



**PO Box 983 Surfers Paradise 4217  
Phone: 1300 852 441  
Fax: 1300 853 441  
Email: [secretary@gcccc.net](mailto:secretary@gcccc.net)**

The Chief Executive Officer  
Gold Coast City Council  
PO Box 5042  
GCMC BUNDALL 9729

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## **GCCCC and CCIQ Response to Gold Coast City Council**

### **Draft Tipplers Hub Concept Plan**

Few issues have generated as much public outrage and media attention as the Gold Coast City Council's purchase of the Tipplers Resort in 2009. On what seemed a weekly basis for over a year, as more information came to light, it continued to fuel public anger. Council's handling of the issue was described as autocratic. Communication emanating from council failed to address the many concerns raised resulting in an unprecedented move where the business community became actively involved.

To understand business's involvement it is necessary to relate some of those issues that drew them into what has become a passionate and at times a confrontational debate that is far from resolved.

#### **Consultation**

According to information in council's Draft Tipplers Hub Concept Plan (DTHCP), consultation during the process of developing the Tipplers Passage Master Plan (TPMP) and later concerns regarding inappropriate development of the Tipplers site was a principle motivation to purchase the resort. The Chamber, in conversations with independent and non government aligned stakeholders involved with that particular consultative process were advised that council's intent to purchase the resort was never mentioned or alluded to. Based on this information, any council justification of the purchase in relation to the TPMP consultative process is misleading and invalid.

#### **Inappropriate Development**

An article published by the Bulletin, reported on the former resort owner commissioning an architect to produce conceptual drawings that were presented to council at some stage during or before the purchase negotiation process. These concept plans were not accompanied by a development application nor was one ever lodged. By council's own admission the owner was at pains to sell the resort. Taking these two circumstances into account, it is reasonable to expect that there was probably never a serious intent by the former owner to redevelop the site. This may have been a clever sales technique with council becoming a gullible buyer.

## **Natural Environment**

The site of the Tiplers resort represents one 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of the South Stradbroke Island landmass and sits upon a re-vegetated sand mining lease. This puts to question its description as a 'pristine environment' voiced by some councillors. Perhaps this may explain why when council applied to the State Government for funding assistance in making the purchase, council was rejected.

## **Updating and Maintenance**

Council's claims that the Tiplers Resort was tired and required upgrading in both style and various aspects of the infrastructure, services and amenities that supported it are valid. However, both the GCCCC and CCIQ contend that there were other less disruptive and destructive ways to address these issues than purchasing the resort and fundamentally changing its considerable value to the boating public.

## **Alleged Alcohol Abuse**

Council has placed a lot of faith and voiced considerable coverage in allegations of public disorder and threat to the public due to a significant number of cases of alcohol abuse at Tiplers. Former staff, security and even police who visited the resort as part of their duties refute these allegations stating they had never witnessed an incident that was disproportionate to any similar destination. Further there was, as far as can be ascertained, no official complaint by council relating to these alleged incidents. When requested by various sources including the Bulletin to substantiate these claims, council has failed to respond other than repeating the allegations or referring to the TPMP consultative process.

## **OSPL Use**

The question of the appropriate use of the Open Space Preservation Levy in purchasing the Tiplers resort remains an issue. The site under conditions of the State Government lease is described as tourism. Council's intentions, at least partly if not adequately, is to maintain a tourism component. Whether this form of development constitutes the term of reference under which the OSPL can be accessed remains a question of relevance that continues to perplex the community and a few legal minds.

## **Costs**

The true cost to ratepayers of the purchase and council's future proposed plans for Tiplers may never be known. A reasonable estimate when factoring in purchase price, interest charges, works, lease fees, security, travel, publications, advertising, promotions and time devoted by council officers is approaching \$14 million. Add to that the proposed \$13.3 million development costs over the next 10 years and this monumental mistake that council continues to support becomes a significant burden to the ratepayer and business.

## **Public Opinion**

Public opinion in re-establishing the Tiplers Resort in a similar vein to its previous form remains firm. A summary of comments posted on the Marine Action Group website

[www.marineactiongroup.com](http://www.marineactiongroup.com) a group that represents the boating community and opposes council's purchase and proposal, describes the former resort as:

Tipplers was that part of the old Gold Coast that should have been preserved, it was enjoyed and patronized by the boating public from all over. Tipplers was a lesson in social integration where it didn't matter if you were a millionaire or pauper, wore the latest casual fashions or shorts and thongs, there was no distinction in race, political persuasion, colour or creed, all were treated equally. No other place on the Gold Coast offered a destination or retreat of this nature it was an irreplaceable experience for the boating public, their families and friends. Those fond memories crossing 2 generations and the opportunity to revisit them have without regard to us been taken away by this council.

## **Public Submission Process**

It took determined public and media agitation for council to finally enter into a public consultation process when it invited public submissions into proposed redevelopment of the resort. There was however restriction placed on these submissions in that they were not to be published in the public domain without council permission. This controlled process created further protest being perceived as a further lack of communication and transparency. Those 5 applicants that made submissions were not discouraged by council in their belief that these would be considered as valid concepts until some time later. Council in its wisdom has chosen to take what they considered the best aspects of these submissions and incorporate them into their own draft plan DTHCP now available on their website for evaluation and public comment.

## **GCCCC and CCIQ Policy**

The Gold Coast Combined Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Gold Coast and Hinterland Regional Board have jointly formed a position and policy on the Tipplers issue that as a part supports the submission from Marine Queensland and herein submit this response to council's Draft Tipplers Hub Concept Plan.

While the past history of the Tipplers issue has drawn condemnation from the GCCCC and CCIQ, council's draft proposal has also come under criticism due to the following:

- A. In our opinion, Council lacks the commercial experience or business acumen necessary to ensure a sustainable and profitable business of this nature.
- B. Council's use of public funds presents unfair and unwarranted competition to established private enterprise business of a similar nature already located on the Tipplers Passage. In our opinion, it is not inconceivable that such unfair competition could lead to the closure of this business further reducing the mix of destinations and options available to locals and tourists alike.
- C. Council's plans include the establishment of a swimming enclosure in the adjoining Tipplers passage. This concept is opposed by our organizations due to establishment and high maintenance costs, ongoing safety issues and the denial of adequate space to beach small craft on the foreshore thereby endangering the safety of passengers or crew. This concept could effectively reduce visitation to Tipplers and challenge its economic viability.

- D. The diversification of the destination in an attempt to appeal to all comes at a cost to the boating public, a critical factor in the economic viability of the project. Without their strong support it is unlikely Tipplers would ever show a return on the substantial public investment. This would then place a continual drain on ratepayers for the foreseeable future, an impost that potentially goes well beyond the existing \$12 per annum levy currently charged to ratepayers in recover of the initial purchase.**
- E. The projected timeframe in redeveloping the resort makes it more difficult in re-establishing any goodwill that may still remain. Developing a viable commercial enterprise that could result in a return on the investment and reduce the financial burden on the ratepayer requires sound marketing strategies and urgent implementation.**
- F. Council already holds other land on Stradbroke Island far more suitable for use as a People's Park and Environmental Education Centre, land that is also far more appropriate in the justified use of the OSPL.**
- G. Since its closure and despite council's media campaign visitation to the resort has been minimal as demonstrated by the 11 craft that visited the site over the long Show-day weekend. Previously during a long week end the resort would see between 400 to 500 craft, a critical mass when considering economic stability.**
- H. Closing the bar during visitation by students while a responsible approach on a social level, also denies a major revenue earner for the resort. In attempting accommodate two incompatible purposes instead of seeking a practical solution council has demonstrated its lack of sound business or commercial experience.**

**The GCCCC and CCIQ support the Marine Queensland submission for the following reasons:**

- (1) The proposal can be implemented immediately at lower cost and has strong support from the boating public who are the principal stakeholders and most likely and able to frequent the resort. Short of accessing expensive transport or travelling in a friend's craft, public access to the resort remains a challenge that council has failed to adequately address.**
- (2) The Marine Queensland proposal suggests management by a not-for-profit organization consisting of a Board comprising with council representation, members from the business community with experience in various fields of expertise. This proposal offers a wealth of experience in effective marketing of the resort, business management practices and higher degree of achieving a return on investment.**
- (3) Marine Queensland's acknowledged peer position in representing the marine industry and their proposal to conduct a variety of marine associated functions are appropriate and value add to the destination. These services will assist in broad marketing strategies through previously untapped resources, increase recognition and promote visitation.**

**In conclusion, The GCCCC and CCIQ believe that Tipplers was a well patronized and iconic destination strongly supported by the boating public. Tipplers should have remained a shelter and retreat where all were welcome regardless of their perceived position in our social strata.**

**The Tipplers site represents an insignificant portion of the Stradbroke Island landmass. When taken in the context of critical environmental protection it does not represent a significant threat and should be returned for the predominant use of the boating public and their guests. Council's proposal may appeal to some sections of the community but it lacks the skills, business acumen and vision to make it a self sustaining and viable enterprise by ignoring the needs of the boating public who are best able to frequent the destination.**

**While our organizations are always prepared to work with council to achieve the best possible outcomes for the city and the business community that supports it, the continuing Tipplers issue has certainly strained that relationship. We believe that in this instance council made a monumental error in judgment. Council needs to reassess its priorities entering into frank and open consultation with the business community, the marine industry and the boating public before committing to an irretrievable decision.**

**Yours sincerely,**

**GCCCC**

**CCIQ GC & Hinterland Regional  
Board**

**Bob Janssen President**

**Tom Tate Chairman**