



# COOLOOLA GREAT WALK

# Proposed Site Selection Information Package

*Cooloola Great Walk Ecotourism Trail*

March 2021



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## 1.0 Introduction

The Cooloola Great Walk, Great Sandy National Park is an existing 102-kilometre walking and camping experience that links Noosa North Shore with Rainbow Beach. The Queensland Government’s Ecotourism Trail Program is working with the Kabi Kabi People and a private proponent (the proponent to enhance the existing trail through culturally inspired, low-impact eco-accommodation and tourism experiences. The Cooloola Great Walk Ecotourism Trail (the Project) is currently in the process of finalising site selection for the low-impact eco-accommodation.

Therefore, this document has been developed to provide the history of the site selection process, information on the proposed sites and identified next steps in the process.

## **2.0 Project Background**

The Queensland Ecotourism Trails program is designed to enhance the existing Cooloola Great Walk and its public infrastructure, cultural values and environmental features. The additions will include nature-based tourism offerings such as low-impact eco-accommodation, guided tours, and additional bushwalking, wellbeing and cultural experiences. A key objective of the Project is to secure long-term job and business opportunities for the Kabi Kabi People.

The State of Queensland (the State) has been working with the Kabi Kabi First Nation People Native Title Applicant (Kabi Kabi Representatives) for the past two years on the Project. The Kabi Kabi Representatives were first approached by the State to seek in-principle agreement for the Project. Since receiving that support, the State has had a number of meetings with the Kabi Kabi Representatives to discuss: process of engagement and support with the Kabi Kabi Representatives; protecting native title and cultural heritage; trail operator selection process; Project updates; job and business development; and, site visits to the Cooloola Great Walk, Great Sandy National Park. To see the list of engagement prior to the site selection process please see Appendix A.

Please note this document refers to the term 'Scenic amenity' and 'amenity'. Scenic amenity/amenity is a term used in government planning documents and discussions. It means what a place does for the appreciation of the public. For example, the natural environmental features of a national park are of high scenic amenity value due to the public's appreciation of its importance to that place.

## **3.0 Site Selection Process**

The purpose of site selection is to identify where the proponent's private infrastructure will be located along the Cooloola Great Walk, Great Sandy National Park. Site Selection has been a collaborative process between the proponent, the Kabi Kabi Representatives and the Department of Environment and Science. This process has considered 43 sites, which has been reduced to five, noting some sites were proposed by an operator proponent that was not selected and subsequently not assessed. For all sites there has been comprehensive cultural heritage monitoring and environmental studies undertaken. The Department of Environment and Science engaged consultant Biodiversity Assessment and Management Pty Ltd (BAAM) to undertake research and provide ecological assessment reports for all sites. The majority of the research and assessment process was undertaken with a Kabi Kabi Representative present.

Importantly, for all sites Kabi Kabi Representatives requested and will be involved in: finalising the location of the infrastructure, select clearing of the areas and the construction process.

Cultural and environmental factors have been taken into great consideration to locate the five proposed site locations.

## **4.0 Proposal**

Following an expression of interest process, the proponent was announced for the Project in February 2020.

### **4.1 Product Proposal**

The proponent is proposing three main product offerings in the initial operational phase of the Project. See the proponent's proposed products below.

1. Noosa River to Rainbow Beach – 6 days/5 nights
  - Start/Finish- Noosa River/Rainbow Beach (Bymein Picnic Area)
  - Guided Tours with Fixed date schedule
2. Rainbow Beach Return – 3 days/2 nights
  - Start/Finish- Rainbow Beach
  - Guided Tours with Fixed date schedule
  - Self-guided when available days
3. Leadership and Corporate Team Building- 6 days/5 nights + 3 days/2 nights
  - As per Products 1 and 2 with guided activities around leadership/team building

The three proposed products would be offered on a demand basis, with the plan for an off-set schedule, with one tour finishing and the next one starting. As demand builds the products will be offered simultaneously. The proponent is looking to offer wellness and wellbeing experiences as part of their products.

### **4.2 Eco-accommodation**

There are five proposed site locations for the proponent's eco-accommodation. The current name of the proposed sites are: Site N, Site L, Site K, Site P and Site D. See Appendix B for the Project map and proposed site locations.

## 5.0 Site N

Site N is the southernmost site in the Project, located along the upper reaches of the Noosa River. It is located adjacent to the Noosa River to the west, and the Cooloola patterned fens, a critical wetland ecosystem found predominantly in Great Sandy National Park, to the east.

### 5.1 Site selection history

#### Previous Sites

1. In June 2019, The proponent proposed two possible locations for a campsite (N2 and N3) in the Dutgee area (near the existing Dutgee Walkers Camp). Two additional sites (N1 and N4) were identified by the non-successful proponent and were not considered further.
2. A number of concerns were raised regarding N2 and N3 including:
  - The areas are in/immediately adjacent to low-lying areas that would likely be a seasonal wetland.
  - Substantial groundcover would need to be removed or impacted to construct campsites.
  - Area was likely to be flood prone during the wet season.
3. With ecological, cultural heritage and park management feedback taken into account, the proponent's Detailed Proposal, submitted in October 2019, identified the preferred site as the existing Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) campsite 4 (N5) on the Upper Noosa River.
4. A search of the Cultural Heritage register did not identify any recorded sites at this location.
5. However, QPWS objected to the site as it would not meet the 'public interest' test under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* as it would limit public access to the existing campsite.
6. In March 2020, further revisions were made and a new site was proposed north of campsite 4 and the existing Cooloola Great Walk track (N6).
7. A report generated from the Cultural Heritage register had no registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage sites located within a 1km buffer area of the proposed site.
8. QPWS provided in principle support for the site, noting that the site would only have river access and that there was no scope for an additional vehicular access track. The lack of vehicle access was seen as unacceptable for the proponent
9. There were concerns on the impacts to the site with regards to commercial capacity and loss of amenity value of the Great Walk around this section.



10. During the March site visit by BAAM, recommendations were made to avoid and buffer large hollow bearing trees, which present high value for common species, and to maintain a buffer area of a least 5 meters around the wallum habitat to the north of the site.
11. No Endangered, Vulnerable and Near Threatened (EVNT) plant species were identified within the clearing area, however they were identified in the broader area, noting that acid frogs were present in and adjoining the wallum heaths.
12. Later in March/April 2020, two alternative sites were proposed – one, by QPWS 130m south of Dutgee Walkers Camp (N7), and another, by the proponent, south of Campsite 3, close to the existing firebreak (N8).
13. QPWS advised that, at N8, eco-accommodation would have to be located very close to the firebreak to ensure vehicle access which may reduce scenic amenity, but raised concerns regarding the proximity to public Campsite 3.
14. BAAM offered advice based on desktop surveys and did not believe the location would cause significant issues and was outside of wallum.

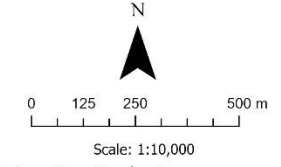
#### **Current Proposed Site**

1. In May 2020 a site visit was conducted where an additional site was inspected, approximately 425m southwest of the existing public Campsite 3 (N9).
2. The proponent was agreeable to this site given the views available from the site.
3. QPWS favoured the site over N8 as it was further from Campsite 3 and there would be less chance of disturbance from the general public.
4. BAAM recommended that a pre-clear survey should be undertaken to identify any EVNT species present.
5. It was noted that the area has recently been burnt and post-fire regrowth of EVNT species may result in EVNT species re-emerging prior to construction commencing.
6. Significant concerns have been raised by ecological and wetland experts regarding the proximity to all sites, but especially N9, to significant wetland values in the area, particularly the Noosa River and adjacent Cooloola patterned fens.

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## Cooloola Great Walk Ecotourism Project Site N selection history



- Ecotourism Product**
-  Rejected site
  -  Current site
  -  Public campsite (not considered)
- Existing Infrastructure**
-  Cooloola Great Walk
  -  Other walking tracks
  -  Firebreak/sand track



Image 1 – Site N location



## 6.0 Site L

Site L is located adjacent to the existing Litoria walkers camp, and is located approximately 650m south west of Lake Cooloomera, which has substantial ecological value as habitat for charismatic acid frog species.

### 6.1 Site selection history

#### Previous and Current Site

1. In June 2019, the proponent proposed areas to the south (L1) south of, and within the western section (L2, L2.1 and L2.2) the existing Litoria walkers camp as potential preferred sites. Two additional sites (L3 and L4) were identified by the non-successful proponent and were not considered further.
2. An initial survey by BAAM in March 2020 identified EPBC and NCA listed flora species *Macrozamia pauli-guilielmi* (Pineapple Zamia) nearby and the potential for *Glycine argyrea* to occur. Large trees were in the area and it was recommended that their habitat value should be assessed in more detail.
3. In March 2020, the proponent reaffirmed its preference to utilise Litoria walker's camp but would avoid any existing campsites. A suitable location on the edge of the walkers camp was identified as the preferred location (L5).
4. QPWS supported L5 and the establishment of a new vehicular access track to allow for servicing.
5. BAAM advised the following of the selected site:
  - Trees with large hollows occur within the eco-accommodation site and the access road. These should be avoided wherever practical.
  - One *Macrozamia pauli-guilielmi* was found within the site and should be avoided or transplanted if disturbance required.
  - Input from ecologist for detailed design locations is recommended. An ecologist should be present for all clearing activities.
  - Avoid patches of grass trees within the access road area. The road should be positioned to the eastern side of the site boundary.
  - The road alignment should be positioned to avoid cultural and ecological values.
6. During the May 2020 site visit, the proponent mapped out the location of eco-accommodation pods in a circle at L5, with a common room in the middle. This design has been refined into a single arc of cabins, with a communal area at the westernmost extent of the site
7. The layout took into account essential habitat trees and EVNT species and avoided these.





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- 8. It was agreed that a secondary walking track to give sole access to the proponent clients was not necessary and that the existing track would be sufficient.



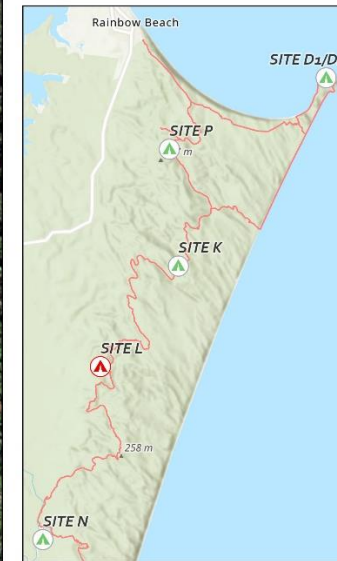
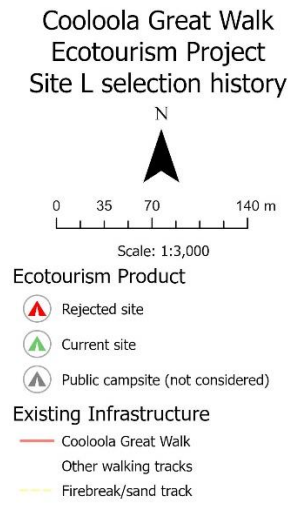


Image 1: Site L Location



## 7.0 Site K

'New Camp' Site is a new and unnamed location along the Cooloola Great Walk.

### 7.1 Site selection history

#### Previous Sites

1. In June 2019, the proponent proposed the existing Kauri walkers camp (K1, K1.1 and K1.2) as their preferred site. Two additional sites (K2 and K3) were identified by the non-successful proponent and were not considered further.
2. QPWS objected to use of the Kauri Walkers Camp as it would not meet the 'public interest' test under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* as it would limit public access. The Kauri Walkers Camp was also found to be located within high value vegetation, including ecosystems which may meet the definition of the Critically Endangered littoral rainforests and coastal vine thickets of eastern Australia Threatened Ecological Community (TEC).
3. 3 alternative sites were proposed (K4, K5 and K6), located ~2km southwest of the Kauri Walkers Camp.
4. A search of the Cultural Heritage register did not identify any sites at the proposed locations.
5. During a March 2020 site visit by BAAM, when the exact camp location was not locked in, it was advised that camps should be located to avoid RE 12.2.3/12.2.1 (of concern *Araucarian* vine forest and *Notophyll* vine forest on parabolic high dunes) as this ecosystem may be of the TEC and impractical for service access.
6. BAAM further recommended a detailed survey once camp location was confirmed to focus on fauna habitat values of large trees and for the presence of EVNT species associated with the rainforest.

#### Current Site

7. In March 2020, a revised new site (K7) was proposed by QPWS south of K4, located close to the Broutha Scrub Track and in lower conservation value blackbutt forest (i.e. outside of the TEC).
8. A search of the Cultural Heritage register did not identify any sites or artefacts at the proposed location.
9. The proponent expressed concerns over the site and its visibility for the existing walking track. Subsequent further inspections demonstrated that the site is not visible from the Cooloola Great Walk.
10. In addition, a seedling of the EPBC listed flora species *Cryptocarya foetida* (Stinking Cryptocarya or Stinking Laurel) was found within the clearing footprint. Large *Allocasuarina torulosa* are also present and these are potential feeding trees for Glossy Black Cockatoo.





# COOLOOLA GREAT WALK

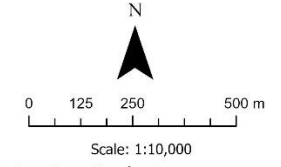
11. The site is located within the Pettigrews Timber Tramway Complex, which is listed as a historic heritage place under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*. Historic heritage surveys found some evidence of historic logging activity within and around the site, such as fallen logs, stumps, and logging tracks.



# COOLOOLA GREAT WALK



## Cooloola Great Walk Ecotourism Project Site K selection history



- Ecotourism Product**
- Rejected site
  - Current site
  - Public campsite (not considered)
- Existing Infrastructure**
- Cooloola Great Walk
  - Firebreak/sand track

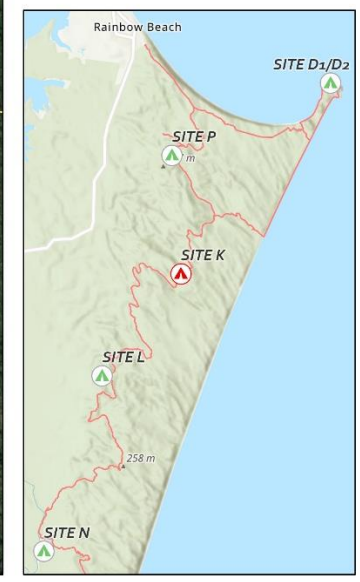


Image 2: Site K Location



## 8.0 Site P

Site P is located adjacent to Poona Lake, a perched lake (the only such lake found on the Australian mainland) with substantial ecological and recreational value.

### 8.1 Site selection history

#### Previous Sites

1. In June 2019, the proponent proposed a site on the south-eastern side of Poona Lake, near the Cooloola Great Walk (P1).
2. DES advised that the site would not be considered suitable as it was too close to the existing Cooloola Great Walk, too close to Poona Lake and too far from vehicle access tracks.
3. With ecological and cultural heritage and park management feedback taken into account, the proponent's Detailed Proposal, submitted in October 2019, identified the preferred location on the north western edge of Poona Lake, spread across two sites (P2a and P2b)
4. A search of the cultural heritage database identified two registered sites around Poona Lake, near the proposed site.
5. QPWS did not support with the proposed site, noting that it was too close to Poona Lake, would encourage multiple entrance points to the lake, would encourage people to walk around the lake, and is too far from vehicle access tracks for servicing.
6. In March 2020, QPWS proposed a site (P4) on the western side of Poona Lake a short way (approximately 300m) from a QPWS repeater tower after extensive ground-truthing. The site offered glimpses of the lake and the private facilities would not be visible from the public day use area on the opposite side of the lake. Poona Lake would also not be directly accessible from the proposed site.
7. QPWS continued to object to a circular track around Poona Lake and limiting lake access.
8. The proponent expressed no major concerns with the site.
9. BAAM conducted a site visit in March 2020 and provided the following commentary:
  - The initial section of the access road that is located on an old forestry track could be utilised with little ecological impact.
  - However, the proposed access road extension enters into the well-developed rainforest vegetation. These REs are listed as Of Concern, and contain numerous large significant trees.
  - EVNT plants occur within the proposed road alignment.
  - The surrounding area, particularly along the proposed access road (but not the site itself), is a Threatened Ecological Community (TEC) - Critically Endangered littoral rainforests and coastal vine thickets of eastern Australia - and so a referral under the



*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC) would likely be required for significant impacts.

- This is further compounded by the identification of Black Breasted Button Quail evidence adjoining the alignment.
- The campsite area has similar values, with numerous very large old growth trees also present. If retained these present a safety issue from falling limbs. However the site is not located within the TEC.
- The access walking track avoids any major clearing of significant vegetation. There are no significant impacts expected from the creek crossing.
- The rainforest habitats are being used by a suite of species restricted to this habitat type.

10. A variation to the site and access track was proposed in April 2020.

11. QPWS advised that an alternative existed where a steeper track could be cut to the north-west from an existing access track but would require additional stabilisation works.

12. BAAM visited the site in April 2020 and provided commentary as follows:

- The proposed site may be workable with flexibility around placement and designs of eco-accommodation (e.g. smaller or redesigned cabins, a smaller scale campsite, or investigating clumping or duplex options) to avoid/mitigate impacts and tree clearing.
- To guide BAAMs analysis, the proponent would need to provide further details on proposed construction methods and access (for example, what assembly is required on site, whether prefabricated structures could be 'flat-packed', how large construction vehicle access will be).
- In addition, proposing an alignment with more difficult gradient, but with reduced impacts on the TEC would demonstrate genuine efforts to avoid/mitigate impacts on the TEC as part of the EPBC referral

13. In late 2020, further work was undertaken on the identifying and reducing impacts on the Poona Lake catchment.

14. Subsequently, in December 2020, QPWS undertook preliminary surveys of four alternative locations outside, or on the edge of, the Poona Lake catchment (CP1, CP2, CP3 and CP4).

15. All sites were rejected as unfavourable – CP1 was located too far away from the Great Walk to have sufficient tourism value, and CP2, CP3 and CP4 were located within highly sensitive rainforest and vine thicket vegetation.

### Current Site

16. A revised site was presented in May 2020 on the western side of Poona Lake, as suggested in March 2020.
17. A new access track was marked by BAAM that avoided all of concerns REs.
18. The common area of the camp was marked out in a circle inside larger blackbutt trees.
19. In December 2020, QPWS obtained high resolution topographic mapping of P4, which indicated that potential impacts to Poona Lake could be mitigated by placing high risk infrastructure (e.g. wastewater storage and collection points) at the south-western edge of the site, which is outside the lake's catchment and drains away from Poona Lake. This was confirmed in groundwater surveys conducted in February 2021 using electrical resistivity imaging of the groundwater table and confining layers.





# COOLOOLA GREAT WALK



## Cooloola Great Walk Ecotourism Project Site P selection history

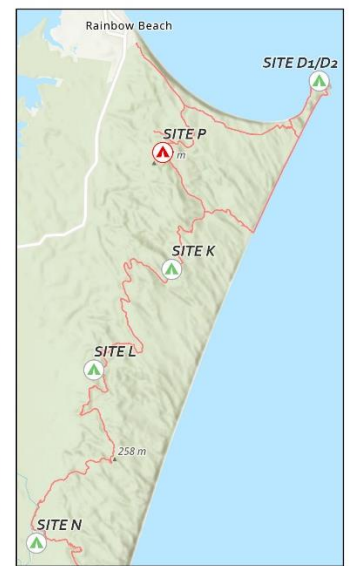
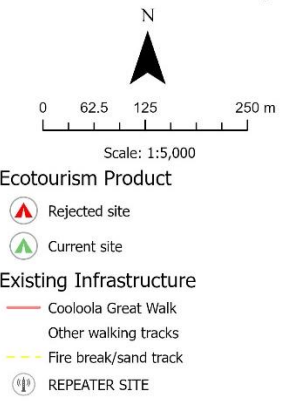


Image 3: Site P Location

Commercial in Confidence

Without Prejudice



## 9.0 Site D

Site D is located on Double Island Point, west of the existing lighthouse station.. The State has worked with the Kabi Kabi Representatives and the proponent to identify a site for the proponent and a Restricted Access Area (RAA) for the Kabi Kabi People. The Kabi Kabi Site may be used to provide a place on country for cultural purposes for the Kabi Kabi People.

### 9.1 Site selection history

#### Previous Sites

1. In June 2019, the proponent proposed two preferred locations at Double Island Point, Pages Hut clearing and the Lighthouse area (D1 and D2). A third site (D3) was identified by the unsuccessful proponent and was not considered further.
2. QPWS objected to both D1 and D2 due to high visitation from free-and-independent travellers due to heritage values and scenic amenity. In addition, sites by the lighthouse would be too exposed to weather extremes.
3. QPWS also objected to the site as it would not meet the 'public interest' test under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.
4. With ecological, cultural heritage and park management feedback taken into account, the proponent's Detailed Proposal, submitted in October 2019, identified an alternative site to the north of the lighthouse (D4).
5. Alternative sites were also identified at the northern end of the headland (D5 and D6) for both the proponent and as an area that could also be utilised by Kabi Kabi People.
6. A search of the cultural heritage register identified a number of sites and artefacts in the general vicinity of Double Island Point, however none appeared to be directly on the proposed sites. It was recommended that further discussions should be held with Kabi Kabi Representatives.
7. The entire area is located within the Double Island Point Lightstation Historic Heritage area, a registered heritage place under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*.
8. QPWS objected to the new site. Despite being further away from the lighthouse, the D4 would still be visible from the lighthouse precinct.
9. During the March 2020 site visit, BAAM advised:
  - Of Concern RE 12.12.19 rocky headland vegetation should be avoided and sites should be placed within the Least Concern RE 12.2.14 fore dune vegetation;
  - The likelihood of EVNT flora species in the area is low, clearing should be concentrated within early successional patches of vegetation and large trees should be avoided.

#### Current Site

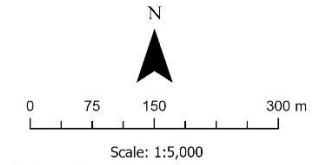
10. A new site (D7) was proposed in March 2020, slightly to the north of previously identified sites. A suitable location for a Kabi Kabi area (D8) was also identified between the lighthouse and D7, adjacent to an existing carpark.
11. QPWS were generally supportive of the site, but vehicle access would need to be discussed as access is currently walk-in only.
12. BAAM advised that:
  - The vehicle access track into the site would be the biggest constraint and would need to avoid large trees and major disturbance to soil;
  - Some hollow bearing trees occur within the alignment and the site, but impacts could be reduced dependent on eco-accommodation layout and design (i.e. micrositing cabins to avoid clearing vegetation);
  - No EVNT species were detected within the area.
13. During the May 2020 site visit, the following was discussed between attendees:
  - There is a possibility for common space inside the proponent's site or for an area between D7 and D8;
  - Vehicle access tracks were mapped and there was a general agreement to realign the existing walking track to allow for vehicle access to the proponent site, however further design work would be required to ensure clarity of pedestrian and vehicle movements.
  - The Kabi Kabi site was mapped and would remain in the same area.



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## Cooloola Great Walk Ecotourism Project Site D selection history



### Ecotourism Product

- Rejected site
- Current site
- Proposed Kabi Kabi area

### Existing Infrastructure

- Cooloola Great Walk
- Other walking tracks
- Firebreak/sand track

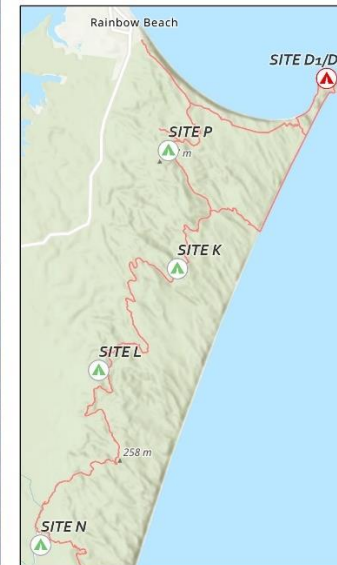


Image 4: Site D1 Location

## 10.0 Next Steps

The Project has a lot of activities that work together but are also run in parallel with one another. Therefore, the activities that will occur include:

- **Cultural Heritage Agreement-** Once agreement has been received the State will continue to engage and negotiate a Cultural Heritage Agreement with the Kabi Kabi Representatives, noting final agreement is required by the Kabi Kabi People.
- **Environmental approvals-** The State will be progressing all necessary approvals under State and Commonwealth environmental and development legislations.
- **Commercial arrangements –** The State will be progressing lease arrangements with the proponent for their eco-tourism operations on the Great Sandy National Park.

## 11.0 Summary

This document summarises two years of engagement and negotiation with a wide range of stakeholders and consultants. It also provides the next key steps for progressing the Project to operation.



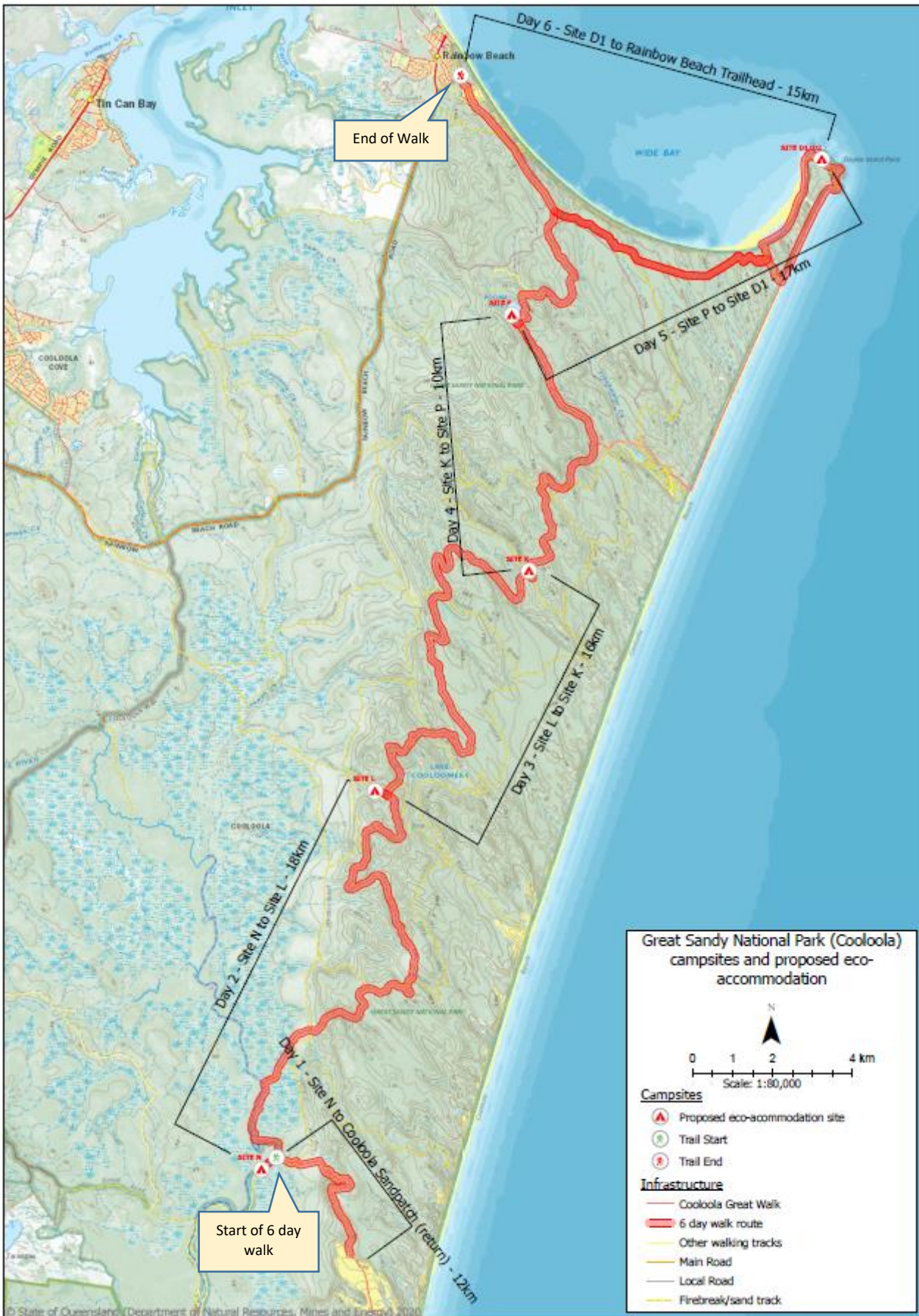
## APPENDIX

### Appendix A

#### *History of site visits*

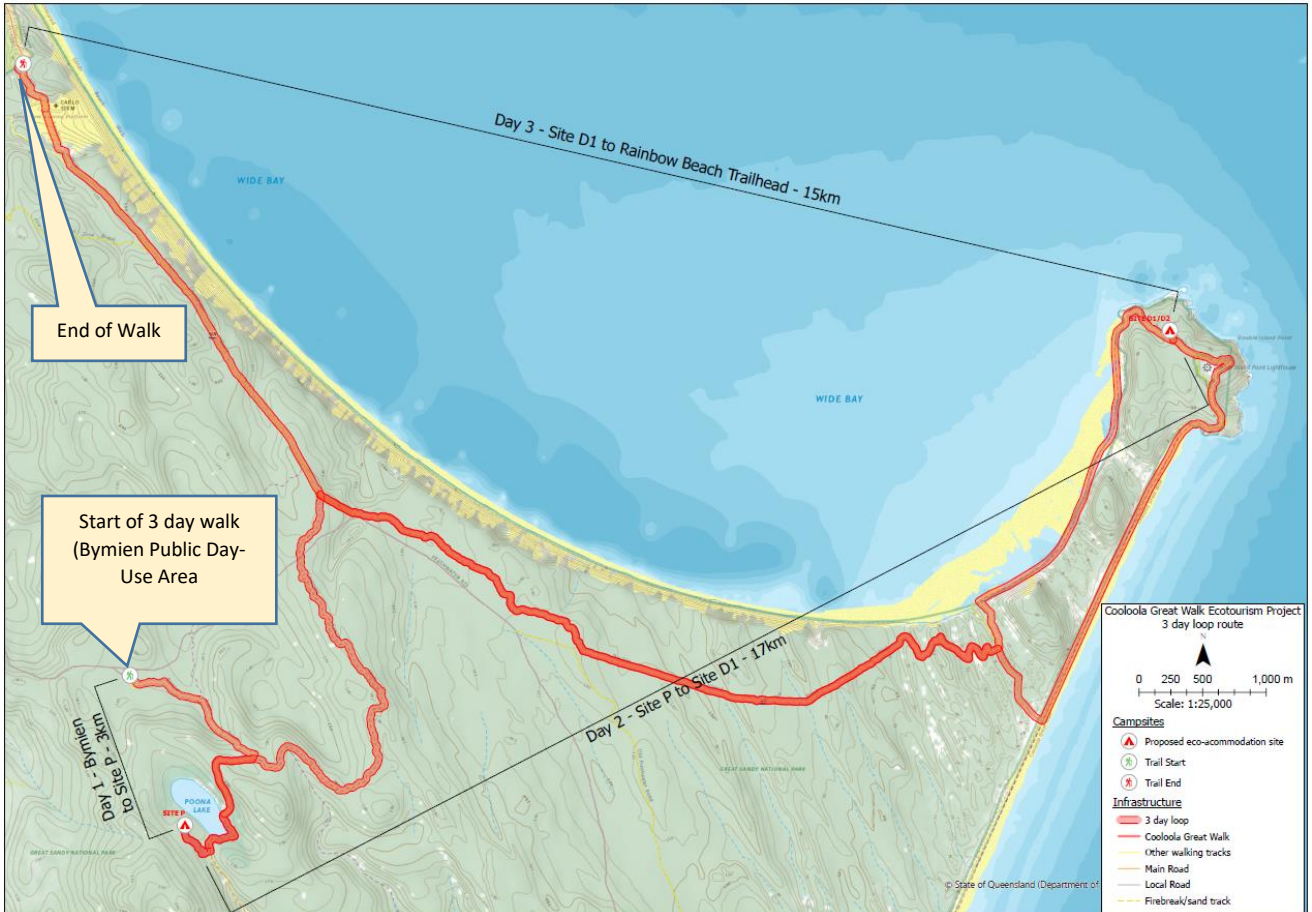
1. The project team engaged with the Kabi Kabi First Nations People from early in the project.
2. A site visit was held on 14-15 March 2019 with representatives of the Kabi Kabi and the project team, to allow for familiarisation of the Cooloola Great Walk.
3. During the Detailed Proposal stage, shortlisted proponents were invited to visit the Project area to identify appropriate areas for eco-accommodation sites and their associated products.
4. A site visit was held on 12-14 June 2019 with shortlisted proponents and Kabi Kabi Representatives.
5. A further site visit was held on 13-15 August 2019 with Kabi Kabi Representatives to discuss concerns regarding site selections.
6. A site visit was held on 7 September 2019 with the proponent and Kabi Kabi Representatives. The purpose of the trip was to build the proponent's awareness of the Kabi Kabi People, their country and their history.
7. A site visit to Double Island Point was held on 14 October 2019 with representatives from Kabi Kabi and Noosa Parks Association.
8. The proponent was announced as the preferred proponent on 25 February 2020.
9. Following the media announcement there was a site visit to discuss site selection, and ecological and cultural heritage matters. This was held on 24-27 February 2020. Attendees included Kabi Kabi representatives, BAAM, NPA and the proponent.
10. Cultural heritage monitors from Kabi Kabi conducted further inspections of Lake Poona on 19-20 March 2020.
11. Further ecological and cultural heritage site visits were conducted on 23-26 March 2020, by BAAM and a Kabi Kabi Representative.
12. Additional discussions regarding site selection were held on 12-14 May 2020, with Kabi Kabi Representatives, the proponent and BAAM in attendance on site.
13. Filming on site with Kabi Kabi Representatives was conducted on 21-22 June 2020.
14. A Kabi Kabi apical ancestors visit to all five sites was undertaken in November 2020.

## Appendix B - Proposed 6 day walk





## Appendix C – Proposed 3 Day loop walk





# COOLOOLA GREAT WALK