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Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
EPBC Number: 2023/09548
Email: epbc.referrals@dcceew.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Draft EPBC Public Environment Report Guidelines – Aura South Self-contained Master-planned Community

I write in response to the Commonwealth's invitation for public comment on the draft guidelines for the preparation of a draft Public Environment Report (PER), for the purpose of assessing the proposed Aura South development under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act).

Firstly, I reiterate Sunshine Coast Council's position – as detailed in the previous correspondence to your Department and the Minister for the Environment and Water – that the proposed development is inconsistent with the State Government's and Council's statutory planning instruments and so has no lawful basis on which to proceed. The structure plan for the proposal cannot proceed under Queensland's Planning Act 2016 and has not been subject to any process of local or State Government assessment.

Therefore, it is Council's position that this referral cannot be properly assessed by your department. Further, if this prematurely triggered assessment process continues, there is a risk of subverting the established planning process through inference of Commonwealth support for a proposal that is inconsistent with the State's planning laws.

In the event that the Commonwealth considers it is obliged to continue the assessment process, the following feedback is offered on the draft guidelines for preparation of a Public Environment Report.

Overall, the draft guidelines prescribe a robust approach for assessment of the matters of national environmental significance (MNES) applicable at the site. However, there are aspects that could be strengthened to better protect the mix of communities and species at and surrounding the site, in the present day and into the climate change-affected future.

Climate change and sea-level rise

The proposed development includes land currently above the level of tidal influence that is projected to be inundated by 2100 as a result of sea-level rise. Therefore, the proposed development will have significant impacts on the potential future extent and condition of, and buffers to, tidal habitats and species. This will affect all three MNES to be assessed.

These impacts are likely to be fast-tracked and compounded by a recent nearby ocean breakthrough across Bribie Island, which has increased tidal heights and ranges in the Pumicestone Passage.

Therefore, the implications for the development and MNES of climate change, sea-level rise and the Bribie Island breakthrough should be comprehensively assessed in the PER, for example, as a stand-alone section after *Description of the Environment*, and in sub-sections of relevant report sections that follow it.

Threatened species and ecological communities

Two additional threatened ecological communities should be added to Table 4 for mandatory assessment:

- *Coastal Swamp Oak (Casuarina glauca) Forest of New South Wales and South East Queensland ecological community*
- *Subtropical and Temperate Coastal Saltmarsh*

Both communities are represented between the proposed development area and the Pumicestone Passage and would naturally migrate landwards under projected sea-level rise. The proposed development would likely have impacts on those tidal and supratidal communities immediately, as a result of increased fresh surface water run-off, and in the long term, by restricting their migration landwards.

The water mouse has been recorded in tidal habitats near the proposed development, and its population across the Pumicestone Passage has been recognised as abundant and important in the Commonwealth's draft species recovery plan. In that plan, a buffer of 200m between development and current and future water mouse (tidal) habitats is recommended. The proposed development intersects with projected future tidal habitats themselves, as well as the desired 200m buffer around them. It is therefore recommended that the water mouse be included for mandatory assessment in Table 4, elevated from its current status as a species that *may be* impacted.

Protection of ecosystem services

A goal of the South East Queensland Regional Plan (2017), which gives effect to the state Planning Act, is to, "protect areas that supply high levels of ecosystem services from inappropriate development and other irreversible impacts". The proposed development site encompass or adjoin hotspots of ecosystem functions, such as soil formation and retention, supporting habitats and nutrient regulation, which are the basis of regionally important ecosystem services.

Therefore, the PER should document the ecosystem functions and services currently provided across the proposed development site, and the likely impacts on their quality and extent within and adjoining the site that would occur as a result of the proposal. A sophisticated assessment of ecosystem functions has been undertaken across the Sunshine Coast LGA that is suitable for this purpose. This requirement should be explicit in the description and impacts sections for the Moreton Bay Ramsar Site.

As expressed in previous correspondence, Council would welcome ongoing engagement on this matter to ensure the pre-emptive steps being taken by the applicant to facilitate urban development in this location are managed appropriately.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bill Hadrill', written in a cursive style.

Bill Hadrill
Group Executive
Liveability and Natural Assets