




Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development

Overview of Submissions on the Christmas Island Crown Land Management Plan Consultation Draft

March 2017



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ISBN 978-1-925401-79-0
March 2017 / INFRASTRUCTURE 2972

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Introduction

The *Christmas Island Crown Land Management Plan Consultation Draft* (draft Crown Land Plan) was released on 31 March 2016 and set out proposed parcels of land available for development which could, in turn, stimulate economic growth.

The draft Crown Land Plan provided background on the Christmas Island planning framework, set out key planning principles, objectives, strategic directions and priorities, and proposed actions for the future use of Crown land on Christmas Island. A number of maps displaying the proposed land uses and actions also featured.

Following the release of the draft Crown Land Plan, the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (the Department) completed a three week public consultation process on Christmas Island during March and April 2016. The intention was to inform the public of the draft Crown Land Plan and seek feedback on both the draft document and proposed actions.

Six written submissions were received, eight meetings were held with key stakeholders, and three community workshops were convened. This Report summarises the submissions, as well as feedback from the meetings and workshops.

All feedback has been carefully considered by the Department and reflected in the final Crown Land Plan, where appropriate. The Department appreciates the time and effort of individuals, families and organisations in preparing submissions, which provided important and detailed feedback.



Administrator of Christmas Island, Mr Haase, hosting a community workshop on Christmas Island

Consultation process

The three week consultation period was designed to further inform the development of the draft Crown Land Plan, respond to questions, and encourage and support the preparation of written and oral submissions from the public and stakeholder groups. The draft Crown Land Plan was released on 31 March 2016 and announced via a Community Bulletin. The consultation period closed on 21 April 2016. Copies of the document were available from the Office of the Indian Ocean Territories Administration on Christmas Island and on the Department's website.

Website

A webpage provided links to the draft Crown Land Plan and supporting documents; dates and locations of community workshops; and information on the consultation process, including the closing date for submissions.¹

The webpage recorded 171 views during the three week consultation period.

Workshops and Meetings

Three community workshops were offered to the public on Christmas Island. Community workshops provided an opportunity for individuals and organisations to obtain information on the draft Crown Land Plan, seek advice from Department representatives and discuss alternative approaches to Crown land management and planning strategies for Christmas Island.

In addition, face-to-face meetings were offered to the public. A number of these meetings were held with key organisations and stakeholders, including the Shire of Christmas Island, Phosphate Resources Limited, developers and community organisations, and Australian and Western Australia Government agencies.



¹ www.regional.gov.au/territories/Christmas/land_management.aspx

Summary of Submissions

Comments made in the written submissions, community workshops and meetings focused on several key themes:

- the environment, mining and development;
- community infrastructure and amenities;
- movement and access;
- disposal of Crown land;
- heritage; and
- economic development.

A summary of each of the main issues raised under each of these six themes is presented below. As a result of the feedback, a number of changes were made in the final Crown Land Plan. An overview of these changes is provided at Table 1.1.

Overall, respondents supported the proposed uses of land presented in the draft Crown Land Plan. Comments tended to focus on the parcels of land being targeted to particular uses and concerns with existing arrangements. The perceived lack of detail regarding areas not mentioned was of concern to some, with submissions suggesting that development should not be restricted to the 'Dogs Head'.


The Environment, Mining and Development

The Environment

Comments relating to the environment tended to focus on the requirements of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and mitigation strategies to protect the environment.

Respondents suggested that the Crown Land Plan make reference to the EPBC Act and regulations, National Recovery Plans, and provide advice on environmental approvals needed before development can be carried out. The Department notes that approvals under the EPBC Act are the responsibility of the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy.

While submissions were generally supportive of the proposed land uses in the draft Crown Land Plan, respondents recommended that the Department (or appropriate body) adopt mitigation strategies at the design and development stages to reduce adverse impacts on native fauna, such as red crabs. The land and proposed developments identified by respondents that would benefit most from mitigation strategies were Lily Beach, south of Smith Point, around the sports oval and the Flying Fish Cove carpark.



Many submissions suggested that a groundwater mapping study was important to Christmas Island. Respondents advised that the outcome of a study may prove that parcels of land identified in the draft Crown Land Plan may not be suitable for development due to the potential adverse impact on water flows and quality. The Department notes that a scoping study commenced in May 2016 and will inform any future decisions on whether to proceed with a geological survey (groundwater mapping).

Mining

The importance of mining to the Christmas Island economy was raised by a number of parties.

Respondents suggested that the Crown Land Plan place a greater emphasis on the significant role mining continues to play in the economy, confirm that mining remains integral to land planning and management, and highlight the financial commitment of the mining sector to the environment.

It was also suggested that areas covered by exploration licences be identified on the maps in the Crown Land Plan, so those interested in the land are aware of possible mining activity being carried out prior to other development.

Tourism Development

There was strong support for a dive resort-style development on Christmas Island, however some respondents questioned the proposed location to the south of Smith Point. Respondents noted that there were a number of locations which could support tourism development. South Point was recommended for a large resort-style development. The area between Ethel Beach and Lily Beach was recommended for a tourist development, similar to that proposed at Lily Beach in the draft Crown Land Plan.

Agricultural Development

Respondents noted that some land identified in the draft Crown Land Plan for agricultural uses falls within areas of high value flora and fauna activity, and that potential developers would be unlikely to obtain the required environmental approvals. As such, it was suggested that these areas be excised from the proposed land uses.


Concerns about developing land to the south of the airport runway for agricultural purposes were raised, particularly given it could limit any future expansion of the runway.

Industrial Development

A Light Industrial Area on Crown land at Irvine Hill was recommended as an alternative to the current site.

Residential Development

A small number of submissions suggested that there are other factors preventing development. Respondents stated that land has been available on the market for some time, while a small number of respondents indicated that this land should be developed before further land is released by the Government. Notwithstanding this, some respondents advised that there is demand for land for private housing which is not being met.



Submissions also suggested that long term residential development in areas subject to mining exploration licences should only be undertaken after all phosphate deposits are removed. It was noted that this would ensure the land can be mined before it is built on, and make it easier for long-term residential development.

Most respondents did not support consolidating housing at the Kampong or releasing land for a tourism or major commercial development in that area. The general view was that when the existing public housing stock reaches the end of its usable life, it should be replaced by new public housing in the same location. Further development was not supported.

The location of the proposed assisted living or respite facility to the north of Plant Hill Road was considered by respondents to be less desirable than a location closer to other services and amenities, such as retail and open space. While having such a development near the Health Service was seen as appropriate, some respondents indicated that isolation should be considered.

Community Infrastructure and Amenities

Comments on the proposed community infrastructure and amenities actions were supportive, with respondents suggesting further improvements for Christmas Island, such as the creation of more walking trails.

A number of site-specific initiatives were identified by respondents:


- the rejuvenation of Flying Fish Cove, with improvements to services and amenities;
- the implementation of the Gaze Road Urban Design Master Plan was supported, with incentives for developers to establish and expand tourism infrastructure;
- the introduction of public art was viewed positively, particularly where accompanied by improvements to other areas of the island; and
- improvements to Tai Jin House and the Christmas Island Club, with respondents suggesting that these facilities be used to house an interpretive centre or provide office space.

While the establishment of an aged care facility was encouraged by respondents, a private facility was not widely supported. There were concerns about the cost of a privately operated facility, particularly in a remote area.

Movement and Access

Generally, the proposed movement and access actions were supported by respondents, especially initiatives to improve bicycle use. Questions were raised about the proposed road linking Smith Point to Drumsite and the pedestrian walkway linking the school to the sports oval.

Submissions questioned the usability of the proposed pedestrian link from the school to the sports oval given the travel time on foot. A road was suggested as an alternative. Conversely, other respondents supported the proposal, seeing it as a positive way of providing faster pedestrian access to the recreational facilities at Phosphate Hill. The Shire's 2011 Dual Pathway Program was cited as an example of improved access in the area, through the creation of additional roads.



Questions were asked about the time, cost and practicability of the proposed road from Smith Point to Drumsite. While many stated that alternative access to the area was positive, others suggested alternative cost-effective solutions.

Submissions favoured the proposed foreshore walkway, recommending that it be extended to the golf course and the incline walkway, which respondents suggested should have good signage, access and lighting along the route. Wayfinding signage was also supported, with suggestions that interpretative elements could be incorporated to highlight heritage links.

Regular Passenger Transport flights to and from South East Asia were raised in submissions as being necessary to improve access for tourists which would, in turn, create economic development opportunities.

Respondents suggested that to make such a service viable, cabotage rules would need to be removed so that international services could continue through to the Australian mainland.

Crown Land Disposal

While not directly relevant to the draft Crown Land Plan, arrangements for the disposal of Crown land was raised in some submissions. A number of suggestions were made, including establishing clear and transparent procedures, developing a land-specific ordinance, the inclusion of caveats on the sale or lease of land to ensure timely development, and proactively releasing further Crown land.

One respondent suggested that the Department establish a Crown Land Release Implementation Committee to oversee the release of land.

According to some respondents, commercial, industrial and agricultural land should be leased, with only land for residential purposes sold as freehold.

Heritage

Comments relating to heritage were centred around the positive role of heritage management in supporting tourism and growth. Many suggested that the Crown Land Plan should have a greater focus on heritage.

Respondents suggested the Department adopt a holistic and strategic approach to heritage management and that this be incorporated into the final Crown Land Plan. Other proposals included exploring how heritage assets can contribute to opportunities and promotion of Christmas Island, and proposed that the Department enter into a Service Delivery Arrangement with the National Trust of Australia (WA).

Economic Development

A number of submissions included suggestions about encouraging economic development.

The future of the casino was raised, as well as the potential to create an integrated tourist resort. The development of a high-end golf course was proposed as a new tourism opportunity.

Respondents also recommended that land be sold to developers at concessional rates to encourage investment, suggesting that this would support long-term economic growth.

Changes to the Crown Land Plan

An overview of the changes made by the Department in the final Crown Land Plan is provided at the Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Changes made to the Crown Land Plan

Section	Change
Background	Increased emphasis on mining activities.
Planning Context	Text on environmental regulation added. Additional information included in Figure 1, Christmas Island Planning Framework. Language and wording was refined.
Crown Land Planning Strategy Introduction	Section on planning challenges was strengthened. Language and wording was refined. Diagram added to show summary of objectives.
Residential Development	Sub-headings added to distinguish different locations. The location of the proposed assisted living or respite facility was moved to the north of Silver City and text added on access to other services. The former location of the proposed assisted living or respite facility has been identified as suitable for residential housing. Language and wording was refined.
Tourism, Commercial and Agriculture	Objective was reworded. References to Lily Beach and Ethel Beach being the most accessible and popular beaches on the Island changed to 'among the most'. Section was added on commercial opportunities for using empty or underutilised shops and Government facilities. The long-term action of consolidating housing at the Kampong or releasing land in the area for niche commercial development was removed. Emphasis is now placed on the Kampong area having the potential to expand into niche commercial land uses. Land available for agriculture uses has been reduced in areas of high-value flora and fauna activity.

Section	Change
	<p>A section on mining has been added, including a reference to future mining activity on Christmas Island.</p> <p>Language and wording was refined.</p>
Community and Social Infrastructure	<p>Objective was reworded.</p> <p>The length of the proposed walking and cycling trail was extended to the Christmas Island Golf Course.</p> <p>The text on the Expressions of Interest process run by the Shire regarding a mountain bike club has been updated to reflect the project's current status.</p> <p>Language and wording was refined.</p>
Movement and Access	<p>Objective was reworded.</p> <p>Text has been added around alternative cost-effective solutions to provide alternative access to Smith Point.</p> <p>Text has been added identifying land between Silver City and Murray Road which has been gazetted by the Shire of Christmas Island as a future road.</p> <p>Language and wording was refined.</p>
Environment and Landscape	<p>Objective was reworded.</p> <p>Percentage of island identified as being part of the National Park was changed to 63%.</p> <p>The Department of the Environment and Energy has been included in the list of departments and agencies the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development will work with.</p> <p>A section on heritage has been added, including a short-term action to promote initiatives to establish heritage trails.</p> <p>Text on the groundwater mapping scoping study was updated.</p> <p>Language and wording was refined.</p>
Implementation and Review	<p>Language and wording was refined.</p>

Conclusion

The final Crown Land Plan has been developed following extensive research and in consultation with the community, key stakeholders and government agencies. The document is intended to support development activity and, in turn, economic investment. Initiatives proposed in the Crown Land Plan are strategic, many are innovative, and delivery is proposed over the short and long term. Private sector involvement is critical to the delivery of the Crown Land Plan.

Feedback from consultations and submissions informed the finalisation of the Crown Land Plan, contributed to the goal of guiding future planning initiatives for Crown land and will support the release of land for development on Christmas Island.

