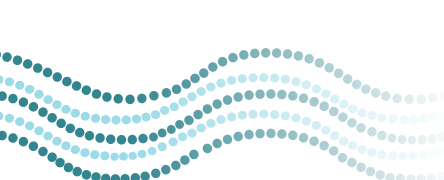


PALM ISLAND WALKING TRAILS

Executive Briefing Pack

The Way Forward



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.

The Palm Island Walking Trails Project is a strategic initiative of the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, supported by Queensland Government funding through the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation (DETSI).

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 Bwgcolman 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.

Between 29 March and 26 May 2026, engagement was delivered through on-Country workshops, trail walks, stakeholder interviews, youth engagement, a community survey, and extensive informal conversations.



29
**Government /Key
Stakeholder interviews**

29th March – 26th May 2026



44
**Community
conversations**

29th March – 26th May 2026



140
**Community Survey
responses**

15th April – 15th May 2026



55
**Community Workshop #1
participants**

Minggamingga Rangers – 29 April 2026



27
**Community Workshop #2
participants**

Minggamingga Rangers – 30 April 2026



62
**Community Workshop #3
participants**

Council Town Square – 13 May 2026



22
**Youth Meeting
students**

St Michael's School – 14 May 2026

The total number of people involved in the engagement was **379**

- **72%** local residents, **5%** Traditional Owners, **12%** visitors, **5%** government stakeholders, **2%** business owners
- **65%** of respondents have lived on Palm Island for more than five years
- Balanced gender participation (49% women, 51% men)
- Broad age representation, with **37%** under 30 years and **17%** over 60 years

Community sentiment through the workshops, meetings and community survey

- **77%** support tourism on Palm Island – only **2%** oppose tourism, the remaining respondents were neutral or unsure.

Community members emphasised opportunities for local jobs, cultural storytelling, youth pathways and community pride. One participant expressed a widely shared view:

“We want tourism that tells our story the right way.” (male resident, survey)

Support for walking trails was exceptionally strong:

95% support walking trails, trails were viewed as both community and tourism infrastructure

Priority Trail locations identified through engagement include:

- Town to Airport & Pencil Bay (89% support)
- Wallaby Point to Cannon Bay (85% support)
- Town to Mundy & Onion Bay (83% support)

These locations were consistently preferred due to accessibility, cultural suitability and alignment with community priorities.

Community respondents highlighted five primary benefits:

1. Local jobs and economic participation (113 responses)
2. Community pride and sharing Palm Island's strengths (110 responses)
3. Health and wellbeing (104 responses)
4. Cultural tourism and storytelling (103 responses)
5. Improved care for Country (98 responses)

These benefits were reinforced through qualitative feedback across workshops, interviews and informal conversations.

“Jobs must go to community members who actually live on the island & who know and live our Bwgcorman way.”
(excerpt from survey qualitative responses)

Community concerns identified were:

- Environmental impacts (78 responses)
- Privacy and proximity to homes/camps (69 responses)
- Impacts on culturally sensitive places (68 responses)

Guided walking trail experiences were widely supported.

Guided access was consistently preferred to protect cultural sites, manage visitor behaviour and maintain community safety. The Minggamingga Rangers were recognised widely to play a leadership role in visitor and trail management activities.

Family camps – particularly at Wallaby Point, Little Cannon Bay, Bamboo Creek and other coastal areas – were repeatedly identified as culturally significant zones requiring careful management, codesign and clear visitor protocols.

“People can’t just walk anywhere – some places are not for everyone.”
(excerpt from on-Country discussions)

Stakeholder and industry insights

Government agencies, regional tourism partners and commercial tourism operators expressed strong interest in the project, noting alignment with Queensland's Destination 2045 strategy and ecotourism frameworks. Operators emphasised:

- Cultural leadership as the defining value proposition
- Preference for guided, small-group, high-quality experiences
- Need for staged development
- Need for strong clear governance structure long term
- Importance of accommodation capacity and long-term tenure
- Need for a tourism partner to provide market reach and product distribution.



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.

The report provides a budget and next steps framework for Council. The 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 through the period July 2026 to December 2027, in readiness for the first walking trail guests in April 2028. The timeline frames the key projects and key considerations in a suggested and structured pathway from planning to activation

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