and stormwater will also be important in the management of water quality impacts across the site and adjacent coastal waters of Ella Bay and GBRWHA.

Other water quality measures to be used across the site include water treatment, the use of water sensitive urban design, water quality monitoring and implementation of a golf course environmental management plan. Water quality will also be managed across the site using constructed wetlands and bioretention filters. Constructed wetlands will be used adjacent to the northern wetlands and Ella Bay Swamp to maintain the current surface water hydrological flow regime to the north and to minimise any nutrient and sediment inflow, and management of the golf course areas that drain northerly.

The coastal areas adjacent to the site are not directly affected by the Ella Bay development although potential impacts associated with increased human activity in the beach areas requires management. The proponent is required to implement a management sub-plan for marine turtles and beach stone curlews, which include strategies to mitigate impacts on marine turtles and shorebirds. Strategies include monitoring nesting activity and protecting identified nests, weed and pest management, public awareness and community education programs, artificial lighting management and prohibition of domestic pets and vehicles on beach areas.

Sustainability

The proponent's proposed sustainability measures for the development include:

- sustainable use and management of land and water resources (totally self-sufficient through rainwater capture and recycling of water)
- more efficient use of energy and greater use of renewable energy resources (all power generated on-site)
- more effective land use planning
- environmental protection and pollution control
- reducing consumption, recycling and minimising waste
- 'green' transport options on-site
- reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality
- protecting biological diversity
- local economic development and employment growth.

Matters of national environmental significance

World Heritage

The Ella Bay site is surrounded on three sides (north, west and part south) by the Ella Bay National Park. Most of the surrounding area is located in the WTQWHA. The site is separated from the GBRWHA to the east by a gazetted esplanade.

The proponent is required to design, construct and manage the Ella Bay development to avoid (where possible) potential adverse impacts on tropical rainforest, swampland and coastal and aquatic ecosystems or on the geological and geo-morphological characteristics of the region that underlie the ecological diversity of the Wet Tropics of Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef. Where impacts cannot be avoided, the proponent is required to implement an environmental management regime and proposes a number of measures to minimise and mitigate potential impacts. The proponent also proposes offsets to address residual impacts.

Primary matters for WTQWHA consideration include maintenance of world heritage values and potential impacts of the access road and the Ella Bay development on the southern cassowary, common mist frog and to a lesser extent, other threatened faunal species potentially having habitat in the world heritage area.

Primary matters for GBRWHA consideration with respect to the Ella Bay development and the access road include maintenance of world heritage values, visual impacts when viewed from ships at sea and potential impacts on biological processes

from water quality (during construction and operation).

Threatened species and communities

An assessment of the impacts on threatened species and communities undertaken during the EIS process indicates that the species with the most potential to be impacted by the development is the cassowary through isolation of habitat, increased human presence and increased vehicular traffic. Other potentially impacted species/communities are:

- stream dwelling rainforest frogs—increased human presence; impacts on habitat; exotic diseases
- marine turtles—increased human presence; lighting and noise; water quality
- other marine species—water quality
- littoral rainforest—spread of weeds; human encroachment.

Mitigation and offsets

The proponent has presented strategies to mitigate and/or offset potential impacts of the development on threatened species and communities and world heritage values including:

- habitat preservation
- connectivity preservation (dedicated conservations zones)
- environmental offsets (purchase and revegetation of onsite and offsite land)
- wildlife management plans (including plans for southern cassowary, marine turtles and stream dwelling rainforest frog species)
- water quality management (including wastewater/recycle water treatment with approved nutrient levels; erosion and sediment controls; water sensitive urban design; water quality monitoring; stormwater treatment)
- road management strategies for wildlife protection (fauna sensitive design mechanisms)
- public awareness/education.

In summary, the objectives of the proponent's strategies are to:

- provide appropriate offsets for potential impacts on MNES
- comply with the requirements of the Queensland *Vegetation Management Act 1999* and associated codes and policies
- be consistent with *Recovery Plan for the Southern Cassowary*
- provide tangible conservation benefits locally and within the wider Innisfail/Graham-Seymour Range area with an emphasis on threatened species conservation.

Conclusion

The Coordinator-General concluded there would be significant local, state, regional and national economic benefits to be derived from the project. He further concluded that any adverse environmental impacts can be acceptably avoided, minimised, mitigated and/or offset by implementing the measures and commitments proposed by the proponent. Conditions in the report have been formulated in order to further manage all impacts associated with the project.

Accordingly, the Coordinator-General approves that the project proceed subject to the conditions set out in appendices 1 and 2. In addition it is expected that the proponent's commitments will be fully implemented.

Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning
PO Box 15517 City East Qld 4002 Australia
tel 13 QGOV (13 74 68)
fax +61 7 3224 4683
info@dsdip.qld.gov.au

www.dsdip.qld.gov.au