

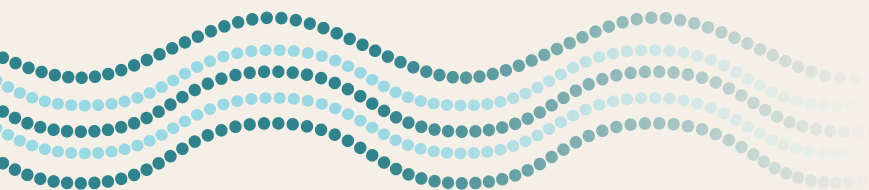
PALM ISLAND WALKING TRAILS

Engagement Outcomes Report
RECOMMENDATIONS



The Way Forward

Contents



*Walking country.
Sharing stories.
Building futures.*

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Executive Summary

The Palm Island Walking Trails Project represents one of the most significant community-led tourism and cultural development opportunities in the history of Palm Island. Across stakeholder meetings, on-Country workshops, a community survey and targeted cultural discussions, the consultation revealed strong and consistent community support for the project, provided it is delivered through a culturally safe, staged, guided and community-benefiting model. A total of 379 engagements were recorded, where 95% of community supported the development of walking trails on Palm Island.

This report provides the recommendations of the consultation. See the Engagement Outcomes Report to understand the full community sentiment toward tourism and the development of walking trails.

At its heart, the project is shaped by two powerful cultural lineages: the ancient Manbarra canoe people whose saltwater traditions define the archipelago, and the Bwngcolman community who have built a community of resilience, identity and cultural strength. Elders from both groups expressed a shared aspiration that the walking trails become a unifying cultural experience, reconnecting people with Country, story and community pride.

A Community-Led Vision

The vision emerging from consultation is clear: Palm Island can become a world-class First Nations walking and cultural experience, delivered at a pace that reflects community readiness, cultural authority and environmental care. The development of tourism on the Island represents an opportunity for community capacity building and economic development through participation in construction and delivery of the walking experience, as well as the development of community-led entrepreneurial enterprises.

The recommended staged approach includes:

- **Stage One (2026–2028):** Establish high-quality priority trails at Wallaby Point, Pencil Bay and Palm Valley; embed cultural interpretation; build community capability; and demonstrate early success.
- **Stage Two (2028–2032):** Progressively link coastal segments into a signature multi-day cultural walk, subject to ILUA processes and Traditional Owner approvals.
- **Stage Three (2032–2035):** Expand into “island walking and island hopping” experiences across Curacoa, Orpheus and Fantome Islands, echoing ancient Manbarra pathways.

Governance and Cultural Authority

Consultation confirmed that the project must be governed through a multi-layered, culturally authorised framework that embeds Elders, Traditional Owners, the Rangers, family camp holders and the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council. Four structures are recommended:

- **Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council** – Project delivery and oversight with a longer-term plan for embedding tourism business into the community and potentially under any entities where Council has some oversight such as the Palm Island Economic Development Foundation.
- **Project Management Team** – planning, design, construction, engagement and stakeholder communication, and interagency coordination.
- **Cultural Advisory Council** – cultural authority, ILUA pathways, trail approvals, storytelling and cultural intellectual property (IP).
- **Community Enterprise Committee** – transparency, local business development, youth pathways and community benefit.

Family camp holders – particularly at Wallaby Point, Pencil Bay and Palm Valley – must have a formal role in governance. Their areas are places of identity, kinship and intergenerational continuity, and their involvement is essential for cultural legitimacy and social licence.

Four Priority Projects

Consultation and technical assessment identified four priority projects that form the foundation of Stage One:

1

Wallaby Point Circuit

The community’s “hero trail,” with significant tourism opportunity, offering reef views, cultural story nodes, and a guided welcome experience. This trail is almost entirely within Council-managed land, making it the most achievable early win.

3

Township-to-Airport Coastal Walk (Pencil Bay)

A high-value local and visitor trail providing safe, scenic access between town and the airport. Strong community support and existing informal use make this a practical early construction project.

2

Palm Island Cultural Welcome Precinct

A cultural arrival zone in the township foreshore area, celebrating Manbarra and Bwgcolman stories through art, interpretation, and ceremonial space. This precinct anchors the walking network and strengthens cultural identity.

4

Township to Palm Valley Rainforest Walk

A culturally significant route linking the township to Palm Valley, the rainforest slopes and the historic community waterhole. This trail offers shade, biodiversity, and deep cultural storytelling opportunities.

Together, these four projects create a coherent, achievable Stage One network that delivers immediate community benefit while laying the foundation for future multi-day experiences.

Ranger Leadership and Capability

The Minggamingga Rangers emerged as the most trusted operational, cultural and environmental partner. Their long-term role spans cultural interpretation, environmental stewardship, trail construction, visitor management and youth training. However, governance changes and capacity constraints mean that there is some risks, and a dedicated Tourism Readiness and Ranger Capability Program is essential. This aligns with the Tourism Masterplan (2023) and positions the Rangers as the frontline custodians of the walking experience.

Tourism Readiness and Market Opportunity

As highlighted in the community survey, Palm Island has strong community support for tourism but limited operational readiness. A structured Tourism Readiness Program – supported by SeaLink and Hinterland Aviation – will allow the community to build skills through real-world day trips, overnight events and guided cultural experiences. The national walking market is growing rapidly, and Palm Island's combination of reef, rainforest, ridgelines and cultural depth positions it uniquely for high-value, small-group, guided experiences.

Commercial Tourism Partner

Consultation strongly supports attracting a commercial tourism partner to provide market reach, operational systems, safety capability and investment confidence – while operating under cultural authority and community governance. This partner will be essential for long-term viability and for transitioning Palm Island into a premium First Nations walking destination. An Expression of Interest process will canvass this support.

Conclusion

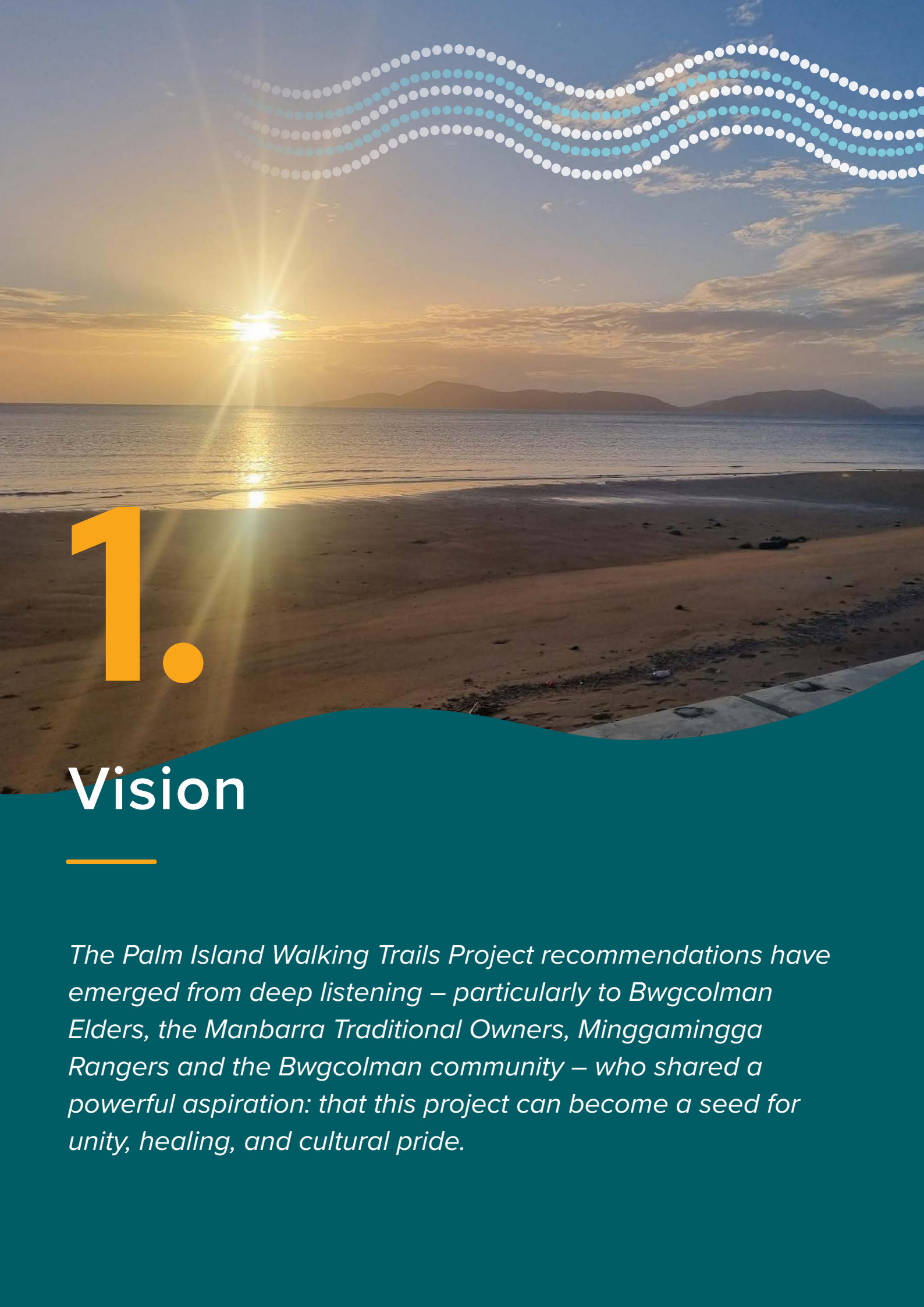
The Palm Island Walking Trails Project is very much a 'seed' that if planted well can be a source of great pride. It is desired and strategically aligned with Queensland's Destination 2045 agenda. With the right governance, cultural authority, staged development and capability investment, Palm Island can deliver one of Australia's leading First Nations walking and cultural experiences – grounded in community pride, environmental care and cultural truth-telling.

“

We want visitors to walk with respect, listen to our stories, and understand our connection to country

MINGGAMINGGA RANGER





1.

Vision

The Palm Island Walking Trails Project recommendations have emerged from deep listening – particularly to Bwgcolman Elders, the Manbarra Traditional Owners, Minggamingga Rangers and the Bwgcolman community – who shared a powerful aspiration: that this project can become a seed for unity, healing, and cultural pride.

The Palm Island Walking Trails Project recommendations have emerged from deep listening – particularly to Bwgcolman Elders, the Manbarra Traditional Owners, Minggamingga Rangers and the Bwgcolman community – who shared a powerful aspiration: that this project can become a seed for unity, healing, and cultural pride.

Their stories reveal two rich lineages that now coexist on Palm Island: the ancient Manbarra canoe-people whose saltwater traditions shaped the archipelago for thousands of years, and the Bwgcolman families whose Torres Strait and broader First Nations roots were brought together through the government removal policies of 1918. This is a particular period of sorrow, but from this has come strength, that shone through in consultation with Bwgcolman community elders.

For the Manbarra people, Great Palm Island is part of a vast cultural seascape. Their stories speak of ‘ancient canoe people’ who shared journeys between islands, walking the ridgelines, harvesting from reefs, and maintaining kinship ties with the Wulgurukaba people of Yunbenun (Magnetic Island). These narratives anchor the Palm Island archipelago as a place of deep belonging, navigation, and continuity – a living cultural map across sea and shore.

For the Bwgcolman community, Palm Island became home through resilience, cultural strength, and the forging of a new collective identity. Elders shared the influence of Torres Strait traditions – seafaring knowledge, language, ceremony, and food – that continue to shape Bwgcolman identity today.

Their story is one of survival, adaptation, and pride in a community built from many nations. Although it is clear there is a period of ‘sorrow’, in some cases, the Elders showed incredible pride in their family area of Palm Island, and wanted to share it with visitors.

The Walking Trails Project offers a rare opportunity to bring these stories together into a unified island-walking experience that enables community-owned enterprises, ranger-led experiences, and environmental stewardship programs across the archipelago.

Achieving this vision requires a potentially five-to-ten-year staged commitment. There is a strong desire to act now. There is younger entrepreneurial skills in the Palm Island community that need to find markets. The community is nearly unanimous that this project and tourism is the opportunity. The project, however, must have a community-led approach where staged works, with community benefits are tested and trialled to build a long-term, world-class cultural and eco-tourism offering that grows at the pace of community readiness, cultural authority, and environmental care.

The recommended stages of the vision outlined include;

- **Stage One – 2026-2028**, establish the first stage of a high-quality walking experience, embedding cultural interpretation, building community opportunity and capability and demonstrating early success with local community trail benefits.
- **Stage Two – 2028-2032**, integral with cultural approvals and custodianship with traditional owners and elders, progressively link coastal segments into a signature multi-day experience that reconnects people with Country and the Palm Island story – its people’s culture and history and its coastline and landscape.
- **Stage Three – an expansion stage 2032-2035**, incorporating Palm Island’s vision – canoe people, coastal people – expanding the product to “island walking and island hopping” experiences across Curacoa, Orpheus and Fantome islands, echoing the ancient pathways of the Manbarra canoe people and the seafaring traditions of Torres Strait families.



At its heart, the vision remains simple and powerful: walking the islands becomes a way of walking the stories – Manbarra and Bwgcolman – together into the future.



2.

Governance, Operational and Delivery Insights

“The walking-trail project should reflect community, cultural and environmental values.”

MINGAMINGA RANGER – MEETING 8

2.1 Proposed Governance Framework

The Consultation shows clear, repeated expectations from community and stakeholders that the project must be delivered through a specific lens:

- Cultural authority first – Elders and Traditional Owners must guide decisions about Country, sacred sites, and trail alignment.
- Local jobs and capability building – This is the strongest community priority across the survey and workshops.
- Guided, managed tourism – 98% support for guided tours; strong opposition to unguided access.
- Respect for camps, privacy, and sensitive areas – Avoidance or guided-only access near homes, camps, Onion Bay burial sites, Bamboo Creek, and ridge-line cultural areas.
- Staged development – “Start modestly, evaluate, then expand.”
- Transparency and continuous updates – Community expects ongoing communication and veto-level input.

These principles form the backbone of the recommended governance model which is the establishment of four linked structures that adopt a community-led, culturally-authorized, multi-layered governance model. This model provides a purposeful role and embeds elders, Traditional Owners, rangers, camp holders, and the Council into a single coordinated structure.

Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council

Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council is placed to deliver the project and is the recipient of funds from the State Government's tourism funding. Longer term, the project may have a commercial tourism partner and other delivery partners, such as the Rangers, transport operators, food service providers, laundry providers and tours, that will require operational support. Consideration could be given to a structure where the Palm Island Walking Trails project is also supported by the Palm Island Economic Development Foundation, providing additional capability.

The scope of the Foundation may need to be extended in line with this approach, and the current Board expanded over time to include key tourism and community members. This framework will ensure the project has community at its foundation, is focused on long-term opportunities and an agency that can effectively oversee a potential range of tourism and enterprise partnerships while continuing to seek funding and investment.

Project Management Team (PMT)

A Project Management Team will provide project leadership, technical and operational skills responsible for planning and project delivery. It is proposed that the PMT would provide:

- Project leadership and management – keeping the project on time and on target
- Government, community and cultural engagement
- Support Council in procurement and contractor management
- Alignment with the Destination 45 Agenda, Council's Strategic Plan and Palm Island Tourism Masterplan (2023).

Project Management Team membership could include a project lead contractor, Council staff, the Rangers, and service providers such as environmental consultants and tourism advisors as required.

Cultural Advisory Council (CAC)

The establishment of a key cultural guidance and advisory committee for the project will be critical to align the cultural heritage and approvals process. A body of elders, traditional owners, and cultural knowledge holders with decision-making authority who can work alongside the project delivery team and a trail construction contract to advise on:

- Cultural Heritage Approvals
- Trail alignment approvals
- Access rules (guided-only zones, restricted areas)
- Storytelling, interpretation, and cultural IP
- ILUA-related processes.

This group should be the first and final checkpoint for all cultural matters. Key members: Manbarra Elders, Bwgcolman Elders, family camp representatives, cultural knowledge holders.

Community Enterprise Committee

Establish a broad-based community enterprise voice to ensure transparency and local ownership. This may include: camp holders who are developing new business opportunities, youth, local artists, entrepreneurs, business owners, TAFE, and school reps. Its functions may include:

- Review project updates
- Provide feedback on design, safety, and community impacts
- Ensure local priorities (jobs, safety, rubbish, wildlife management) are addressed
- Build community enterprise capability – this could be a series of entrepreneurial and training initiatives supporting tourism, arts, cultural business initiatives

The Project Management team would be responsible for managing and resourcing these Committees and their Advisory functions.

2.2 Family Camp Holders

The consultation highlighted as a potential project risk, ‘family camp holders’ on Palm Island and therefore embedding family camp holders in meaningful engagement is essential to ensuring that trail development is culturally grounded, community-led, and respectful of long-standing patterns of use across Palm Island. Family camps at Wallaby Point, Pencil Bay, and Palm Valley are not simply recreational spaces, they are places of identity, kinship, and intergenerational continuity. Giving these families a direct role in the project through either or both, the Cultural Advisory Council and Community Enterprise Committees ensures that the opportunities that arise out of the project and decisions that are made have cultural authority, and the practical realities of how these areas are used and cared for.

In the context of these committees, trail-priority representation may be considered, that is one group for each major trail zone ie Wallaby Point, Pencil Bay and Palm Valley. This creates a clear, fair, and transparent structure. It allows each family group to speak to the specific cultural, environmental, and social considerations of their area while contributing to island-wide planning. This approach strengthens legitimacy, reduces the risk of conflict, and builds shared ownership of outcomes. It also ensures that opportunities arising from tourism, enterprise, and cultural interpretation flow back to the families who hold deep connections to Country.

Incorporating family camp holders into governance is therefore not symbolic, it is a foundational requirement for culturally safe, sustainable, and community-endorsed trail development.

“

Projects in the lease area will require negotiation with prescribed Elders – that’s non-negotiable

REMOTE INDIGENOUS LAND PROGRAM OFFICE – MEETING 7

2.3 Minggamingga Rangers

The Minggamingga Rangers are positioned to play a central, long-term role in the Palm Island Walking Trails Project. Across workshops, on-Country discussions, and stakeholder meetings, the Rangers consistently emerged as the most trusted operational, cultural, and environmental partner for the project. Their role spans cultural authority, environmental stewardship, visitor management, construction, and community leadership.

The Ranger capability however has to be highlighted as a potential project risk. With the Ranger co-ordinator stepping down recently, questions remain about the Ranger program governance and capability to deliver on their potential. For this reason, an investment in a capability program is fundamental to the success of the Ranger involvement in the project.

Rangers were consistently mentioned as integral to;

Cultural advice & storytelling

The Rangers hold deep cultural knowledge and maintain strong relationships with Elders, Traditional Owners, and family groups. While there remain some internal governance concerns, their role is vital to the project’s success and includes:

- Ensuring cultural protocols are followed during planning, construction, and visitor access
- Supporting the Cultural Authority Council with on-Country knowledge
- Helping identify sensitive cultural areas, including burial sites, camps, and restricted zones
- Contributing to cultural interpretation, including voice recordings, QR-code storytelling, and guided experiences
- Acting as cultural hosts for visitors, reinforcing the community’s preference for guided-only tourism.

Environmental management & land care

The Rangers are also the island’s frontline environmental stewards. Their responsibilities include:

- Monitoring and protecting bush tucker, wildlife, and sensitive ecosystems
- Managing erosion, rubbish, and environmental impacts along trails
- Supporting wildlife management (e.g., pigs, roaming animals)
- Advising on environmental risks & mitigation strategies
- Maintaining trail infrastructure to ensure long-term sustainability

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised that Ranger involvement is essential for environmental protection.

Trail construction & maintenance

The Rangers have existing experience in track construction (e.g., Pencil Bay) and are well positioned to support:

- On-ground trail construction in partnership with a trail contractor such as Tricky Tracks
- Mapping of proposed alignments for environmental and cultural assessments
- Ongoing maintenance of trails, signage, toilets, and safety infrastructure
- Establishing Ranger Hubs/Outposts at key trailheads (Wallaby Point, Palm Valley, Pencil Bay).

The consultation highlighted that Rangers require dedicated funding support to participate in the construction and delivery of the project, as they already have a full work program.

Guiding & visitor management

The community overwhelmingly supports guided tourism, and the Rangers are the natural leaders of this model to deliver guided walks and cultural experiences, visitor induction, safety briefings, and codes of conduct. The Rangers are ideally placed to monitor and manage visitor movement to avoid camps, sensitive areas, and cultural sites. Their work is forecast to extend into Sea Country care and therefore can also work with commercial tourism partners for marine tourism, transporting guests to locations such as Cannon Bay, reefing and island hopping. This aligns with the community's desire for highly managed, low-impact tourism.

Youth pathways, training & local employment

The Rangers are also a key mechanism for delivering the community's strongest priority, local jobs and youth opportunity.

It is a key recommendation that the construction contract for the walking trails specify the employment of local people including the Rangers to help with the trail construction. Their role would include providing training pathways for young people in guiding, land care, and cultural interpretation, supporting school-based tourism programs, and building long-term capability in trail management and eco-tourism.

As one participant noted "Young people don't know about culture and tourism" - the Rangers are uniquely placed to change this.

The Minggamingga Rangers are not simply a delivery partner, they are a core governance, cultural, environmental, and operational pillar of the Palm Island Walking Trails Project. Their leadership is essential to ensuring the project is culturally safe, environmentally responsible, community-led, and economically beneficial for future generations.



2.4 Palm Island Tourism Readiness

While building the physical infrastructure is important, delivering a strong Capability and Tourism Readiness Program is one of the most vital foundations for the Palm Island Walking Trails Project to deliver. The soft (people) skills are vital to ensure the success and sustainability of this project. The consultation with community members, elders, key stakeholders and the Minggamingga Rangers all want to see tourism grow – but only in a way that the community is ready to lead, benefit from, and control.

A structured capability program can embed 'tourism readiness' along with the restoration of 'community visitor events' that will provide real-world immediate opportunities for 'enterprise' development on Palm Island. A tourism readiness initiative becomes a deliberate investment in people, culture, and long-term economic participation. The program should align directly with the Tourism Masterplan 2023, which emphasises events, cultural experiences, and community-led enterprise as the pathway forward. Building capability within the Rangers and community is central to this.

They are the future custodians of the trail network, the cultural interpreters, and the frontline of visitor management. Strengthening their skills in guiding, compliance, visitor safety, cultural storytelling, and sea-country care positions them as leaders in a growing tourism economy. Programs such as a small grants scheme to support micro-businesses in their development phase, other capacity building programs may involve a mentoring initiative connecting Palm start-ups/small businesses to other Indigenous businesses/entrepreneurs.

Partnerships with SeaLink and Hinterland Aviation from 2026–2028 can act as catalysts, bringing day-trip and overnight event visitation that allows the community to practise, refine, and grow its tourism capability in real time.

2.5 Iconic Trails

An iconic multi-day walking experience, like the Larapinta Trail or Three Capes Walk, shares a recognisable set of characteristics that elevate it from a “walk” to a nationally significant, high-value, tourism experience.

Similarly, the Wukalina Walk is a multi-award-winning, 4-day/3-night, Palawa-owned and operated cultural walking experience in the northeast of Tasmania. It takes visitors across Wukalina / Mt William and Larapuna / Bay of Fires, guided entirely by Aboriginal guides who share stories, cultural knowledge, language, and deep connection to Country. The walking product key characteristics are:

- **Fully Indigenous-owned and operated** – one of only a handful of Aboriginal multi-day guided walks in Australia.
- **Cultural immersion** – guides share Palawa history, contemporary identity, language (palawa kani), and ongoing cultural practices.
- **Nature-based experience** – traverses bushland, coastline, eucalypt forest, and Mt William National Park, with wildlife encounters and remote landscapes.
- **Community connection** – the walk is positioned as a way for visitors to engage with the broader Palawa community, its stories, and cultural revival.
- **National recognition** – listed on TIME’s World’s Greatest Places (2024) and widely profiled as a leading First Nations tourism experience.

The experience is described as both physical and spiritual, offering visitors a chance to learn about the impacts of colonisation, cultural survival, and the significance of Country to Palawa people. Palm Island potentially has what it takes to be a world-class walking experience and receive reviews like below that talks strongly about sharing food, custom and culture.

Trip Advisor Review February 2023



Wukalina Walk – The experience of a lifetime

Just do it! - From the moment I arrived at the Elders Centre, my expectations were not only met, but exceeded on every level. Aunty Sharon's scones were fresh, warm, and delicious. The accommodation was extremely comfortable in both locations, and the guides and elders were exceptionally generous when sharing their knowledge of both country and culture. The krakani lumi standing camp has been thoughtfully designed and constructed, with protection of the environment being of the utmost importance. The carefully planned menu consisted of local bush foods with every dish. It was fresh and delicious, beautifully presented, and just kept coming! Despite walking nearly 40 kilometres, I put on over a kilo over the 4 days! The guides were so well organised, and always calm and friendly, and never seemed flustered - despite often multi-tasking. They even whipped up a delicious birthday cake after I divulged that it was my birthday! The smoking ceremony on the first night at krakani lumi, and the seafood feast on the second night were highlights for me. As were the visits to the living site on day two, and the bush tucker walks. Oh, and who could forget the view from the lighthouse!!! My Wukalina experience finished with a beautiful swim with guides Carleeta, Nathan, and Cody in the crystal clear water of larapuna, before setting out for Launceston after a final delicious lunch. Thank you to all guides and elders responsible for conceptualising and developing this walk, and then sharing your knowledge on this exceptionally beautiful and immersive experience!



Spectacular landscapes

The landscape is the hero. Iconic walks offer:

- Dramatic geological features (gorges, escarpments, sea cliffs, mountains, remote beaches)
- Distinctive ecosystems and biodiversity
- A sense of remoteness, scale, and immersion
- Multiple “wow moments” designed into each day’s route.

For Palm Island: the combination of rainforest, granite outcrops, reef views, and cultural and historical sites is a unique differentiator.



Palm Island Coastal Landscapes (Tricky Tracks photos 2026)

Strong cultural narrative

The best walks are story and welcome led, not just track-led. They feature:

- Deep welcome and cultural interpretation delivered by Traditional Owners and custodians
- Place-based storytelling tied to Country, language, history and identity
- Cultural protocols, welcome, and ceremony
- Authentic, community-controlled experiences

Palm Island’s Manbarra and Bwgcolman stories can form the backbone of a nationally significant cultural walking product.

High-quality track infrastructure

Iconic walks invest in:

- Purpose-built, durable track surfaces
- Boardwalks, steps, bridges, and lookouts
- Wayfinding that is subtle but reliable
- Rest points, shelters, and interpretation nodes

The first stage of the Palm Island Walking Trails project can be a benchmark for the islands authentic, low-impact, walking and reefing experience.

Guided experience model

Most iconic walks succeed because of:

- Expert guides who interpret landscape, culture, and safety
- Small group sizes (8–16)
- High guide-to-guest engagement
- Safety management in remote terrain

This aligns strongly with Palm Island’s aspiration for small group, Indigenous-led guided experiences and youth employment pathways.

Immersive itinerary design

The walk is choreographed like a journey:

- 3–6 day itineraries with varied terrain
- A narrative arc: arrival → immersion → climax → reflection
- Daily highlights: sunrise points, swimming holes, cultural sites
- Balanced challenge: achievable but rewarding.

Palm Island’s topography lends itself to a 2–4 day modular itinerary. A long-range vision for multi day island hopping walking experience will provide a significant journey experience.

Environmental stewardship

Iconic walks are conservation-led:

- Strict carrying capacity
- Low-impact construction
- Waste minimisation and off-grid systems
- Visitor education on caring for Country

This is essential for Palm Island's sensitive ecosystems and cultural landscapes. Palm Island has a rubbish and waste problem that needs to be part of its early capability planning in context with its experience.

Signature accommodation

Multi-day walks typically offer distinctive eco-lodges or huts, low-impact, off-grid systems, offering comfortable but simple amenities (hot showers, communal dining, drying rooms). Gathering points offer spaces designed for reflection and storytelling.

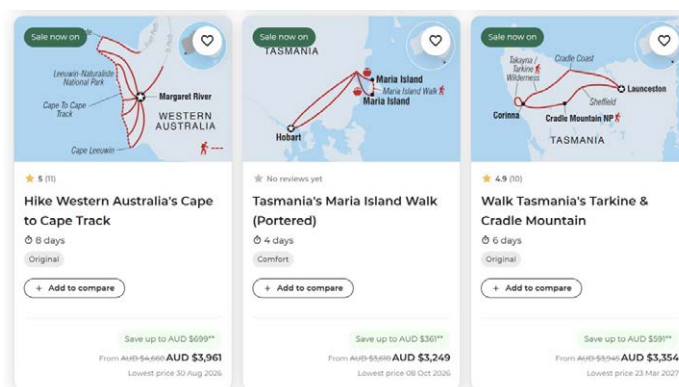
Palm Island could explore a small group, 16-20 mobile eco-tourism accommodation base, or hut-to-hut, glamping, or hybrid models aligned with traditional owner, cultural and environmental values. This effectively could be five twin share and five double tents with a central kitchen/catering and social area.

Premium market positioning

These walks attract;

- High-yield domestic travellers (45–70 years)
- International adventure and nature travellers
- Visitors seeking cultural immersion
- Walkers willing to spend \$2,000–\$5,000+ for guided experiences

Palm Island can position itself as Australia's leading First Nations, island hopping walking experience.



Part of Intrepid Travel's portfolio of walks for sale – June 2026



Eco Structures Australia Mobile Safari Camp options

2.6 Track Design

Trail construction on Palm Island must balance long-term durability, environmental sensitivity, and the creation of a high-quality walking experience. The island's landscape is exceptionally diverse, ranging from sheltered bays and sandy beaches to steep rainforest slopes, open sclerophyll forests, and expansive grasslands. Across all these environments, one feature dominates: rock. From massive granite boulders to scattered stone fields, Palm Island's geology shapes both the challenges and opportunities for sustainable trail design.

The trail alignments proposed by the Tricky Tracks (2026) report, traverse this full spectrum of terrain, offering walkers varied, dynamic experiences that include ridgelines, coastal flats, rainforest edges, and access to beaches and reef areas previously unreachable on foot. This diversity is central to delivering an iconic walking experience, but it also requires a construction approach that is robust, safe, and resilient in a tropical climate.

The Tricky Track (2026) report, and subsequent discussions with the consultants sets out proposed trail construction methods for the Palm Island walking trails identifying most trails will fall within the level 3 of the Australian Walking Trail Graded System with some harder sections that may edge into Grade 4. See Appendix 6.3 for more information. The walks would be moderate to difficulty tracks, suitable for most walkers, giving the trail a strong market opportunity, for visitors with varying levels of reasonable fitness.

Palm Island receives very high rainfall, meaning trails must be engineered to withstand intense wet-season conditions. Level 3 design principles – such as contoured alignments, stone armouring, rock-cut steps, switchbacks, and drainage control – are essential to prevent erosion, protect vegetation, and minimise long-term maintenance. Fortunately, the island's abundant natural rock provides ideal material for durable, aesthetic stonework, reducing the need for imported construction materials.

Equally important is the focus on experience-led design. The alignments have been chosen not only for sustainability but to maximise the island's natural highlights: panoramic viewpoints, dramatic rock formations, shaded rest points, and access to swimming and snorkelling nodes. This ensures that each track delivers the sense of reward, immersion, and discovery expected of a Level 3 walk.

Trails will need to be clearly signposted and well-defined. The track design facilitates walkers walking together in open woodland areas, and periods following each other on single-track routes at other times. This is similar to construction methods used in the neighbouring trails on Thorsborne (Level 5 walk) and Ngara Trail (Level 3 - 4 walk).

“The width of track is variable but will fall in an average range anywhere between 500mm and 900mm with new track builds not exceed 1200mm in line with Australian Walking Standard 3.” Tricky Tracks 2026.

This trail construction method aims to minimise ground disturbance, reduce erosion risk in very high rainfall environments and fits the natural Palm Island terrain (steep side-slopes, rocky outcrops, boulders).

This will also keep construction costs manageable and aligns with low-impact, sustainable walking experience desired by rangers and elders. This approach will have positive implication for cultural process approvals, with narrower tracks reducing environmental triggers, easing ILUA compliance (less ground disturbance) and lower cultural heritage risk and where this is the case, the construction approach will allow for diversions.

See Appendices 6.1 for a case study on the Thorsborne Trail, 6.2 for the Australian Walking Trail Graded System and 6.3 for the Tricky Tracks proposed design method characteristics for the Palm Island Walking Trail.

Thorsborne Trail, Hinchinbrook Island



2.7 The Potential Tourism Walking Market

During the project consultation our consultation team were struck by the positivity around the walking trail project from all sections of the community, and particularly the stories from a few of the elders who recalled to us their stories of showing visitors around the banana plantations in Palm Valley in the 1960's. Upon further investigation, Palm Island has a documented history of tourism dating back to 1912. This early tourism history - and those projects that have been undertaken along the Palm Island foreshore areas over time - have resonance in the community and provide a foundation for this project and culturally respectful storytelling. Visitor interest in Palm Island is not new – the market-interest in the Palm Island story (Manbarra, Bwgcolman and settlement story) is quite diverse and this is evidenced in the period 2012- 2020 when SeaLink offered event-based tours to Palm Island which often received overwhelming interest and support.

Australia's walking and adventure tourism market is entering a period of sustained growth, driven by rising demand for immersive, nature-based and culturally rich experiences. Industry projections indicate the Australian adventure tourism market continues to grow, reflecting strong consumer appetite for active, meaningful travel. Walking sits at the intersection of several high-value segments: nature-based tourism, soft adventure, wellness travel, and premium small-group guided experiences. Walking and hiking are consistently among the top activities undertaken by both domestic and international visitors in Tourism Research Australia's activity datasets, and these categories have shown sustained growth post-COVID as travellers seek nature, wellness, and outdoor experiences.

Similarly, Queensland is one of Australia's strongest nature-based tourism markets, and TEQ's data shows that walking and hiking are major drivers of visitation, particularly in regions with iconic trails (e.g., Thorsborne Trail, Ngaro Trail, Scenic Rim).

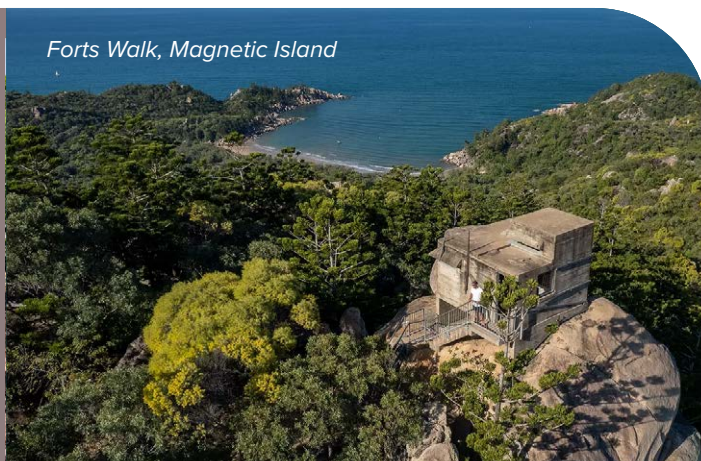
Nationally, Tasmania has championed this sector, but South Australia is emerging with the Northern Territory. The sector does not specifically attract large numbers but is known to attract strong yield per visitor.

Guided multi-day walks have become one of Australia's most successful high-yield tourism products. Benchmark operators such as the Australian Walking Company, World Expeditions and Intrepid typically attract affluent domestic travellers aged 45–70 years, international "icon chasers," and younger values-driven experience seekers. These travellers consistently seek curated journeys, strong interpretation, comfort and safety, and evidence of sustainability and community benefit. Market pricing reflects this: premium guided walks commonly achieve A\$700–A\$1,500 per person per day, while adventure-style products sit around A\$300–A\$600 per person per day. This yield profile makes walking one of the most economically efficient, low-impact tourism models available.

Queensland's tourism strategy, *Destination 2045*, identifies ecotourism, nature-based experiences, cultural tourism, and world-class attractions as priority investment areas. With tourism contributing 1 in 11 jobs in Queensland, and with the state preparing for the global visibility of the 2032 Games, Queensland is actively seeking iconic, sustainable, regionally led visitor experiences that showcase environment, culture and lifestyle. Walking aligns directly with these priorities—particularly when it integrates First Nations leadership, conservation outcomes, and high-quality infrastructure.

Australia's walking and adventure tourism market is entering a period of sustained growth, driven by rising demand for immersive, nature-based and culturally rich experiences.

Forts Walk, Magnetic Island



2.8 Iconic Tourism Walk Characteristics

The proposed Palm Island Walk potentially has some very unique characteristics.

- A curated culturally immersive experience on a remote Great Barrier Reef island, a self-governed indigenous community, guided by local indigenous Rangers.
- A diverse landscape walk of tropical rainforest, Archipelago views, ridgetop walking, wilderness beach walking, remote coral beach atolls, and World War II (WWII) Military ruins.
- The potential for an integrated island experience incorporating other archipelago islands.

Iconic walks share common attributes: spectacular landscapes, strong cultural narrative, high-quality track infrastructure, signature accommodation, expert guiding, and a choreographed multi-day journey.

Over time, and with capacity building toward its vision Palm Island can deliver all of these, with a differentiator no other Australian walk offers: a First Nations–led, tropical island-hopping walking journey across an ancient archipelago.

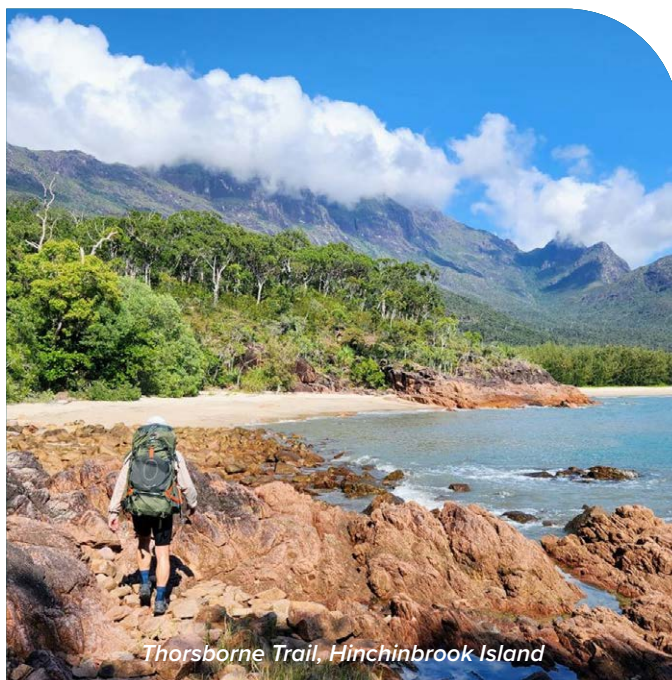
Palm Island's combination of rainforest ridges, granite outcrops, reefing experiences, cultural and historical sites, and sea-Country crossings positions it as a globally distinctive product. The proposed model – guided by Manbarra and Bwgcolman cultural authority, supported by ranger capability, and delivered through small-group, low-impact operations – aligns precisely with the expectations of premium walking operators and the high-yield market segments they serve.

Capacity building for Palm Island is a fundamental priority and can be strengthened with experience working with third parties and in hosting key community events.

Over time, the Palm Island vision, to provide an iconic walk concept, including the Palm Island Circumference Walk and inter-island journeys to Fantome, Curacoa and Orpheus, directly supports strongly the Destination 2045 priorities:

- **Ecotourism:** low-impact, conservation-led walking and sea-Country experiences
- **Experiences:** world-class, story-rich, culturally guided journeys
- **Events & brand:** a hero product capable of elevating Queensland's global profile
- **Industry:** community-owned enterprises, ranger employment, and youth pathways

In this context, the Palm Island Walking Project is taking steps to something very significant. It could be, not just another walk – with sustained commitment and support, it can be a unique flagship Queensland cultural and nature-based tourism asset, capable of attracting premium domestic and international visitors while delivering deep community benefit.



“

Low impact, high value customer is the one you're after, particularly in the first stage. The premium guided walking space could make sense here. You could develop it in time and have a vision to have this potentially as one of the great walks of Australia.

MEETING 15

If you just build a walk trail, you've got another walk trail. Whereas if you focus in on the experiences, that's key for success. Skip what all the other walks are already doing and find that niche – go for that high-value customer.

MEETING 15

2.9 A Commercial Tourism Partner

The consultations make one thing clear: Palm Island has the cultural depth, the landscapes, and the community aspiration, but it will need assistance to develop market reach, product distribution, operational systems and commercial infrastructure to activate a sustainable visitor economy.

A commercial tourism partner fills that gap without replacing community ownership and leadership. The operators most aligned with Palm Island's opportunity are:

- **Intrepid Travel** are leaders in the responsible tourism sector, product with cultural experiences, products likely to engage with local community projects, strong local supply chains, global markets and interests in socially developing communities
- **The Australian Walking Company** are willing to invest with a strong product vision, with a strong governance model and Traditional Owner collaboration, premium multi-day, long-term investment with incredible State Tourism Organisation and Tourism Australia alignment and marketing connections
- **World Expeditions** are experts in guided multi-day, mid-to-premium market but have two other regional products – could make a 'three capes' approach but have they market capability to attract enough customers for their Queensland products.

It is recommended that the Palm Island Walking Trails initiate an Expression of Interest (EOI) process in the third quarter of 2026 to identify a suitably qualified commercial tourism partner to support the staged activation of the Palm Island Walking Trails Project. Operators have indicated that they would like to be involved in new projects early. The EOI could seek operators with demonstrated capability in guided cultural experiences, remote trail operations, market distribution, and community-aligned tourism development. The process will emphasise alignment with Palm Island's cultural values, the ILUA framework, and the community's aspiration for a guided, culturally-led visitor experience.

The EOI could invite proposals outlining how operators can contribute to product development, visitor management, marketing reach, and capacity building for the Minggamingga Rangers and emerging community enterprises. Respondents will be required to demonstrate experience working in Indigenous contexts, commitment to cultural authority, and willingness to operate under a co-governance model that ensures community benefit and protects family camp areas.

Shortlisted proponents will be assessed against criteria including cultural alignment, operational capability, safety systems, investment potential, and partnership approach.



The EOI will position Palm Island to secure a partner capable of delivering high-quality, commercially viable experiences while supporting long-term community capability and economic participation.



Design & Implementation Considerations for the Priority Trails

Priority 1: Wallaby Point Circuit

Priority 2: Palm Island Cultural Welcome Precinct

Priority 3: Township-to-Airport Coastal Walk

Priority 4: Township to Palm Valley Rainforest Walk and
Community Waterhole



RECOMMENDATION

01

**PRIORITY
HIGH**

The Wallaby Point Circuit is identified as the first priority for the Palm Island Walking Trails project.

While the trail needs cultural heritage clearance, further route definition and consultation with ‘family camp holders’, the walk potentially delivers on every element required of an iconic, high-value, culturally grounded walking experience. It combines dramatic landscapes, panoramic ridgelines, cultural history, WWII heritage, swimming, reefing and snorkelling nodes, and a loop structure that is accessible, achievable, and memorable for a wide range of walkers.

3.1 Priority One: Wallaby Point Circuit

The Wallaby Point walk had strong community support, including 85% in the survey results and strong support through the community workshops.

Wallaby Point is the major priority trail for investment because:

- The investment can be linked in many ways with the broader vision for trails on Palm Island
- It offers a variety of experiential walking, reefing and cultural experiences that can be linked with a multi-day experience
- It has scope to establish a unique, distinctive, remote eco-accommodation experience
- It has the most potential to attract a long-term tourism partner
- It is high-impact and high-reward
- It is feasible to build early and is estimated to be completed in a six-month build term with 8 trail construction workers
- It has strong community support
- It offers immediate tourism value
- It is culturally rich and environmentally suitable

Tricky Tracks (2026) report concludes:

“A good candidate for one of the first tracks to be constructed due to its dynamic experience... and suitability for a variety of fitness levels.”

It offers a dynamic, varied, and immersive walking experience

The Wallaby Point Circuit is a 4.7 km loop that transitions through multiple landscapes:

- Rocky hillside with boulders and slabs
- Open country with sweeping views
- A ridgeline with dual-aspect panoramas
- A dramatic descent through dense vegetation
- A long beach walk with deep-water swimming

This diversity is exactly what defines an iconic walk: constant change, constant reward, and constant interest. The Tricky Tracks report describes it as:

“A fantastic walking experience... with numerous viewpoints looking out on both sides of the peninsula.”

Signature lookouts and panoramic vistas

The circuit includes multiple natural lookouts:

- Large stone formation lookout – a natural rest point with views across the peninsula
- Ridgeline summit lookout – offering views to both the eastern and western coasts
- Western-facing viewpoints on descent toward Curacao Island

These viewpoints create the “wow moments” that iconic walks are known for and can be linked long term with a Palm Island Circumference Walk and the proposed island-hopping experience with Curacao Island just 500 metres offshore. The opportunity would also be to find an iconic location for an eco-tourism off grid camp for walkers and visitors to the island.

Strong cultural and historical storytelling potential

The walk connects to:

- Cannon Bay and Big Cannon Bay – culturally significant areas
- Catalina flying boat wreck – a WWII heritage site linked to the U.S. Naval Air Station
- Traditional walking routes used by families and Rangers

High community support and local use

Consultation shows Wallaby Point is already one of the most used and most loved walking areas by locals. It is safe when managed, connected to camps and family spaces, and highly valued for fishing, swimming, and recreation. This ensures with consultation, that strong local ownership and pride, critical for an iconic walk.

Accessible yet adventurous (suitable for various fitness levels)

The circuit offers gentle contouring climbs, short, achievable ascents, rest points at natural lookouts and a long, flat beach section. It is challenging enough to feel adventurous, but not so difficult that it excludes families, youth, or older walkers. This aligns with the “iconic but accessible” model used in Queensland’s top walks.

Exceptional water access for swimming and snorkelling

The circuit provides:

- Deep-water swimming at Wallaby Point
- Reefing and snorkelling opportunities and accessibility access at Cannon Bay
- Aquatic and terrestrial wildlife opportunities
- Sandy, safe beach entry points

This is rare and highly valued in walking tourism markets – creating a “signature experience” unique to Palm Island.



High environmental suitability for construction

The terrain is ideal for sustainable track building. Open slopes suitable for contouring, abundant rock for natural stone steps, stable ridgelines and minimal need for heavy infrastructure. The Tricky Tracks report notes: “The open terrain is well suited to contoured tracks.” This reduces cost, risk, and environmental impact.

Strong potential for guided tourism and ranger leadership

The walk is perfectly suited to:

- Ranger-led guided walks, with accommodated experiences, one to three night guided cultural experiences opening opportunities for local families and other service providers to develop product for visitors
- Small-group tourism
- Potential day-trip packages with Hinterland and SeaLink
- Youth training and employment pathways

This aligns with community preference for guided-only tourism and supports local jobs.



Wallaby Point WWII history site needing restoration program (2026)





RECOMMENDATION

02

PRIORITY GATEWAY

A community-led cultural gateway that anchors the entire Walking Trails Project is important.

Priority Two is to extend Council's Cultural Walk Plan to create a Cultural Welcome Precinct – a place where Bwgcolman and Manbarra culture is visible, celebrated, and shared with both community and visitors. This precinct becomes the heart of the walking trails network, the starting point for guided experiences, and a living cultural space for performance, art, storytelling, and community pride.

3.2 Priority Two: Palm Island Cultural Welcome Precinct

The Council's existing Knowledge Centre, Palm Island artist network, cultural dance groups and the Palm Island Rangers all play a central role.

The recommended site is located in close proximity to the jetty where the ferry arrives, making it the ideal location for a welcome experience upon arrival at Palm Island. The Palm Island Rangers precinct is well positioned and can be developed further with improved catering, amenities, amphitheatre area and visitor gathering points. There is also significant opportunity for these facilities to be integrated into vacant areas of the Palm Island Business and Retail Building, with an outdoor amphitheatre and performance space closely aligned.

Why this is an important priority

This precinct is the capstone investment that ties the entire project together. It:

- Creates a cultural anchor for all trails
- Supports the commercial tourism offer
- Provides a high-quality visitor welcome
- Supports local jobs, pop up enterprise and market opportunities for key events
- Strengthens community identity and pride
- Ensures tourism remains guided, respectful, and community-controlled

It is the place where Palm Island tells its own story.

A cultural welcome space rooted in community expectations

Across workshops, surveys, and on-Country discussions, community members repeatedly emphasised:

- "Palm Island should tell its own story."
- "Visitors must be welcomed and guided."
- "Arts, culture, dance, and storytelling are central to who we are."
- "We need a place for our artists, dancers, and young people."

The Foreshore Cultural Welcome Precinct directly answers these priorities by creating a dedicated cultural home that belongs to the community first.



Palm Island Business & Retail precinct has some available space that would suit for a cultural gallery / visitor information area.

Key facilities and their purpose

Cultural Amphitheatre

- A natural, open-air performance space for:
- Welcome to Country
- Dance and song
- Cultural demonstrations
- School and youth performances
- Community celebrations

This aligns with strong community interest in guided cultural tourism, and provides a dignified, visible platform for Manbarra and Bwgcolman cultural expression.

The Palm Island Cultural Walk plan includes outdoor cultural spaces and traditional owner and Bwgcolman story areas, ideally a 'welcome and performance area' could be integrated into an 'arrival precinct' plan.

History & Culture Gallery Space

Council's Knowledge Centre provides a critical historical and cultural role and is integral to a visitor precinct:

- Mission history
- Prison history (Pencil Bay)
- WWII Catalina stories
- Family stories and oral histories
- Elders' knowledge and language
- Manbarra History
- Digital storytelling and QR-linked trail interpretation

This responds directly to consultation themes around preserving Elders' knowledge and ensuring the island's history is told by Palm Island people.

Working Artists & Makers Space

Our consultation clearly indicated an arts centre is vital both for working artists but also to capture the commercial opportunity around visitors to Palm Island. A flexible space for Palm Island's painters, weavers, spear makers, carvers, textile artists, and cultural educators. This supports the strong desire expressed by artists for a central arts hub, and aligns with the community's vision for an arts-led visitor experience.

Public Amenities & Visitor Orientation

Essential infrastructure to support both locals and visitors include toilets, shade structures, seating, water points, visitor induction area, and a ranger welcome point. This becomes the starting point for guided walks, including Wallaby Point, Palm Valley, and the Town-to-Airport Walk.

Manbarra & Bwgcolman Story Spaces

Dedicated areas for storytelling, language, cultural interpretation, elders' voice recordings, seasonal cultural knowledge. This honours the consultation message that both Manbarra and Bwgcolman stories must be visible and respected.



The Palm Island Cultural Walk plan includes outdoor cultural spaces and traditional owner and Bwgcolman story areas, ideally a 'welcome and performance area' could be integrated into an 'arrival precinct' plan.

How this precinct connects to the walking trails project

A. It becomes the "front door" to the entire trail network

Visitors begin their journey here, receive cultural orientation, and join guided walks.

B. It anchors the community-led tourism model

The precinct supports:

- Ranger-led tours
- Cultural performances
- Arts-based visitor experiences
- Youth training and employment pathways

C. It strengthens community pride and identity

The precinct is a place for:

- Local events
- School programs
- Cultural gatherings
- Intergenerational knowledge sharing

D. It supports economic development

The space enables:

- Local art sales
- Cultural workshops
- Micro-enterprise opportunities
- Partnerships with SeaLink and tourism operatorstourism and supports local jobs.



RECOMMENDATION

03

PRIORITY
EASY

The township to airport loop is a high-value community connector and a signature day-trip experience.

The Township-to-Airport Coastal Walk is the most strategically important community-focused trail in the Palm Island network. It directly responds to what residents repeatedly raised during consultation: the need for a safe, scenic, off-road walking route between town and the airport, and a welcoming first impression for visitors arriving on day trips.

3.3 Priority Three: Township-to-Airport Coastal Walk

This walk delivers strong benefits for both local mobility and visitor experience, making it the natural second priority trail after Wallaby Point.

This walk is recommended because it:

- Delivers immediate community benefit
- Improves safety and mobility providing a community connector to the airport
- Enhances the visitor arrival experience with an immediate walk available along the coast
- Connect with the Casement Bay Lookout already in place
- Links the township to the trail network
- Supports both local use and day-trip tourism

It is the most important community-first trail in the project.

A safe, attractive alternative to walking on the road

The current route from town to the airport requires residents to walk along the road verge – something the community consistently identified as unsafe. The proposed alignment provides:

- A dedicated walking route separated from traffic
- A coastal experience rather than a roadside one
- A safer option for school students, workers, and families
- A reliable all-tide connection (with inland bypass where needed)

This directly supports the community's desire for better everyday walking infrastructure, providing health and wellbeing outcomes for the community, not just tourism assets.

A scenic, coastal walk that enhances daily life

The walk follows the coastline from Regina Bay, offering ocean views, a low-elevation lookout, a shaded forest section, access to beaches at low tide and a natural, peaceful walking experience.

For locals, workers on island and visitors this is likely to become a daily exercise route, a place to walk with family, and a healthier alternative to road walking. For visitors, it becomes a gentle, beautiful introduction to Palm Island.



A signature “arrival experience” for day-trip tourists

Day-trip visitors arriving by ferry or plane who want a short, achievable, scenic walk that can be completed in 1–2 hours. This track delivers exactly that.

It offers:

- A coastal walk accessible to all fitness levels
- A short climb to a lookout with sweeping views
- A connection to Old School Road and Pencil Bay
- A natural introduction to Palm Island’s landscapes and culture

This walk becomes the ideal first activity for visitors before guided cultural experiences or a Wallaby Point tour.

Strong cultural interpretation opportunities

The route passes coastal Country with deep cultural significance, some family homes, a giant paperbark tree and a paperbark cultural welcome site that could become a cultural welcome point. The walk would suit storytelling nodes, QR-code interpretation, and ranger-led introductions. This aligns with community sentiment that Palm Island should tell its own story through guided experiences.

Practical, everyday benefits for residents

This walk directly supports community priorities identified in the survey and workshops:

- Health and wellbeing (104 survey responses)
- Improved mobility and safe walking routes
- Local pride and beautification of the coastline
- Better access to beaches and recreation areas

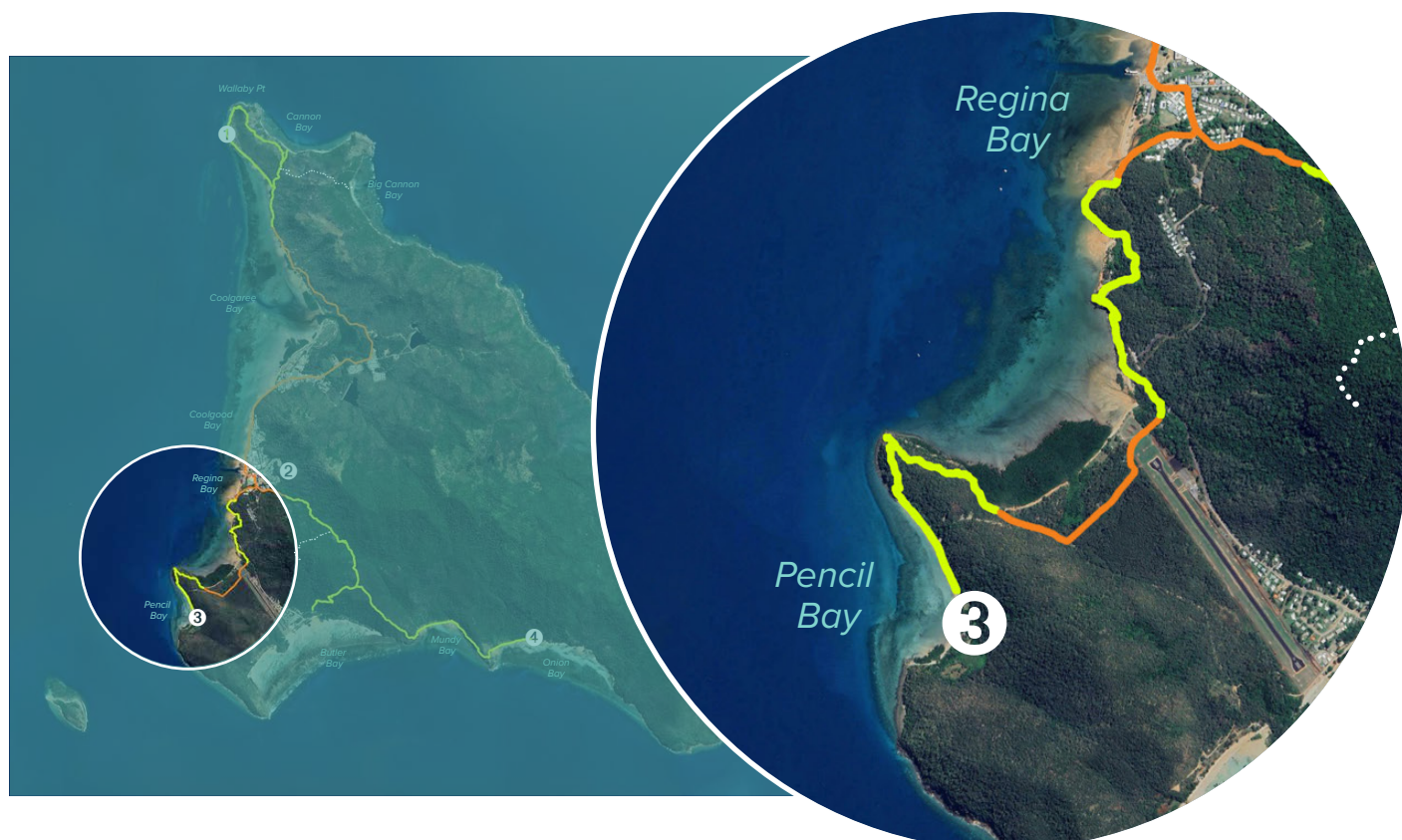
It becomes a daily-use community asset, not just a tourism product.

A logical connector to the wider trail network

The walk links:

- Town → Regina Bay → Airport → Old School Road → Pencil Bay

This creates a continuous coastal walking spine, enabling a potential future expansion to Butler Bay and Mundy Bay. It is the backbone of the southern trail network.





RECOMMENDATION

04

PRIORITY
FUTURE

Priority Four proposes to complete a signposted Palm Valley Walk trail from the edge of town, along the existing track providing access to seasonal waterholes and beautiful rainforest of Palm Valley.

This trail commencement provides a local community-benefit that builds momentum toward a future iconic trail and is proposed to include some amenities and facilities for locals.

3.4 Priority Four: Township to Palm Valley Rainforest Walk and Community Waterhole

The Palm Valley Walk – Stage One focuses on completing only the short section from town to the Community Waterhole, establishing a safe, accessible, culturally significant walking route that delivers immediate community benefit while laying the foundation for the full Palm Valley Walk at a later stage. It will give time for future consultation with traditional owners about the potential of this walk reaching Munday Bay and potentially into North-East Bay.

This staged approach responds directly to community sentiment, funding realities, and the need to demonstrate early progress while talking more with traditional owners about possibilities in buffer zones and leased areas.

This section is prioritised because it:

- Delivers immediate community benefit
- Requires lower construction complexity than the full Palm Valley Walk
- Avoids major ILUA triggers at this early stage
- Builds the foundation for a future iconic ridge-to-coast experience
- Strengthens community ownership before expanding into more sensitive areas

A high-value community asset from day one

The Community Waterhole is already a well-known and well-used local gathering place. Completing this first section provides:

- A safe, formalised walking route for residents
- A daily exercise path for families, Elders, and young people
- A cool, shaded destination ideal for short walks
- A community-owned space that strengthens connection to Country

This aligns strongly with community priorities identified in the survey:

- Health and wellbeing
- Safe walking routes
- Local pride
- Youth engagement

The Waterhole section becomes a quick, meaningful win for the community.



Palm Valley Rainforest Walk to the Community Waterhole

A natural gateway to the full Palm Valley Walk

Completing this first section establishes the trailhead, interpretation style, and construction standards for the full Palm Valley Walk, which will be delivered at a later stage when additional funding becomes available.

This staged approach allows Council to:

- Build momentum
- Demonstrate progress
- Strengthen community trust
- Complete cultural and environmental approvals for the full route
- Secure future funding with a proven, visible success

The Waterhole section becomes the anchor point for the future iconic walk.

Strong cultural and environmental value

Palm Valley is rich in cultural stories, traditional walking routes, and natural features. The elders spoke fondly about banana plantations, lookouts, the old timber cutters and areas such as Munday Bay and Onion Bay. We are aware of some potential 'burial sites' in the coastal environments that will require cultural assessment. The Waterhole section allows:

- Cultural interpretation led by Elders and Rangers
- Youth learning opportunities, particularly for use by the local schools as an outdoor education space
- Ranger-guided short walks for visitors
- A respectful, low-impact introduction to Country

This supports the community's preference for guided, culturally grounded tourism.

A perfect short walk for day-trip visitors

Day-trip visitors coming to Palm Island for events, and on board ferries would be able to utilize this walk:

- A short, achievable walk
- A shaded, scenic destination
- A cultural introduction to the island
- A guided experience led by locals

The Waterhole walk delivers all of these, making it an ideal entry-level visitor experience that complements the Priority One Wallaby Point Circuit and the Priority Two Township–Airport Walk.

It can be packaged with:

- Ranger welcomes
- Cultural storytelling
- School or youth performances
- Short guided nature walks

This creates a low-impact, high-value tourism product that benefits the community first.



Palm Valley Rainforest Walk to the Community Waterhole

“

Palm Valley Walk has premium potential – especially if linked to North East Bay

WALKING CONTRACTOR – MEETING 9

A photograph of two women standing in front of a large satellite map of a coastal region. The woman on the left is wearing a dark cap with sunglasses and a dark jacket with a name tag that reads 'K. STEPHEN SMON'. The woman on the right is wearing a dark polo shirt with a logo that reads 'LIZARD RESEARCH STATION'. A large yellow number '4' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

4.

Project Next Steps, Product, Timeline & Budget Allocation

“We need coordinated planning – transport, infrastructure, and visitor experience must align.”

Establishing a strong commercial tourism product is essential to the long-term success and sustainability of the Palm Island Walking Trails Project.

4.1 Palm Island Walking Trails – Tourism Product

Ultimately a well-designed product suite will be developed with a commercial tourism partner. Commercial operators provide the professional capability, market reach, and distribution channels needed to attract consistent visitation and convert interest into real economic outcomes for the community.

The below provides a suggestion of the type of product that the walking trails project on Palm Island can develop and how they could be positioned in the North Queensland tourism industry. Importantly, commercial partnerships create pathways for local employment, enterprise development, and skills transfer, embedding community benefit into every tour. This foundation positions Palm Island as a credible, competitive, and culturally led destination within the North Queensland tourism market.

Experience	Duration	Core Themes	Visitor Type
2-Day Eco-Cultural Walk	2D/1N	Cultural welcome, walking, reef ecology	Short-break travellers, walkers, added to East Coast itineraries
3-Day Cultural Reefing Journey	3D/2N	Deep cultural immersion, snorkelling, Land and Sea Country care	Adventure walking markets, linked to East Coast experiences, educational tourism group markets, international university programs, cultural travellers
Day Tour Art & Nature	1 Day	Palm Island Art, rainforest, coastal walking	Event visitors, families, day-trippers



Two-Day / One-Night Palm Island Eco-Cultural Walk

A premium short-stay walking experience combining cultural welcome, coastal walking, and reef discovery.

Overview – Guests arrive via SeaLink ferry or Hinterland Aviation and begin with a Minggamingga Ranger Welcome to Country, followed by a guided Town Art Walk showcasing Bwgcolman and Manbarra stories, murals, and local artists. A boat transfer carries guests to Wallaby Point for a 6 km coastal circuit walk, rich in cultural interpretation and tropical ecology. The day concludes at the Cannon Bay eco-tourism base, where guests enjoy an evening on Country with storytelling, stargazing, and local seafood BBQ. Day two features a reefing experience in the sheltered bays around Cannon Bay and Wallaby Point – a guided introduction to reef ecology, tropical fish habitats, and traditional relationships with Sea Country.

Ideal For Short-break travellers, walking enthusiasts, cultural tourism markets, and visitors seeking a curated, First Nations-led experience.

Key Features

- Minggamingga Ranger Welcome
- Town Art Walk
- Wallaby Point 6 km Circuit
- Cannon Bay Eco-Tourism Base
- Reefing Experience

Three-Day / Two-Night Palm Island Cultural Reefing & Walking Journey

A deeper immersion into Palm Island's walking landscapes, Sea Country, and cultural knowledge.

Overview – Building on the two-day itinerary, this extended experience adds a full-day cultural reefing journey led by Indigenous guides. Visitors explore traditional reef harvesting techniques, turtle nesting and breeding grounds, and the cultural significance of Sea Country. This includes a guided snorkelling experience in clear, shallow waters, with interpretation of coral systems, reef species, and cultural protocols.

The additional night at Cannon Bay allows for a slower pace, deeper cultural exchange, and optional sunrise or sunset walks.

Ideal For Adventure travellers, cultural immersion markets, educational groups, and visitors seeking a multi-day, First Nations-led walking and snorkelling experience.

Key Features

- All inclusions of the 2-day experience
- Indigenous-led Reefing & Hunting Techniques
- Turtle Breeding Grounds Interpretation
- Guided Snorkelling on Sea Country

Palm Island Day Tours – Art, Rainforest & Coastal Walks

A flexible, event-ready day experience ideal for visitors attending festivals, sports events, and community gatherings.

Overview – This guided day tour showcases Palm Island's accessible walking network. Guests begin with a Town Art Walk, followed by the Palm Valley Rainforest Walk to the community swimming hole – a lush, shaded trail highlighting rainforest species and freshwater ecology.

The experience continues with a guided walk to Pencil Bay, including a Stringybark Lagoon welcome delivered by Minggamingga Rangers. The tour is designed to be available on all event days and suitable for a wide range of visitors.

Ideal For Event attendees, day-trippers, families, school groups, and visitors seeking a culturally rich, low-impact walking experience.

Key Features

- Town Art Walk
- Palm Valley Rainforest Walk
- Community Swimming Hole
- Pencil Bay Guided Walk
- Stringybark Lagoon Welcome

Estimated Value of the Product

20 tours per annum

12 guests per tour

Ferry and Flight Connections

Retail price:

\$900 – \$1,200 per person

Annual Volume:

Target 200 – 240 guests

20 tours per annum

12 guests per tour

Ferry & Flight Connections

Retail price:

\$1200 – \$1,800 per person

Annual Volume:

Target 200 – 240 guests

5 tours per annum

40 guests per tour

Ferry & Flight Connections

Retail price:

\$250 per person

Annual Volume:

Target 200 guests

4.2 Next Steps Timeline

The below next-steps timeline is provided as a guide for Council and helps position the Palm Island Walking Trails Project for coordinated delivery, ensuring cultural authority, operational readiness, and investment confidence.

The timeline frames the key projects and key considerations in a suggested and structured pathway from planning to activation.

PHASE ONE – Governance, Design, Approvals, Capability (Jul–Dec 2026)

Task	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Council Adopt Consultation Outcomes Strategy	■	■				
Ngaro Trail / Thorsborne Trail Stakeholder Event		●				
Establish Governance arrangements	■	■				
Approve Project Delivery Model	■	■				
Establish Committees + Ongoing Consultation	■	■				
Palm Island Trails Project Launch		●				
Trail D&C Tender Released	■	■				
Environmental Consultant Tender Release	■	■				
Cultural Heritage Assessment Negotiation	■	■				
Appoint Trail Construction Contractor		■	■			
Appoint Environmental Consultant		■	■			
Tourism Partner EOI Released		■	■			
Finalise Arrival Precinct Facilities Plan		■	■	■		
Launch Tourism Readiness Program – Stage 1		■	■	■	■	
Tender Local Contract – Arrival Precinct		■	■	■	■	
Ranger & Trails Labour Recruitment		■	■	■	■	
Trail Cultural Heritage Assessment		■	■	■	■	
Trail Environmental Assessment		■	■	■	■	
Finalise Trail Design & Infrastructure Plan		■	■	■	■	
Tender – Signage, Huts, Amenities		■	■	■	■	
Tourism Partner Appointed		■	■	■	■	
Spring Fair Community Event		■	■	■	■	
Northern Australia Festival Event		■	■	■	■	
Review Eco-Tourism Accommodation Options		■	■	■	■	
Review Final Trail Design & Approvals		■	■	■	■	
Finalise Eco Accommodation Tender & Appoint					■	■
Council Approve Arrival Precinct Plan					■	■
Council Approve Final Trails Design					■	■

PHASE TWO – Construction & Activation (Apr–Nov 2027)

Task	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
Phase Two Trail & Arrival Precinct Construction								
Environmental & Cultural Heritage Clearance								
Review Eco-Accommodation Plans								
WW2 History Restoration Planning								
Tourism Readiness Program – Stage 2								
Trailhead Signage Installation								
Waymarker Signage Installation								
Eco Toilet Amenities – Install								
Rest Site Amenities – Install								
Ranger Hut – Install								
Gathering Points – Install								

PHASE THREE – Product Launch (Apr 2028)

Task	Apr
Establish Eco Accommodation Base & Launch	



4.3 Proposed Budget Framework

A clear and well-structured budget framework is essential for guiding the Palm Island Walking Trails Project from concept into delivery.

The following allocation model is a suggested framework only, and provides a transparent view of how the proposed \$4.5 million investment could be distributed across trail construction, cultural infrastructure, regulatory pathways, and community capability.

The budget reflects the project's core principles:

- cultural authority
- environmental stewardship
- operational readiness
- long-term tourism viability.

By apportioning funds across the three priority trail zones – Wallaby Point, Pencil Bay and Palm Valley – alongside the eco-accommodation base, arrival precinct, and approvals processes, the framework ensures that investment is both targeted and balanced. Importantly, the inclusion of a Ranger & Community Capability Program strengthens local employment and enterprise pathways and embeds cultural leadership into the project's operational future.

A dedicated contingency allocation also provides resilience against remote-area construction risks, supply chain pressures, and weather-related delays. This introduction sets the foundation for a budget that is realistic and aligned with the intentions of the DETSi funding to deliver the 'walking trails' key tourism experience with a longer term vision for Palm Island as a leading First Nations walking and eco-cultural tourism destination.

“

A staged approach is the only feasible way to deliver this

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT – MEETING 12

Budget allocation framework

1. Wallaby Point Priority Zone – \$1.2M

High-complexity coastal construction, rock work, drainage, safety infrastructure, signage and cultural interpretation nodes.

2. Pencil Bay Priority Zone – \$600k

Moderate-complexity upgrades, lagoon welcome area, beach access, signage, and safety improvements.

3. Palm Valley Priority Zone – \$300k

Rainforest walk upgrades, signage, community swimming hole access, cultural interpretation nodes.

4. Eco-Accommodation Base (Cannon Bay) – \$850k

Accommodation pods, amenities, solar, water, waste, storage.

5. Eco Base Transport, Logistics & Installations – \$250k

Barge transport, materials handling, remote installation.

6. Arrival Precinct Facilities (Amphitheatre, Amenities, Kitchen, Artist Spaces) – \$600k

A culturally led, community-facing precinct forming the “front door” to the walking trails network. Includes:

- **Outdoor amphitheatre** for performance, dance, cultural welcome
- **Visitor amenities** (toilets, shade, seating, water points)
- **Community kitchen facilities** for events, catering, and cultural demonstrations
- **Artist spaces** for painters, weavers, carvers, and cultural educators
- **Signage**

This aligns with your earlier vision for a cultural welcome experience on the foreshore.

7. Cultural Heritage & Environmental Approvals – \$300k

ILUA processes, Native Title clearances, CHMP, environmental assessments, marine approvals, and regulatory pathways.

8. Ranger & Community Capability Program – \$200k

Training, accreditation, cultural content development, enterprise readiness, and community tourism capability.

9. Project Contingency – \$200k

Covers cost escalation, weather delays, supply chain issues, and remote-area construction risks.



Walking Trail Risk Framework

*“Approvals are the biggest risk
– not fieldwork.”*

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT – MEETING 12

5.0 Walking Trail Risk Framework

There is no doubt effective risk management for the Palm Island Walking Trails Project means anticipating challenges early, responding quickly, and protecting cultural, environmental, and community values at every stage. The project operates in a complex setting – Country with deep cultural significance, sensitive ecosystems, seasonal weather patterns, and strong community expectations – so risk management must be proactive, transparent, and culturally informed.

Risk management is not a one-off task – it is a living process that evolves as the project moves from planning to construction to long-term operations. By combining cultural governance, ranger leadership, technical expertise and strong communication, the project can remain resilient, adaptive and aligned with the community's vision.

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation / Controls	Owner
RISK CATEGORY: Cultural Authority				
Misalignment with Elders, TOs, or family camps causing delays, conflict, or loss of trust.	High	Critical	Establish Cultural Authority Council (CAC); follow ILUA processes; on-Country validation; avoid sensitive areas (Onion Bay, Bamboo Creek, ridge-lines, camps).	Council, PMT + CAC
RISK CATEGORY: Cultural Heritage Approvals				
Delays in PAN notifications, heritage surveys, or ILUA approvals.	Medium	High	Early mapping; GPS logging by Rangers; staged approvals; engage cultural heritage body early.	Council, PMT, CAC
RISK CATEGORY: Environmental Assessment				
Flood zones, erosion, steep terrain, fire risk, wildlife impacts (pigs, horses).	Medium	High	EcoRex desktop + field assessment; avoid high-risk terrain; drainage design; wildlife management plan; fire-risk mapping.	Council, PMT
RISK CATEGORY: Emergency Response				
Limited mobile coverage, slow response times, unclear evacuation routes.	Medium	Critical	Mandatory EPIRBs/SAT phones; Build Ranger capability & response protocols; Emergency Evacuation Plan with Hospital, QPS, SES; visitor safety briefing.	Council
RISK CATEGORY: Cyclone & Seasonal Closures				
Cyclones, heavy rain, trail washouts, unsafe conditions Dec–March.	High	High	Seasonal operating calendar; cyclone response plan; closure protocol; pre-season inspections; digital alerts.	PMT / Tourism Partner
RISK CATEGORY: Construction Delays				
Delays due to terrain, weather, cultural approvals, or contractor availability.	Medium	High	Staged construction; Ranger workforce integration; realistic timelines; early procurement; contingency budget.	PMT / Contractor

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation / Controls	Owner
RISK CATEGORY: Operational Security				
Vandalism, damage to toilets, signage, or infrastructure.	Medium	Medium	Ranger presence; CCTV in town-adjacent nodes; durable materials; community stewardship; rapid repair protocols.	Council / Contract / Community Rangers
RISK CATEGORY: Waste & Toilets				
Overflowing toilets, rubbish, environmental damage, negative visitor experience.	High	High	Early waste management design in toilets and accommodation centre; funded maintenance schedule; Ranger or contractor servicing; visitor education;	Council / Operational Contracts
RISK CATEGORY: Visitor Behaviour				
Visitors entering camps, sacred sites, or restricted areas.	Medium	High	Guided-only model; clear signage; visitor induction; cultural code of conduct; ranger-led monitoring.	PMT, CAC + Rangers
RISK CATEGORY: Community Expectations				
Raised expectations not met; perception of exclusion; consultation fatigue.	Medium	High	Transparent updates; staged delivery; community forums; CAP oversight; clear communication on scope and timelines.	Council
RISK CATEGORY: Local Jobs & Capability				
Failure to deliver local employment leading to loss of support.	Medium	High	Local-first hiring policy; training pathways; Ranger capability program; youth tourism pathways; enterprise development via PIEDF.	Council Contracts
RISK CATEGORY: Tourism Partner Not Sourced				
EOI attracts no interest	Medium	High	Build strong vision for project, prepare a back up plan.	Council, PMT
RISK CATEGORY: Tourism Market Viability				
Low visitation, poor commercial uptake, or misaligned tourism products.	Low	Medium	Guided cultural tourism model; partnerships with SeaLink, AWC, Intrepid; market testing; staged tourism rollout.	PMT / Tourism operator
RISK CATEGORY: Infrastructure Readiness				
Jetty, trails, accommodation, roads, airport access not ready for visitors.	Medium	High	Manager project tightly; issue contracts early, adjust time frame expectations early.	Council + Qld Government
RISK CATEGORY: Governance Breakdown				
Confusion between Council, Rangers, Elders, TOs, and PIEDF roles.	Medium	Critical	Implement governance model (PMT + CAC+CAP); clear Terms of Reference; monthly reporting; decision pathway.	Council / PMT

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation / Controls	Owner
RISK CATEGORY: Funding & Timeframe				
DETSI funding milestones at risk due to delays in approvals or construction.	Medium	High	Early environmental + cultural assessments; staged delivery; realistic scheduling; monthly progress tracking.	DETSI, Council, PMT
RISK CATEGORY: Reputational Risk				
Project seen as externally driven or culturally unsafe.	Low	Critical	Community-led approach; Elders' leadership; transparent communication; guided-only model; local jobs.	Council + CAC
RISK CATEGORY: Marine Safety				
Risks associated with sea country activities, reef trips, island hopping, or ranger boats.	Medium	High	Marine safety protocols; vessel maintenance; skipper qualifications; weather-based closures; visitor briefings.	Rangers + SeaLink, Adrenalin Partnerships – Staged Roll out of this product
RISK CATEGORY: Wildlife Encounters				
Pigs, snakes, horses causing safety incidents.	Medium	Medium	Wildlife management plan; signage; ranger patrols; visitor education.	Ranger Controls / Vet support / Council programs
RISK CATEGORY: Trail Maintenance				
Trails degrade without ongoing maintenance, leading to safety issues.	High	High	Funded maintenance schedule; Ranger hubs; annual audits; community reporting system.	Rangers Contract
RISK CATEGORY: Transport Reliability				
Ferry or flight disruptions affecting visitor experience.	Medium	Medium	Coordination with TMR, SeaLink; flexible booking windows; visitor communication protocols.	PMT
RISK CATEGORY: Digital Connectivity				
Lack of mobile coverage affecting safety and visitor experience.	High	Medium	EPIRBs/SAT phones; offline maps; signage; ranger checkpoints.	PMT



6.1 Thorsborne Trail Case Study

A history of the Thorsborne Trail

1. Pre-Trail Context: Hinchinbrook Island as a Protected Wilderness (1930s–1970s)

- Hinchinbrook Island was recognised early for its exceptional natural values, eventually becoming part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.
- Its rugged terrain, mangrove systems, beaches and waterfalls remained largely untouched, with no resort development and minimal human impact.
- This set the foundation for a low-impact, conservation-led walking route rather than a tourism-driven one.

2. The Thorsborne's and the Conservation Ethos (1960s–1980s)

- The trail is named after Arthur and Margaret Thorsborne, two of Queensland's most influential conservationists.
- They dedicated their lives to protecting Hinchinbrook Island's ecosystems, conducting wildlife monitoring, advocating for minimal development, and promoting wilderness protection.
- Their philosophy shaped the trail's core principle: nature first, visitors second.
- The Queensland Government later formally recognised their contribution by naming the trail in Arthur's honour.

3. Establishment of the Thorsborne Trail (1980s)

- The trail was formalised as a 32 km wilderness walk along the island's east coast.
- Its design intentionally avoided heavy infrastructure – no boardwalks, no huts, no commercial accommodation – preserving the island's sense of isolation.
- Campsites were designated at key points, but facilities remained minimal (non-flush toilets, basic clearings).
- The trail quickly gained a reputation as one of Australia's most challenging and beautiful multi-day hikes.



Thorsborne Trail, Hinchinbrook Island

4. Management Philosophy: Low Numbers, High Protection (1990s–2010s)

- To protect fragile ecosystems, the Queensland Government introduced a strict permit cap (40 walkers at any one time).
- This made the Thorsborne Trail one of the most tightly managed wilderness walks in the country.
- The trail's reputation grew internationally for its:
 - remoteness
 - diversity of landscapes (rainforest, beaches, heathlands, waterfalls)
 - wildlife, including cassowaries and unique flora
 - the trail remained largely unchanged for decades – an intentional decision to preserve its wilderness character.

5. Renewed Government Focus and Ecotourism Strategy (2020s)

- Under Queensland's Destination 2045 tourism plan, the Thorsborne Trail was identified as a flagship ecotourism asset.
- In 2025, the government announced a major upgrade and redevelopment, positioning the trail as a world-class hiking experience while maintaining its conservation ethos.
- Key developments included:
 - improved track sections
 - enhanced safety infrastructure
 - refined campsite layouts
 - new guided walk offerings (World Expeditions)
 - free unguided permits for the 2026 season
- The redevelopment was framed as part of a broader push to revitalise Queensland's ecotourism sector after years of limited approvals.

6. The Modern Trail (2026–present)

- The trail reopened as a premium wilderness experience, still retaining its low-impact character.
- It continues to be celebrated for:
 - its conservation legacy
 - its connection to the Thorsborn's
 - its role in showcasing the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area
- The trail remains one of Australia's most iconic multi-day hikes, attracting both domestic and international walkers seeking a true wilderness immersion.

It stands today as a testament to Arthur and Margaret Thorsborne's lifelong commitment to preserving Queensland's natural heritage.

The role of World Expeditions

World Expeditions has been appointed by the Queensland Government as the official operator delivering the new fully guided, fully supported multi-day walking experience on the Thorsborne Trail. This is part of Queensland's ecotourism expansion under Destination 2045.

Below is a structured breakdown of what the product actually is.

1. Core Product: A Fully Guided 4-Day / 3-Night Wilderness Walk

- A 32 km guided hike across Hinchinbrook Island (Munamudanamy).
- Operated as a 4-day, 3-night experience.
- Walkers carry a medium pack (9–12 kg); the trail remains a remote, Class 5 wilderness track.
- The experience is designed to maintain the trail's wild character while improving safety, interpretation, and visitor support.

2. What's Included

World Expeditions provides a supported, catered, small-group experience, including:

- Professional wilderness guides
- All meals (3 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 3 dinners)
- Camping equipment and campsite hosting
- Interpretation of ecology, culture, and history
- Safety management and logistics
- Boat transfers to/from the island (as part of the package)

This shifts the Thorsborne Trail from a purely self-supported walk to a premium guided ecotourism product – while still allowing independent walkers to access the trail separately.

3. Cultural Partnership & Interpretation

The product was developed in collaboration with the Bandjin and Girramay Traditional Owners, who share custodianship of Munamudanamy (Hinchinbrook Island).

- Cultural stories, ecological knowledge, and Traditional Owner perspectives are embedded into the guided experience.
- The operation is framed as a regenerative tourism model that supports Country, culture, and conservation.

4. Positioning in Queensland's Ecotourism Strategy

The Queensland Government selected World Expeditions through a competitive tender process to deliver a world-class, low-impact walking product.

- It is one of the flagship ecotourism experiences promised under Destination 2045.
- It sits alongside the new Ngaro Track guided walk in the Whitsundays, also operated by World Expeditions.

This positions the Thorsborne Trail as:

- a premium, bookable ecotourism product,
- with strict environmental protections,
- and enhanced visitor experience without compromising wilderness values.

5. Key Features of the Experience

- Moderate difficulty, 4–8 hours walking per day
- Unformed, rugged terrain – the trail is not hardened or graded
- Small group sizes to maintain the wilderness feel
- Seasonal operation (May–October)
- Strong conservation messaging aligned with the Thorsbornes' legacy

In Summary

The World Expeditions product is a guided, catered, culturally informed, low-impact, premium walking experience that overlays professional support and interpretation onto the existing wilderness trail – without replacing or diminishing the independent walker experience. It is designed to:

- protect the island's natural and cultural values,
- elevate visitor safety and understanding,
- and create a world-class ecotourism product for North Queensland.

Price of the World Expeditions Thorsborne Trail Guided Walk

- AUD \$2,599 per person
- Applies to the 2026 season (May–October)
- Listed under Australian Walking Holidays – Queensland Island Walks as the Thorsborne Trail Guided Walk product.

What the Price Includes

This is a fully inclusive package covering:

- Professional wilderness guides
- All meals (breakfasts, lunches, dinners)
- Camping equipment
- Campsite hosting and logistics
- Boat transfers to/from Hinchinbrook Island
- Safety management
- Cultural and ecological interpretation

It is positioned as a premium, low-impact, small-group ecotourism experience.

What's Not Included

World Expeditions typically excludes:

- Travel to/from the departure point (Cardwell or Mission Beach)
- Personal gear (clothing, boots, etc.)
- Travel insurance

Meeting Notes - Thorsborne Trail Collaboration – Palm Island Walking Trails Discussion, Andy Causebrook (DETSI), Marcio and PaulWed, Apr 15, 2026

Meeting 11 Summary:

The meeting reviewed collaboration opportunities to apply management approaches used on Hinchinbrook Island's Thorsborne Trail to the Palm Island walking trails project. Paul Victory outlined Palm Island project funding, stakeholder roles, and asked which Thorsborne lessons could inform Palm Island planning and community engagement. Andy Causebrook described Thorsborne as a Class 5, 30 km wilderness walk managed by camping permits with a recent trial limiting independent starts to 12 per day and a roughly \$3 million investment in campground toilets, sleeping nodes, and management capacity while retaining a deliberately rough trail character. He noted World Expeditions holds a commercial permit allocation with maintenance obligations and that QPWS rangers remain the primary managers, collaborating with Giringun rangers as required.

The group reviewed environmental and cultural assessment practice for remote trails, agreeing routine maintenance can proceed without major studies but reroutes or substantial campground works trigger formal environmental and cultural reviews and co-design with Traditional Owners. Operational topics covered five years of hiker-survey results driving campground upgrades, seasonal closures (January–February), cyclone-triggered shut-downs, two permitted transfer operators, customer-paid transport, limited mobile coverage, incident-response recommendations (ePIRBs/SAT phones), and a one-year-per-30 km rough construction benchmark plus extra time for approvals and cultural work. Participants agreed to organize a stakeholder site visit in late May or early June, to include councillors, rangers, DETC representatives, project staff and Traditional Owner representation, and Andy offered to help with facilitation, logistics, and email follow-up.

Overview of the Thorsborne Trail and access controls

Andy outlined Thorsborne as a Class 5, 30 km trail established in the 1980s with a history of independent hikers managed by camping permits and a permit cap to control impacts.

- * Thorsborne is managed as a Class 5 wilderness walk with a 30 km route and deliberately minimal trail infrastructure.
- * Independent hikers have been capped and are now part of a trial limiting daily starts to 12 to reduce campground crowding.

Guided tours and recent permit changes

The department initiated guided tours with World Expeditions after an expression of interest; the guided product will start bookings and tours in June and World Expeditions is partnering with traditional owners.

- * World Expeditions won the permit to operate guided tours and has a separate allocation of permits to avoid reducing independent-hiker access.
- * Approximately \$3 million was invested to upgrade campground facilities and management capacity across the trail's main campgrounds.

Campground investment, facilities and user experience

Investment focused on the three main campgrounds to upgrade toilets, expand discrete camping nodes with platforms and pack poles, and to maintain a basic wilderness experience rather than adding luxury amenities.

- * Water is not provided at camps; hikers collect from a few reliable natural water sources (e.g., Zoe Falls and Mulligan Falls).

Water, safety and seasonal management

Hikers must collect their own water from reliable natural sources (notably Zoe Falls and Mulligan Falls) and the park is improving communication about water availability and expectations across seasons.

Trail maintenance, ranger roles and commercial arrangements

The trail is intentionally left largely natural with opportunistic annual clearing after the wet season; QPWS rangers run visitor management with Giringun rangers assisting by boat, and World Expeditions holds a separate permit allocation and pays fees back to the park with some maintenance obligations under their commercial agreement.

- * Guided operators have maintenance duties in their commercial activity agreement to assist park rangers with basic tasks like toilet cleaning.

Environmental & Cultural Assessment Practices

Paul asked how environmental and cultural heritage assessments are handled for the trail and whether those processes are part of ranger/QPWS duties or separate work. Andy described formal QPWS capital-works processes that determine when small maintenance can proceed and when larger reroutes or campground works require independent environmental and cultural investigations.

- * Routine maintenance on the trail proceeds without major environmental work, but reroutes or major construction trigger formal environmental and cultural assessments.

Use of Independent Consultants and Applicability to Palm Project

Paul probed whether assessments are done internally or by private consultants given the Palm project's land tenure (council or native title). Andy confirmed QPWS often uses private consultants for resourcing and transparency and recommended independent assessment for comparable projects.

- * QPWS/DETSI uses independent consultants for environmental assessments when resourcing or transparency requires it.

Visitor Survey Findings and Experience Design

Andy described a multi-year hiker survey to capture representative visitor views and avoid extreme stakeholder feedback, reporting overall high satisfaction and actionable campground improvements. Survey results emphasized freshwater swimming, vistas, and the importance of a clear vision for the visitor experience when planning changes or extensions.

- * The project team runs an ongoing hiker visitor survey that shows very high satisfaction (around 80–90%) and guides campground improvements.
- * The most desired visitor features are freshwater swimming spots and high coastal vistas, while beach walking was less popular for proposed extensions.

Seasonality, Access, and Transfer Operators

Katie asked about seasonality and closures; Andy explained the trail closes Jan–Feb due to creek crossings and that cyclones or major weather trigger additional closures, which are operationally difficult because bookings occur far in advance. The team explained there are only two permitted transfer operators for the Thorsborne experience, operators run from Dungeness, and transport is arranged and paid directly by customers.

- * The trail is closed January–February due to unsafe creek crossings, and cyclones/major weather are the primary operational triggers for additional closures.
- * Only two licensed transfer operators are permitted for Thorsborne transfers; transfers are arranged and paid for directly by customers.

Safety, Incident Management, and Communications

Katie queried incident response and mobile coverage; Andy said coverage is patchy and not reliable island-wide, so QPWS advises ePIRBs or SAT phones and provides clearer pre-trip information on risks and emergency expectations. Vessel operators and emergency services handle many rescues, and operators can assist with pick-ups when needed.

- * Mobile coverage on the island is patchy; visitors are advised to carry ePIRBs or SAT phones and be self-sufficient.

Market Demographics and Visitor Mix

Andy said the market is diverse with international visitors, families, younger and older groups, and a mix of fitness and preparedness levels – COVID and social media broadened the visitor profile. The variety reinforces the need to communicate the true difficulty and conditions of the walk before booking.



Implementation, Timeframes, and Approvals for New Trails

Marcio asked about implementation challenges, approvals, and construction timeframes; Andy estimated that construction (for example a 30 km Class 4 trail) can take about a year to build but should be preceded by significant preparatory and approvals work, potentially adding up to a year or more for investigations and cultural engagement. Andy emphasized that logistics for islands and avoiding major environmental impacts are key constraints and that one small hold-up in approvals can delay the program.

- * Building a new Class 4 trail of roughly 30 km can take about a year to construct, with substantial preparatory time for approvals and cultural work before construction.

Approvals and Planning Instruments

The discussion opened with how projects route through SARA and multi-department approvals and how native title and council land use differs from national park planning instruments. Participants noted that some approvals (including EBDC Act referrals) can delay progress and that different land tenures impose different constraints.

- * The project relies on a multi-department SARA process and may require EBDC Act referrals depending on land tenure.
- * Land tenure differences (native title/council vs national park) change planning instruments and approval pathways.

Working Group and TO Engagement on Maggie

Andy described a long-running working group with Traditional Owners for Maggie, including field-based cultural inspections and mostly upgrading existing trails to limit cultural impact. The group emphasized clear upfront arrangements for TO participation and payment.

- * DETSI has an ongoing working group with TOs on Maggie that conducts cultural inspections for trail upgrades.

Cultural Heritage Process and Compensation

The team clarified that cultural heritage inspections are a paid engagement for TO representatives and discussed managing the appropriate number of paid advisors versus additional unpaid attendees. Establishing expectations early was presented as essential.

- * Cultural heritage engagement typically involves paid TO participation.

Integrating Environmental Assessment and Co-design

Paul advocated for treating environmental assessment (SARA) and TO collaboration as concurrent components of project work to enable co-designed outcomes and avoid siloed, sequential tasks. The group agreed this approach could improve collaboration and reduce rework.

- * The team prefers running environmental assessment (SARA) in tandem with TO co-design rather than sequentially.

6.2 Australian Walking Trail Graded System (AWTGS)

Australian Walking Trail Graded System

The Australian Walking Track Grading System (AWTGS) is a national, standardised five-level system used across Australia to describe the difficulty of walking tracks. The Thorsborne Trail is correctly classified as Grade 5, the highest and most demanding category.

Below is a clear explanation of what the system is, how it works, and where it comes from, grounded in authoritative sources.

What the Grading System Is

The AWTGS grades tracks from Grade 1 (easiest) to Grade 5 (most difficult). A track's grade is determined by the most difficult of five criteria:

- Experience required
- Steps
- Gradient
- Path quality
- Signage

This means a walk may have some easier sections, but the grade reflects the toughest part you will encounter.

The Five Grades (Summary)

Grade 1 – All-abilities

- No bushwalking experience required
- Flat, even surface; no steps
- ≤ 5 km

Grade 2 – Easy

- No experience required
- Hardened/compacted surface; gentle hills; occasional steps
- ≤ 10 km

Grade 3 – Moderate

- Some bushwalking experience recommended
- Short steep sections; rough surface; many steps
- Up to 20 km

Grade 4 – Hard

- Bushwalking experience recommended
- Long, rough, steep; limited signage

Grade 5 – Difficult (Wilderness)

- Very experienced bushwalkers only
- Navigation and emergency first-aid skills required
- Very rough, very steep, often unmarked
- May exceed 20 km (but can also apply to shorter, technical routes)

This is the category that applies to the Thorsborne Trail, which is remote, rugged, and minimally marked.

Where the System Originates

The AWTGS was:

- Developed through a Victorian Government initiative,
- In partnership with government agencies and non-government groups across Australia,
- Based on the Australian Standard for walking track construction (AS 2156),
- Endorsed nationally in July 2010 as a voluntary industry standard.

Since then, it has become the dominant national system, replacing older state-based grading approaches.

Why It Exists

The system was created to:

- Provide a consistent national standard
- Help walkers choose tracks appropriate to their skills
- Reduce risk by clarifying difficulty
- Support land managers in communicating track conditions

It does not measure the quality or beauty of a walk – only its difficulty.

How This Applies to the Thorsborne Trail

The Thorsborne Trail is classified as Grade 5 because it meets the highest difficulty criteria:

- Unformed or minimally formed sections
- Steep, rough terrain
- Limited or no signage
- Requires navigation and self-sufficiency
- Remote, wilderness setting

This aligns with the AWTGS definition of a Grade 5 wilderness walk.

Australian Walking Track Grading System – Grade Comparison

Grade 1 – All-Abilities / Easy Access

- Experience: None
- Terrain: Flat, even, no steps
- Surface: Hardened or paved
- Signage: Clear, frequent
- Typical Users: Families, wheelchairs, mobility-assisted users
- Risk Profile: Very low

Use case: Botanic gardens, boardwalks, short interpretive loops.

Grade 2 – Easy

- Experience: None required
- Terrain: Mostly gentle slopes; occasional steps
- Surface: Hardened/compacted
- Signage: Clear and continuous
- Typical Users: General public, casual walkers
- Risk Profile: Low

Use case: Coastal paths, short nature trails, urban–bush interfaces.

Grade 3 – Moderate

- Experience: Some bushwalking experience recommended
- Terrain: Short steep sections; uneven surfaces
- Surface: Formed track, may be rough
- Signage: Generally signposted
- Typical Users: Recreational walkers with moderate fitness
- Risk Profile: Moderate

Use case: National park day walks, lookouts, waterfall circuits.

Grade 4 – Hard

- Experience: Bushwalking experience recommended
- Terrain: Long, steep, rough, or slippery sections
- Surface: Formed track but may be limited or eroded
- Signage: Limited; navigation skills helpful
- Typical Users: Fit, experienced walkers
- Risk Profile: High

Use case: Multi-day hikes with variable terrain, remote sections, creek crossings.

Grade 5 – Difficult / Wilderness

- Experience: Very experienced bushwalkers only
- Terrain: Very steep, very rough, unmodified or minimally formed
- Surface: Natural surfaces; may involve rock scrambling, river crossings
- Signage: Minimal or none – navigation essential
- Typical Users: Self-sufficient, wilderness-capable walkers
- Risk Profile: Very high

Use case: Remote wilderness routes, unmarked tracks, self-reliant expeditions. Example: Thorsborne Trail – remote, rugged, limited infrastructure, self-sufficient conditions.

Why Thorsborne is Grade 5

The Thorsborne Trail meets the highest difficulty criteria because it is:

- Remote and self-reliant
- Minimally marked
- Rugged, steep, and uneven
- Subject to creek crossings, weather exposure, and isolation
- Managed intentionally as a wilderness experience

This aligns precisely with the Grade 5 definition.



Key Differences at a Glance

Grade	Track Condition	Navigation	Experience Required	Risk Level	Typical Setting
1	Fully formed, accessible	No navigation	None	Very low	Urban/parkland
2	Formed, gentle	No navigation	None	Low	Coastal/lowland
3	Formed but uneven	Basic navigation	Some experience	Moderate	National parks
4	Rough, steep, long	Limited signage	Bushwalking experience	High	Remote sections
5	Unformed, wilderness	Navigation essential	High-level experience	Very high	Wilderness/remote

6.3 Walking Trail Design Method Proposed for Palm Island – Track Width & Classification

1. Preferred Width Range

- 500–900 mm typical width
- Maximum 1,200 mm (Australian Walking Track Standard Class 3 limit)

Beth's guidance:

"The width of track is variable but will fall in an average range anywhere between 500mm and 900mm... New track builds will not exceed 1200mm in line with Australian Walking Standard 3."

Why this width is preferred

- Minimises ground disturbance
- Reduces erosion risk in very high rainfall environments
- Fits natural terrain (steep side-slopes, rocky outcrops, boulders)
- Keeps construction cost manageable
- Aligns with low-impact, sustainable walking experience desired by Rangers and Elders

Implication for approvals

- Narrower tracks reduce environmental triggers
- Easier ILUA compliance (less ground disturbance)
- Lower cultural heritage risk

2. Track Type – Single Track (Preferred)

Preferred Construction Form

- Single-track, low-impact, hand-built or light-machine-built trail

Beth's guidance:

"The track design is single track. This is appropriate to the type of terrain... and keeping the track as sustainable as possible."

- Why single-track is preferred
- Minimises cut-and-fill
- Reduces erosion on steep slopes
- Avoids major drainage structures
- Fits Palm Island's rugged volcanic terrain
- Supports a cultural + nature immersion experience

Where single-track is ideal:

- Wallaby Point
- Pencil Bay
- Palm Valley
- Ridge sections toward Cannon Bay
- Coastal connectors

3. Surface & Construction Materials

Preferred Surface

- Natural surface (soil, rock, compacted earth)
- Minimal imported material
- Rock armouring only where needed

Beth's guidance:

"All of the lookout areas have natural surfaces and open spaces... We built a small lookout area on the Pencil Bay track but this wouldn't be necessary for any of the other lookout areas."

Why natural surface is preferred

Reduces environmental footprint

- Avoids visual intrusion in cultural landscapes
- Lower cost and easier maintenance for Rangers
- Performs well in tropical island conditions

4. Lookouts & Gathering Nodes

Preferred Approach

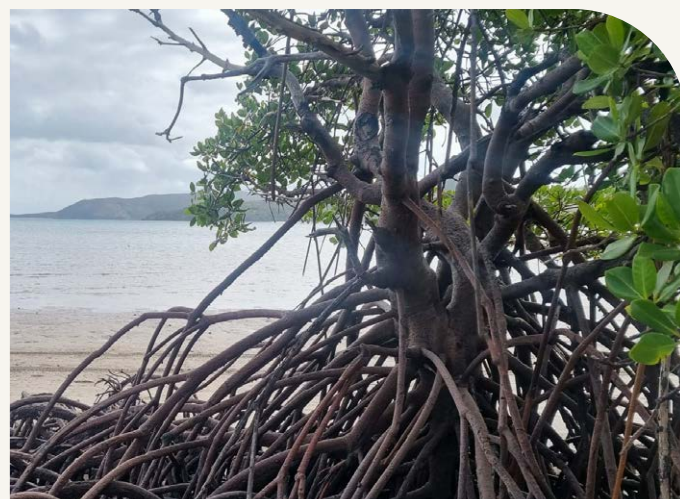
- Use existing natural clearings
- Avoid built platforms unless absolutely necessary
- Small groups (10–15 people) can gather safely

Beth's guidance:

"Lookout areas have natural surfaces and open spaces... only one small lookout area was needed on Pencil Bay."

Implications

- Minimal approvals
- Minimal ILUA triggers
- Lower construction cost
- Supports cultural storytelling nodes



5. Accessibility Considerations

Key Insight

Palm Island's terrain cannot support fully accessible trails except in very short, isolated sections.

Beth's guidance:

"We wouldn't recommend anything wider, or more accessible... the track has steps and is navigating through rocky bouldery terrain."

Where limited accessibility may be possible:

- Short sections of Wallaby Point
- Town-based connectors (existing roads/footpaths)
- Ferry Terminal → Town Square (already accessible)

Where accessibility is not feasible:

- Palm Valley
- Mundy Bay
- Onion Bay
- Ridge lines
- Cannon Bay

Implication

The project should adopt a graded fitness/ability model, not an accessibility model.

6. Fitness Level Grading

Family / Low Fitness

- Wallaby Point
- Pencil Bay
- Regina Bay → Old School Road

Beth's guidance:

"Wallaby Point area, Pencil Bay, Regina Bay to Old School Rd would be suitable for families and lower fitness levels."

Moderate to High Fitness

- Palm Valley
- Mundy Bay
- Onion Bay
- Ridge Walk to Cannon Bay

Beth's guidance:

"Palm Valley to Mundy and Onion Bays for a higher fitness level."

Implication

This supports a tiered product model:

- Short cultural walks
- Half-day scenic walks
- Full-day adventure walks
- Future multi-day experience

7. Construction Methodology

Preferred Methods

- Hand-built or light machinery (mini-excavator)
- Side-slope benching where required
- Rock armouring in wet zones
- Drainage dips rather than culverts
- Minimal vegetation clearing

Why this method suits Palm Island

- Reduces environmental approvals
- Minimises ILUA disturbance
- Fits Ranger capability development
- Lower cost and faster delivery
- Resilient in tropical rainfall

8. Alignment with ILUA, Environmental & Cultural Requirements

Why this construction approach is ideal for Palm Island

- Low ground disturbance = fewer ILUA triggers
- Natural surfaces = lower environmental impact
- Small footprint = easier cultural heritage clearance
- Supports staged development (as recommended by Rangers & DETSI)
- Compatible with Ranger-led construction and maintenance

Summary – Preferred Palm Island Trail Construction

The preferred construction approach is:

- 500–900 mm natural-surface single track
- Max 1,200 mm (Class 3 standard)
- Low-impact, hand-built or light-machine-built
- Use natural lookouts, avoid built structures
- No fully accessible trails except short sections
- Fitness-graded trail network
- Minimal imported materials
- Culturally sensitive, environmentally sustainable

This approach is:

- Technically sound
- Culturally appropriate
- Environmentally sustainable
- Cost-effective
- Aligned with Tricky Tracks, Rangers, DETSI and ILUA constraints



Engagement Outcomes Report

RECOMMENDATIONS



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