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DESKTOP PEER REVIEW OF PUBLIC
CONSULTATION/SURVEY MATERIALS RELATING TO
THE YAROOMBA BEACHSIDE SITE

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- Prepared for -

Sunshine Coast Regional Council

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Executive Summary

The Sunshine Coast Council is currently reviewing a proposal from Sekisui House to develop a 20 hectare site in the beachside locality of Yaroomba, just south of Coolumb.

A component of this application is the outcome of a community engagement process that involved a mix of community information session and stakeholder meetings, provision of a project website and community information line designed to provide information and receive comments from the community and an independent market research survey.

The Council, as part of their assessment of the proposal commissioned Roy Morgan Research to undertake a review of the community engagement process. This review, based on documents provided by Council, has been undertaken by Gerry Bardsley, Senior Research Director at Roy Morgan Research.

Independent Market Research

The market research, based on a telephone survey of 400 residents of the Sunshine Coast Council area (aged 18 years and older), was conducted by Footprints Market Research in November 2014 to measure the awareness and overall level of support for the proposed development, as well as the level of support for individual characteristics of the development.

The review of the market research is structured around an examination of several key components of good survey design:

1. Survey Sample

Footprints' Report provides limited information on how respondents were selected for the survey and how representative those participating in the survey are of the adult population residing in the Sunshine Coast Regional Council area.

The sample was designed as a quota sample that ensured that the survey interviewed an equal numbers of men and women, an equal number of residents from each of 10 Council Divisions, and that the proportion of people in the age groups 18-29, 30-49, 50-69 and 70 years and older reflected the actual age distribution for these 4 groups within the Sunshine Coast Regional Council area.

The population's age, gender and location is however not distributed equally and best practice would have been to have used "inter-locking" quotas so that the age of the males and females reflected the true age distribution for each gender and that this was also applied within each Division's sample group.

Of greater concern is that there is no information as to how a respondent was selected to participate in the survey and, therefore, no way knowing if the sample design excluded anyone from participating in the survey. It appears, for example, that mobile phone numbers may have been excluded from the sample as the quota design would have needed a question to determine where the respondent lived, since unlike a landline phone number, mobile phone numbers are not restricted to a specific geographic location. As approximately one in four households and nearly one in two people aged between 25 and 35 do not have a landline telephone, but do have access to a mobile phone, a significant proportion of the adult population may have been excluded from the survey.

There are also no details on how the respondent is chosen once a household is contacted. To be truly representative, everyone aged 18 or older should have an equal chance of participating. Since there is no respondent selection process in the questionnaire it is assumed that whoever answered the phone, or was available/willing to give an interview was asked the survey. Best practise would have been to randomly pick a person to interview and if they were not available, or no one was home, to try and contact them at another time.

Ideally the report should have also identified how many people were excluded from giving an interview because their age quota or gender was already achieved and the number of people who refused to participate should have been provided.

Without such information it is not possible to assess what, if any, sample bias exists and therefore it is not possible to determine if the survey is representative of the Sunshine Coast Regional Council adult's residents.

2. Analysis of the Results and Questionnaire Design

The results for the total population are based on 400 interviews and there are no particular issues in regard to this sample size being used to make estimates about the general population.

Care, should however always be taken with survey findings based on small numbers of respondents. The general industry standard is that no reliance should be placed on results based on 30 or less respondents as they will be subject to high levels of error and be of limited use.

While this is acknowledged by Footprints, the Report provides tables of results and continuous commentary based on small numbers of respondents particularly in regard to results for different Divisions and various age groups. These results should have clearly described them as indicative only.

There are some issues in regard to the interpretation of the survey results:

The first question provides a clear and (subject to the limits of the sample design discussed above) accurate estimate of the level of awareness of the proposed development in the wider community i.e. 15% believed that they knew quite a lot, 39% knew a little, 7% were only aware of the name and 38% knew nothing about it.

The second question aims to measure the level of support for the development by asking everyone if they support the concept– including all those who have just stated that they know nothing about the proposed development or have only heard of the name. The results for this question, as presented in the report are, in our view not a true measure of the level of community support for the development. This should be re-calculated by including only those who believe they have some knowledge about the development.

The rest of the questions are designed to measure if support for the development increases *after hearing more about the proposed development*.

The questionnaire states that the development may deliver a number of benefits and the respondent is then asked about their support for a development that included 6 specific benefits - these are all positive benefits and while not explicitly claiming they are benefits of the proposed development there is a strong inference that they are. Our concern is that the questions could be seen to be leading and an approach that examined the level of support for a broader range of both positive and negative scenarios would have been more balanced.

The analysis claims that once people are informed about the development they are more likely to start supporting the concept. It is not surprising that, once asked a series of questions that implied that the development brought a range of positive benefits to the community, support would increase – particularly amongst those who had said they previously knew nothing about it. If the survey respondent had been asked a series of questions only based on negative aspects of the development we would expect respondents to be less inclined to support it.

Rather than identifying *a movement in support from the start of the survey* the opinion poll has demonstrated that community support can be influenced by the nature and extent of information provided (and hence a need for a balanced presentation of facts and information) and that nearly half (45%) of the community knows nothing about the proposal.

Public Consultation

In our view the public consultation process involving community information sessions (public meetings and information booths in shopping centres), discussions with Stakeholders, a web site where people could leave comments and access information, and the survey are part of the “normal” procedures for undertaking a public consultation process and as such raise no concerns in regard to the broad process.

There are, however, several specific aspects of the reporting of the outcome of the consultation process that warrant comment.

In particular the report claims that the proponent *received feedback from more than 1,000 people with 58% positive or neutral in their view about the project, leaving 42% negative*.

We are concerned that the analysis has exaggerated the extent of support for the concept by combining those who support or are neutral about the concept together and comparing that to those who are opposed to it. It is not appropriate to imply that a person who is neutral is by default a supporter of the development.

It is also inappropriate to assume that anyone who attended a session but did not submit written feedback is neutral, particularly given that there are no details on how the feedback form was distributed to or collected from attendees.

The figure of more than 1,000 people providing feedback is achieved by combining all who participated in any of the four consultation processes. All four are legitimate processes but as they are measuring different attitudes and are such diverse groups they should be assessed independently. In our view it would be more appropriate for commentary on “community consultation” to only cover the views of the 648 people attending the community information sessions.

A more accurate analysis would have been to compare the proportion of different attendee’s opinions separately for the 648 people (ignoring the possibility of any multiple attendances) who attended a community information session i.e. 18% positive, 51% negative, 15% neutral and 15% who did not express an opinion.

Overall we do not have any issue with the Community sessions in as much as they were an opportunity to allow discussion and for the developer to address concerns and present their perspective of the nature and benefits of the proposed development. We do, however, not agree that the survey conducted as part of these session is a legitimate measure of community support or opposition to the development as it is not a representative sample of the community - which is the legitimate role of the independent commissioned market research.

Background

The Sunshine Coast Council is currently reviewing a proposal to develop a 20 hectare site in the beachside locality of Yaroomba, just south of Coolumb. The proposal is for a 251 bed five star hotel and a 1,350 dwelling medium/high density residential development. The project proponent is Sekisui House – a major global development company from Japan.

A component of Sekisui House’s application is the outcome of a community engagement process undertaken on their behalf by BBS Communications. This consultation process was conducted in October and November 2014 and consisted of:

- stakeholder meetings with community and business groups, and Council (ongoing),
- a project website and community information line to receive feedback and queries on a daily basis,
- community information sessions (6 locations), and
- an independent market research survey (conducted by Footprints Market Research).

The Sunshine Coast Council, as part of their proposal review has commissioned Roy Morgan Research, on a confidential basis, to undertake a desktop expert peer review of the community engagement process.

The review has been undertaken by Gerry Bardsley, Senior Research Director at Roy Morgan Research and is based on the following project material supplied by the Sunshine Coast Council:

- *Attachment 13 Sekisui House – Yaroomba Community & Stakeholder Feedback Report BBS Communications Group*
This is a document prepared by BBS Communications Group detailing the process and outcomes of the community consultation process and market research. The document also includes a copy of:
 - the engagement information materials
 - a report of the market research finding prepared by Footprints Market Research and a copy of the questionnaire
 - a Shopping Centre Survey form used in the community information “Sessions”
 - a Feedback Form
- *Yaroomba Precinct Submission 6. Engagement*
This consists of page 25 to 27 of the Submission to the Council and summarises the process and outcomes of the Yaroomba Community & Stakeholder Feedback Report and the market research findings
- *Attachment 1 Master and Precinct Plans Hassell*
This is a copy of the Master Plan and the Precinct Plan for the proposed development.

Copies of these documents can be found as Attachment 1, 2 and 3 of this review.

Independent Market Research Survey

BBS Communications undertook the management of a community consultation on behalf of Sekisui House and as part of this process commissioned Footprints Market Research (Footprints) to undertake an independent survey designed *to measure community awareness and support for the proposed (Yaroomba) development.*

The survey was conducted as an interviewer administered telephone survey using the questionnaire found as part of the Footprints Report included in the Attachment 1 documents.

This questionnaire was designed to specifically measure:

- *awareness of the proposed development at Yaroomba (from detailed description),*
- *overall level of support for the development at Yaroomba,*
- *level of support for individual characteristics of the proposed development, and*
- *comments/potential concerns about the proposed development*

Four hundred interviews were conducted with people aged 18 years or older between 10th and 14th of November 2014.

This review is structured around an examination of the sample design, analysis of the results and the questionnaire design. Commentary is broadly based on the *Guidelines on Opinion Polls and Published Surveys* published by ESOMAR and WAPOR¹ and Gerry Bardsley's 40 years experience as a market research practitioner.

In making these comments we have recognised the need to balance the restraints of best (theoretical) practice and what, from a commercial and practical perspective, can be regarded as a fair and reasonable approach to conducting a community survey.

Survey Sample

There is no detailed explanation of the sample design or the sample frame used in the market research except for the statement that

A total sample of n=400 residents were interviewed ... with equal representation across the 10 (Sunshine Coast Regional Council) divisions ... The sample is equally divided into males and females and is representative of the Sunshine Coast's age profile. During the survey, information on household status and occupation was also collected.

¹ESOMAR (the World Association for Social, Opinion and Market Research – formally European Society for Opinion and Market Research) and WAPOR (the World Association for Public Opinion Research) are generally recognised as the principal international professional bodies for the market research and opinion polling profession. As such they have established a set of guidelines and standards that are generally recognised as best practices for conducting survey research. The *Guidelines on Opinion Polls and Published Surveys* can be found at <https://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/ESOMAR-WAPOR-Guideline-on-Opinion-Polls-and-Published-Surveys-August-2014.docx>.

An essential component of good survey practice is to ensure that the survey universe (in this case the adult population of residents within the Sunshine Coast Regional Council area) is fully represented in the sample and everyone has a known and preferably equal chance of selection. In other words a good sample design should ensure that there is no built in bias as to who will and will not be given the opportunity to participate in the survey.

The sample is *representative of the Sunshine Coast's age profile* and broadly gender and geographic location (we understand that each of the 10 Divisions have similar population sizes) because age, gender and Division quotas were applied. i.e. respondents were screened and selected to ensure the proportion of people in each age group reflected the proportion in the population, that half the respondents were male and an equal number interviews was held with residents of each Division.

While this is a widely applied and generally standard industry procedure, best practice would have been to have used "inter-locking" quotas so that the age of the males and females reflected the true age distribution for each gender and that this was also applied within each Division sample group. Further details on how many people were excluded from giving an interview because their age quota or gender was already achieved should have been provided.

Of greater concern is that there is no information as to how a respondent was selected to participate in the survey and, therefore, no way of calculating selection probability or assessing if the sample is representative of the adult population residing in the Sunshine Coast regional Council area.

Were respondents, for example, selected from lists of names or phone numbers and if so what was the basis for inclusion on that list. If a list such as White Pages was used, for example, particular groups of residents such as people with silent phone numbers, recent arrivals to the area, people who have moved since the list was constructed could be excluded.

If mobile phone numbers were called the survey would have needed a question to determine if the person answering the phone lived in one of the 10 council divisions because, unlike a landline phone number, mobile phone numbers are not restricted to a specific geographic location. As the questionnaire has no such screening questions it would appear that mobile phone numbers were not called. Since approximately one in four households and nearly one in two people aged between 25 and 35 do not have a landline telephone but do have access to a mobile phone any sample design based on calling only household landlines would have automatically excluded a quarter of the general population from participating in the survey and the opinion of only half of the 25 to 35 year olds would have been considered.

Similarly it is normally accepted best practice to explain how the respondent is selected once a household is contacted. In order to be truly representative there should be a clearly specified selection process designed to give every adult resident an equal probability of selection. A common way of ensuring equal probability of selection is, for example, to interview the person whose birthday is closest to the date of the interview. Since there is no respondent selection process in the questionnaire

it is assumed that whoever answered the phone, or was available/willing to give an interview was asked to participate in the survey.

Best sample design practice would also normally have a regime of making at least 3 attempts to contact any selected household. This is to ensure that, for example, residents who are away or are shift workers, or simply not at home when the telephone survey is being conducted (generally of a weekday evening and weekend daytime) are included in the survey.

Reporting on the sample should also ideally include details of the response rates. It is to be expected that there will be a proportion of people approached to give an interview who refuse, however the proportion of the sample that refuses should be stated in order to be able to judge if it is sufficiently high enough to be potentially biasing the representativeness of the survey. A refusal rate of 15% to 20% would not be unusual and while not desirable is a realistic outcome for most opinion surveys these days. Since there is no data on response rates it is not possible to assess the impact, if any, on the validity of the sample design.

Without a sample design specification in the report it is therefore not possible to determine who, if anyone, was excluded from participating in the survey and if the probability of selection was equal for all residents. Without such information it is not possible to assess what, if any, sample bias exists and therefore it is not possible to determine if the survey is representative of the Sunshine Coast Regional Council adult residents.

Analysis of the Results and Questionnaire Design

The results for the total population are based on 400 interviews and there are no particular issues in regard to this sample size being used to make estimates about the general population. Results, as stated in the Footprints Report, based on 400 interviews are subject to a margin of error from +/-2.9% to +/-4.9%².

Care should however always be taken in analysing tables based on small numbers of respondents. The broad industry convention would be that no reliance should be placed on small number cells (the general industry standard is cells with 30 or less) as they will be subject to high levels of error and be of limited use.

While this is acknowledged by Footprints with their warning that the results for each Council Division are based on a sub sample of 40 and as such should only be regarded as indicative (the margin of error

² All sample surveys are subject to sample variability i.e. they may differ from a survey based on the total population (a Census) or if the survey was repeated with a different sample of respondents. The margin of error shows the extent to which a repeat survey result might vary by chance because only a sample of people were interviewed. The error range quoted by Footprint is at the 95% probability level which is to the highest industry standards and effectively means that if the survey was repeated with a different sample of people using the same the sample frame there is 95% probability that results would fall within the stated + or - range.

for a sample of 40 ranges from +/-9.2% to +/-15.4%) the report provides results for each division throughout the document – including the Summary of Findings.

The issue of small sample sizes and therefore potentially unreliable estimates carries through into other areas of the reported survey findings. There is, for example, discussion of the 18 to 29 year old age cohort throughout the analysis. Since this is based on 60 interviews (15% of the sample) any result based on less than 50% of this cohort should be treated as indicative only.

While we accept that there is interest in examining the results for sub-sections of the area's residents, in our view any such findings presented within a table of results should have included a footnote warning the reader to treat them with caution. Similarly, any commentary based on such small numbers should have clearly described them as indicative only.

The first question (Q1) gives a broad neutral description of the proposed development at Yaroomba and then asks if the respondent was aware of the development before the day of the interview. This question should provide a clear and (subject to the limits of the sample design discussed above) accurate estimate of the level of awareness in the wider community. That is, 15% believed that they knew quite a lot, 39%, knew a little, 7% were only aware of the name and 38% knew nothing about it.

The questionnaire then goes on to ask everyone to what extent do they support or not support the proposal (Q2). We do not accept that it is appropriate to ask someone who has just stated that they know nothing about the proposed development or have only heard of the name if they support the concept. The results for this question, as presented in the report are, in our view, not a true measure of the level of community support for the development. This should be re-calculated by including only those who believe they have some knowledge about the development and ideally analysed by those who claim to know a lot, albeit this would be based on small numbers, and those who only know a little.

The remainder of the questionnaire is primarily concerned with determining if people will change their support for the proposal *after hearing more about the proposed development*.

This is achieved by firstly stating that the development may deliver a number of benefits to the Sunshine Coast. The respondent is then asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagree that they supported a development that included a series of six specific benefits. These are all positive benefits relating to things such as employment opportunities, sustainable building practices, and economic growth for the area and while not explicitly claiming they are benefits of the proposed development there is a strong inference that they are.

By only including very positive benefits the questions could be seen to be leading. A better practice would have been to include a broader mixture of measures. This could be achieved by, for example, including a mixture of questions that alternated between *you support a (specified) benefit* and *you DO NOT support a (specified) benefit* in order to minimise any in-built ordering effect because the respondent was simply always saying they agreed or disagreed.

It could also be argued that a more balanced approach would have been to have included a mixture of statements that reflected the positive and negative aspects of the development identified and/or raised in the Public Consultation sessions – although we do understand that the Developer may not accept that there were any legitimate negative factors.

The analysis claims that once people are informed about the development they are more likely to start supporting the concept. It is not surprising that if someone, and particularly the 45% who knew nothing about the concept, were asked a series of questions that implied there were a range of positive benefits related to employment opportunity, economic growth and sustainable building practices that they would indicate support for the proposal. Similarly if they had been asked a series of questions only based on negative aspects of the development we would expect respondents to be less inclined to support it.

Rather than identifying *a movement in support from the start of the survey* the opinion poll has demonstrated that community support can be influenced by the nature and extent of information it is provided with (and hence a need for a balanced presentation of facts and information) and that nearly half (45%) of the community knows nothing about the proposal.

Public Consultations

A series of public consultation exercises were also carried out. They consisted of both public meetings and information booths in shopping centres as well as discussions with stakeholders and a web site where residents could obtain information and leave comments.

In our view these activities cover the “normal” procedures for undertaking a public consultation process and as such raise no concerns in regard to the broad process. There are, however, several specific aspects of the reporting of the outcome of the consultation process that warrant comment.

In particular the report claims that they *received feedback from more than 1,000 people with 58% positive or neutral in their view about the project, leaving 42% negative.*

This is achieved by combining the numbers of people who attended the community information sessions with the attendees of the stakeholder’s briefings, people who contacted the information phone line email, or website and the survey participants. In our view it would be more appropriate to exclude the results of the survey from this analysis as the measure of support for the development was different to the measure obtained in the information sessions and the research was conducted as an independent measure of total community knowledge and opinion.

Similarly stakeholders are not necessarily reflective of the broader community and their support or opposition should not be combined with the results of all aspect of the process.

Those participating in the information sessions have a particular interest in the development and presumably were motivated to either attend the Coolum Community Centre meetings or were interested in visiting or attracted by the display at the shopping centre information booths.

All four are legitimate processes but are measuring different attitudes and are such diverse groups that they should be assessed independently.

It is also worth noting that the report acknowledges that people may have attended the information session on more than one occasion (and we assume therefore potentially completed more than one questionnaire) however the scale of this and the impact on the reported 1,000 people is unknown.

We are also concerned that the analysis has exaggerated the extent of support for the concept by combining those who support or are neutral about the concept together and comparing that to those who are opposed to it. It is not appropriate to imply that a person who is neutral is by default a supporter of the development.

It is also inappropriate to assume that anyone who attended a session but did not submit written feedback is neutral, particularly given that there are no details on how the feedback form was distributed to attendees. There are many reasons why someone may not have completed the form including not being aware of it, not having time or not being able to access it. Some attendees may have also felt that the response form questions were not neutral (see comments on the market research questionnaire and the discussion below) and hence did not complete the form.

A more accurate analysis would have been to compare the proportion of different attendees opinions separately for the 648 people (ignoring any multiple attendances) who attended a community information session (i.e. 18% positive, 51% negative, 15% neutral and 15% did not express an opinion).

We assume that the Sekisui House Yaroomba Proposal Survey form was used to measure support for the development proposal at the Community sessions. The comments previously made in regard to the leading nature of Q3 in the market research survey are also applicable here and in particular apply to the last question (Q6) which asks for preference for one of two contrasting scenarios (one arguably very negative in comparison to the alternative).

Overall we do not have any issue with the Community sessions in as much as they were an opportunity to allow discussion and for the developer to address concerns and present their perspective of the nature and benefits of the proposed development i.e. essentially an information/education session. We do, however, not agree that the survey conducted as part of the session is a legitimate measure of community support or opposition to the development as it is neither a representative sample of the community - that is the legitimate role of the independent commissioned market research.

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Appendices

Roy Morgan Research

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Appendices 1: Attachment 13 Sekisui House – Yaroomba Community & Stakeholder Feedback Report BBS Communications Group

For the appended document, refer to Attachment 6 - Information from Sekisui House of this Council Agenda Report, which contains an internal attachment 'Attachment 13 - Sekisui House - Yaroomba Community and Stakeholder Feedback Report, BBS Communications Group'.

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Appendices 2: Yaroomba Precinct Submission 6. Engagement

For the appended document, refer to Attachment 6 - Information from Sekisui House of this Council Agenda Report, which contains an introduction document referred to as 'Sekisui House Submission - Yaroomba Investigation Area'. Section 6 'Engagement' of this document is located on page 25 (as listed on the document page).

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Appendices 3: Attachment 1 Master and Precinct Plans Hassell

For the appended document, refer to Attachment 6 - Information from Sekisui House, which contains an internal 'Attachment 1 - Master and Precinct Plans (Hassell)'.

