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CC: Richard Gilmore

Brett de Chastel
Chief Executive Officer
Noosa Council
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Dear Brett

Re: Draft Noosa River Plan

Thank you for allowing The Nature Conservancy the opportunity to provide input into the Draft River Noosa Plan. I have provided below a summary of the key points covered in our meeting in late August:

We commend the Council for developing this detailed management plan which identifies the Noosa River's key threats, management responses and current policy settings. Overall, the Plan is well written, easy to follow and the management responses are generally appropriate to address the identified threats. The feedback below which may help improve the Plan in the final version:

The *Scope and Purpose* of the Plan (pg 8) could consider focusing on community values, threats and appropriate management responses to those threats. These should be time-bound and prioritised, based on mitigating risks associated with threats to community values.

The *Guiding Principles* (pg 10) could include a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework that measures the effectiveness of the management responses to identified threats. This follows the principles of adaptive management; where management responses are dynamic and fluid according to the measured effectiveness of the management intervention and/or changes in the condition of the asset(s) being managed.

The overall strength of the Plan could be enhanced by restructuring it to align more closely with a community values and risk-based framework, which is currently considered best practice. This includes:

- The upfront identification of community values (including visitor values)
- Identification of current and future threats to those values
- Creation of a timebound risk matrix (threats vs values)
- Prioritisation of threat management based on risk ratings
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of current management responses to reduce risk
- Development of new management responses if existing responses are assessed to be ineffectual

For example:

Foreshore amenity is identified as being *highly valued* by the local community and visitors (why people live there and why they visit).

Risks to foreshore amenity include: over-development and sea level rise (both determined as *high risk* in the immediate (5 years) and long-term (10-50 yrs)).

Current management response is to: restrict foreshore development (which could be assessed as being effective but not comprehensive).

A new, additional management response may include: evaluate and revise current set-back policy to allow for landward migration of foreshore habitats as a response to sea level rise.

The new management objective is therefore to reduce the risk rating of 'loss of foreshore amenity' from 'high' to 'low-moderate' over a 5 year time frame by conducting the above *effective* and *comprehensive* management activities.

Monitoring and evaluation of these activities could include bi-annual monitoring of foreshore habitat condition and extent (perhaps through satellite imagery and on ground survey) to assess loss/increase of natural foreshore areas.

The above framework is considered a more effective method of response planning compared to the current threat-focused approach, as it places greater emphasis on *community values* and how the Council and other groups are *responding to and prioritising* management activities according to the highest risks associated with community values. The ultimate outcome (and benefit) of using this preferred risk-based method is greater community support for the Plan and its management activities.

This approach may also reduce the number of objectives (pg 9) and management responses (57-64) identified. By prioritising management responses by risk, the division of resource allocation and management effort can be more easily justified. The method also supports the use of a measurable, goals-driven monitoring and assessment approach, whereby the ultimate goal of the Plan is to reduce all high risk ratings to acceptable risk levels as determined by the Council and community.

The NSW Government, through the NSW Marine Estate Management Strategy, provides a good example of the above approach: <https://www.marine.nsw.gov.au/key-initiatives/marine-estate-management-strategy>

TNC's own Conservation Action Planning methods, based on the Open Standards for Conservation, also provide further information:

<https://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPlanning/cbd/Pages/default.aspx>

Thanks again for the opportunity to provide some feedback. Should you require any further information please don't hesitate to contact me via Email: chris.gillies@tnc.org.

Warmest regards,



Chris Gillies
Marine Manager, Australia Program