Introduction

A master plan is being developed for Mon Repos, led by the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sports and Racing (NPRSR), to consolidate the future of this site as an iconic encounter with turtles experience. The Master Plan is in draft and is now available for community consultation. Mon Repos is considered to have strong potential for a range of partnerships and investment models that increase year round visitation and support turtle conservation outcomes.

Through redeveloping facilities at Mon Repos and implementing new tourism products, the opportunity exists to create an iconic ‘gateway national parks visitor centre’, catering for an enhanced visitor experience during turtle season, increased visitation outside of peak season, world class research and environmental education, and a high profile tourism offering for the Bundaberg North Burnett region.

Key objectives of the master plan include:

• Expand ecotourism opportunities for domestic and international visitors
• Create diverse experiences around an already well-established turtle viewing experience
• Increase community awareness of and support for the conservation efforts at Mon Repos
• Improve the quality of visitor experience
• Improve cost efficiency and return on investment
• Generate additional resources for research and conservation programs
• Generate direct benefits for community, visitors and tourism.

A draft concept master plan for Mon Repos has been proposed following a series of consultative workshops with NPRSR and key stakeholders.

The Mon Repos Master Plan project is a priority of the Queensland Government in delivering its commitment to improve access to national parks for sustainable ecotourism and outdoor recreation and support growth of Queensland’s tourism industry.

The purpose of this discussion paper

NPRSR has developed this discussion paper to gain your thoughts and insights with a view to developing a longer term vision for Mon Repos. This paper explores the redevelopment opportunity and the main elements of the proposed concept master plan. Questions have been included in the paper as discussion points. Your response to these and any other comments you have are welcomed.

Consultation

The master plan project is being led by NPRSR in conjunction with stakeholders. A Project Steering Committee and Reference Group have been established, with representation from NPRSR, Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ), Department of Tourism, (DTESB), Department of State Development (DSDIP) and Bundaberg Regional Council (BRC). Two workshops have been held to canvas the views of members of the Committee and Reference Group. Discussions on key opportunities at Mon Repos have also been held with other relevant government departments, statutory agencies, local government, and the tourism industry.

Feedback on this discussion paper and any other comments and insights provided will be used to assist in developing the final Mon Repos master plan. Your feedback is invited particularly in relation to actions that can be delivered within existing available budget, and in relation to longer term site development proposals that are subject to funding being available.

Creating a shared vision amongst key stakeholders and community will be crucial to the success of the Mon Repos Master Plan.
Current situation

Mon Repos site

Mon Repos is located approximately 14 km from Bundaberg in the township of Bargara on the Woongarra Coast. The area includes 45 hectares of beach and coastal vegetation and the tenure is classified as Regional Park under the Nature Conservation Act, 1992.

Mon Repos supports the largest concentration of nesting marine turtles on the eastern Australian mainland and is the most significant loggerhead turtle rookery in the South Pacific. Successful breeding is critical for the survival of this endangered species. The Mon Repos Visitor Centre is managed by NPRSR.

Mon Repos receives approximately 30 000 visitors annually, (75% domestic families, 20% grey nomads and 5% international). Visitors come to the centre primarily to participate in the Ranger guided viewing of nesting and hatching turtles during November – March every year. There are additional visitors to the site during the day and throughout the year; however these numbers are currently low. Use of the public beach is restricted during turtle nesting and hatching season.

The Mon Repos Visitor Centre is pivotal to the visitor waiting experience. The centre provides an opportunity for visitors to learn about marine turtles through interpretive displays and presentations by Rangers in the open air amphitheatre before an orderly progression down beach access pathways for the turtle viewing. Other built facilities located on site include the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, Queensland Turtle Conservation Project research station and temporary Ranger offices. There is also a heritage listed South Sea Island Wall located at Grange Road which is one of the longest most intact examples of its type in the area.

There are a number of challenges facing Mon Repos. The Visitor Centre infrastructure and facilities are in need of upgrade to improve visitor appeal and amenity. The Visitor Centre is unable to accommodate large numbers of people or traffic particularly in wet or humid conditions. The site entry statement to the site is not visible which understates the value of the visitor experience on offer.

Any development of the site would need to be highly sensitive and not compromise the ecological integrity of the rookery. Marine turtles are highly vulnerable to human encroachment on their nesting grounds. Conservation of the site would involve managing night time light pollution, habitat changes to beach or wetland areas, and predation of eggs and hatchlings by foxes.

Current site arrangement
Photos of current site arrangement

Photos courtesy of Nigel Russell
Adjoining resources

Resources adjoining Mon Repos include conservation areas to the north and south, the Great Sandy Marine Park to the east and the Barolin Nature Reserve to the south-west. Directly adjacent to the site there is also caneland, an unused former caravan park and peri urban residential development.

The Barolin Nature Reserve is managed by BRC for environmental purposes. The reserve has a long history of cattle grazing which is slowly being reduced to encourage the high conservation of environmentally significant plant communities. The reserve is set on over 300 hectares and includes large areas of natural bush, grassy plains and wetlands. Council has provided over four kilometres of paths for walking and bike riding within the reserve that links to Mon Repos via the Turtle Trail.

The Turtle Trail is a walking and cycling path connecting Kelly Beach to Burnett Heads Harbour. The Turtle Trail has been developed to improve accessibility to Mon Repos, promote healthy recreation while enjoying the Coral Coast scenery and to link Bargara and Burnett Heads.

The Great Sandy Marine Park extends from Baffle Creek in the north to Double Island Point in the south and seaward to three nautical miles. Mon Repos is identified as a conservation park in the Marine Parks (Great Sandy) Zone 2006 with designations for turtle monitoring and protection.

The opportunity

Mon Repos has long been regarded by the local community and regional tourism operators including the Bundaberg Burnett Regional Tourism Organisation as the signature experience in the region and the jewel in the crown of the region’s tourism brand and experience. This concept master plan builds on their vision to support and consolidate the strengths and opportunities presented by the site.

Mon Repos presents a unique opportunity to provide the community and visitors with a world’s best practice ecotourism experience and further position the region as a ‘must visit’ destination. While already well-regarded and respected for its Ranger-led guided tours and on-site research and volunteer program, Mon Repos’ full potential has yet to be realised.

The site has the potential to generate increased revenue from visitation and sponsorship and reinvest this for the purposes of site management and turtle conservation. This reinvestment model has been successfully employed by wildlife ecotourism operations in Australia and worldwide. The establishment of a Turtle Foundation for private donation and sponsorship will further assist in this regard.

Mon Repos also has untapped potential for creating year round visitation. This attribute is essential for attracting commercial investment in the site, but also for supporting the economic and tourism objectives of the region. It will also provide the community with a valuable asset that can be used for a number of purposes including environmental education programs and amenities and facilities for members of the public and visitors participating in outdoor recreation at the Barolin Nature Reserve.

Photos courtesy of Nigel Russell
Proposed Vision for Mon Repos

The proposed concept master plan for Mon Repos is a culmination of stakeholder input and detailed analysis of the site, market opportunities, and business models. The overall vision behind this plan is to create a world class conservation centre and a ‘must do’ ecotourism attraction in the region.

Specifically, the vision for Mon Repos is:
- Year round experiences and activities
- An expanded range of opportunities for visitors to have natural encounters during peak season
- Suitable commercial opportunities (such as retail, café, eco-accommodation) and partnerships
- World class turtle conservation and research
- Facilities for environmental education and interpretive displays.

Visitor market potential

The ‘Connect with Nature – Encounter with Turtles’ experience attracts many domestic and international visitors each year. Current visitation to the Bundaberg North Burnett Region and Southern Great Barrier Reef is split between day trippers 64%, domestic overnight 30%, and international 3% (Tourism and Events Queensland). Domestic and international tourism have been identified as the primary visitation market for Mon Repos with a particular focus on drive tourism (families and couples), wildlife tourism and voluntourism.

Marine turtles are an iconic wildlife that attract visitors who are seeking natural experiences that are personal and engaging. The current Ranger led guided tours provide an authentic turtle viewing experience which integrates the educational and research aspects. There are opportunities to further capitalise on this offering through a range of tiered tourism products that better reflect current market value. Below provides an overview of the visitation market to Mon Repos.

Target market for Mon Repos


Have your say on the name in the Feedback survey

It is proposed that Mon Repo be renamed to the Mon Repos Turtle Centre and the brand positioned as; ‘The world’s best practice turtle experience and conservation movement’. This new branding reflects the intent of the site to continue to deliver conservation focussed ecotourism.

Guiding the master planning process is a number of principles that act as a yardstick to determine master planning concepts and strategies that reinforce the future vision for Mon Repos. These include:
- Turtles are key to the attraction
- Engage visitors through purposeful participation and education
- Encourage and embrace local community support and involvement
- Position Mon Repos around world leading research and conservation
- Strive to effect positive change in post visit behaviour
- Take charge of turtle habitat protection

Visitors come to Mon Repos to be part of the story and know that by working or observing they can make a difference. The experience of Mon Repos is not just a science story, Magical and enchanting—the experience will stay with them for a lifetime.
Mon Repos Conservation Park site map

Photo: Robert Ashdown, Queensland Government
Proposed Master Plan

The concept Master Plan for the Mon Repos Turtle Centre presented in this section is the outcome of a series of consultative workshops with NPRSR and key stakeholders, detailed analysis, development of marketing strategies and the proposition of a new business and governance model to provide NPRSR with a 2020 vision for creating a world’s best practice turtle experience and conservation movement.

The areas of focus or core opportunities which form the foundation of the proposed Mon Repos Turtle Centre going forward include:

1. A governance model for Mon Repo where revenue can be reinvested into conservation, research and site management. This will enable flexibility to develop an increased range of ecotourism products including higher end tailored experiences. It will enable revenue generated at the site to be reinvested into the development of the site. It will enable the operation to secure private sponsorship and donations to pursue a range of conservation activities at the site and more broadly.

2. An extended and upgraded visitor centre that provides a range of facilities that would be expected of a best practice operation of this nature and is designed to integrate visitor amenity and comfort with interpretive displays, retail and merchandising and a café. QPWS Rangers who manage the site and visiting researchers require facilities that are integrated into the visitor centre and reinforce the conservation agenda of the operation.

3. A draw card or ‘hero’ experience to attract visitation to the centre throughout the year. A bold opportunity is presented by the inclusion of a turtle nursery within the research area of the visitor centre. It is proposed that up to 50 hatchlings could be housed in suitable facilities at the centre for a 9 – 18 month period after which they would be tagged and released to the sea. This solution provides a number of ecotourism and conservation benefits and reinforces the vision for the site.

The concept master plan illustrated on the following pages is an artists’ impression of how the Mon Repos Turtle Centre could look to deliver on building elements of the vision for the site. The master plan is draft only and is for community consultation. Included in the concept master plan are the following features:

- The creation of new high quality interpretive display facilities;
- Researcher facilities that include publicly accessible areas;
- The creation of the hatchling pools and viewing decks;
- The provision of a covered café/dining area;
- The creation of a range of covered areas/breakout spaces for visitors;
- Merchandising and retail area;
- Refurbishment of and cover over the existing amphitheatre;
- New facilities for the Rangers and the volunteers;
- Additional car parking and new entry feature on Mon Repos Road; and
- A new commercial accommodation offer on site – ‘Glamping’ or permanent tents with facilities.

Questions:

Do you support the draft concept for the redevelopment of the Mon Repos site?

Do you support the centre being re-named to the Mon Repos Turtle Centre?

The proposed master plan includes opportunities for the following activities:

- Ecotourism
- Outdoor Recreation
- Environmental Education and Community Use
- Wildlife experiences.
Ecotourism

Ecotourism provides an experience that increases visitor appreciation and understanding of nature. Ecotourism engages and informs visitors and contributes to the wellbeing of the natural areas and local communities. Mon Repos is recognised for increasing community and visitor awareness of turtles and their habitat through the Ranger guided tours and environmental education programs.

The concept master plan proposes a vision to enhance the ‘encounter with turtles’ experience through developing a range of visitor experiences at the site such as group tours, more intimate Ranger guided tours and tours which involve practical research such as indexing of turtles or relocation of eggs. Increased revenue from these enhanced visitor products can be used as part of a governance model which responds to market trends and uses profit to reinvest back into the conservation and management of the site.

The visitor centre could also be upgraded and extended to provide the level of visitor amenity required of a world class centre, such as café/dining, retail and merchandising and interpretive displays facilities, as well as the incorporation of researcher and Ranger facilities to reinforce the conservation agenda of the site. Any development of the site would be environmentally sensitive to the rookery. The draw card presented by the turtle nursery would reinforce the vision of the site.

Community goodwill and support are critical to the successful operation of Mon Repos. Currently volunteers provide invaluable support to Rangers and researchers during the turtle season with aspects such as visitor management, guided tours and data collection. There are also significant tourism dollars returned to the local community and region through visitation to the site. The concept master plan provides for additional commercial benefits to local businesses, tour operators and others.

Questions:
Do you support the inclusion of a variety of ecotourism opportunities at Mon Repos?
With a view to improving financial viability, do you support the plan to engage with local tour operators and businesses to deliver some of services provided on site?

Proposed Mon Repos Turtle Centre
Proposed new Mon Repos Turtle Centre – Daytime render
Proposed new Mon Repos Turtle Centre – Nighttime render (low light emission has been incorporated into centre design)
Environmental education and community use

The vision for Mon Repos includes a world’s best practice conservation movement. There are a number of threats facing the Mon Repos marine turtles and raising community awareness and funds for research and conservation activities is a core element of the Mon Repos Turtle Centre. Marine turtles are an endangered species. Only 300-400 loggerhead turtles visit Mon Repos which is considered a significant rookery. These turtles and their hatchlings are vulnerable to impacts on their nesting and foraging habitat, death or injury from commercial fishing, ingestion of plastics floating in the ocean and unsustainable harvesting. Female marine turtles generally only return to nest at the rookery where they were born and therefore protecting these unique creatures is critical.

The concept master plan contains features that reinforce environmental education. The visitor centre would be environmentally designed to avoid any light spill and reinforce sustainability values around issues such as water and energy conservation. The interpretive display area could include a lecture theatrette that could be used for a variety of research and education programs, including by school groups. Interpretive resources would be updated with exciting new features such as live turtle tracking screens. The opportunity to experience turtles through a range of ‘encounter with turtle’ offering all year round would also reinforce this element.

Data collected from a visitor survey in 2001 found that the majority of respondents (98%) were convinced that more action should be taken to minimise threats to marine turtles. It was revealed that the desire to protect marine turtles increased after visiting Mon Repos. The reasons cited included: marine turtles are unique (90%), because they are ancient (66%), have recreational value (32%) and they can generate income (23%). (Source: CRC Tourism, 2002. Economic, Education and Conservation Benefits of Sea Turtle Based Ecotourism: A study focussed on Mon Repos.)

Questions:

Do you agree with Mon Repos encouraging curriculum based excursions for school groups?
Do you believe the site redevelopment will improve the quality of experience for school groups and the local community?
How would you like to see the local community involved in the delivery of the vision for the site?
Would you be interested in returning to Mon Repos if new experiences were available to get ‘behind the scenes’ with turtle conservation and research?

Outdoor recreation

There are a number of outdoor recreation opportunities at or surrounding Mon Repos. Mon Repos contains a picturesque beach which attracts visitors throughout the year. The surrounding Barolin Nature Reserve will be further rehabilitated over time to expand the environmental and community use aspects of the reserve. This will reinforce the outdoor recreation opportunities in the area, supported by a number of walking and cycling tracks such as the Turtle Trail. The Southern Great Barrier Reef contains a number of iconic outdoor and wildlife experiences. Cross-selling of these experiences can encourage visitors and the community to enjoy the year round opportunities presented by the region.

The concept master plan proposes that the centre will be opened during the day and will provide both locals and visitors a compelling reason to visit the centre. They can view the turtle nursery and interpretive displays, talk with on-site Rangers, researchers and volunteers and obtain refreshments at the dining café. The Mon Repos Turtle Centre would be a hub of activity throughout the year, and more so during the turtle viewing season.

Question:
Are there any outdoor recreation opportunities you would like to see provided on site or in the adjacent conservation park?

Photo by Rowan Bestmann courtesy of Tourism and Events Queensland

Photo: Robert Ashdown, Queensland Government
Wildlife experiences

The wildlife experience of the Mon Repos turtles is the key attraction at Mon Repos. Marine turtles navigated the world’s oceans for over 100 million years. These ancient marine reptiles have significance for mythology and folklore for many coastal Indigenous cultures including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Marine turtles are considered by many as mystical, unique and a source of living wonder.

Seeing wildlife in its natural environment, seeing wildlife behaving naturally and seeing rare, unique or unusual wildlife were the three most important features sought in a wildlife tourism experience. (Source: CRC Tourism, 2002. Economic, Education and Conservation Benefits of Sea Turtle Based Ecotourism: A study Focussed on Mon Repos.)

The concept master plan would enable visitors who are seeking an iconic wildlife experience to either participate in the ‘encounter with turtles’ guided program during turtle season and/or view and learn more about the hatchling turtles in the Mon Repos turtle nursery all year round. In terms of wildlife experience the master plan allows for:

• All visitors to Mon Repos at any time of year are guaranteed the opportunity to view a marine turtle and learn more about this species as well as the threats and challenges facing its long term survival;
• Volunteers, researchers and voluntourists can participate in running guided tours for viewing of turtles and encouraging community involvement and ownership of the experience;
• A range of tourism products can be developed around the viewing of the turtles covering experiences such as the viewing, discussions with the researchers, assistance with measuring and indexing and assistance with releasing the turtles to the ocean; and
• Tagging and monitoring of the hatchlings or nesting turtles will also provide a significant benefit to the research at the Centre.

Questions:
Do you want to see opportunities for close encounters with turtles continued at Mon Repos?
Do you support the Master Plan proposal to investigate opportunities for a year round turtle experience with research and education outcomes?
Would you be interested in sponsorship or donations to a Turtle Fund if funds went directly to assist turtle research and conservation?

Photo: Robert Ashdown, Queensland Government
Master plan delivery

The proposed concept Master Plan would need to be delivered through a staged approach that is dependent on available NPRSR funding, potential future State Government and private investment. The long term vision for the site is to create a new and re-imagined visitor information centre that is a world’s best practice turtle experience and conservation movement.

A staged approach is planned for delivery of the vision. A number of proposed immediate actions able to be delivered within existing budget allocation, subject to detailed design and costing after budget allocation, and have a key objective to increase visitor numbers, improve the quality of visitor experience, improve cost efficiencies and return on investment and generate direct benefits for the community, visitors and tourism.

Increasing visitor numbers is important in attracting commercial proponents to take up the café and outdoor recreation opportunities. These services will add substantial value to the local area. The concept master plan also acknowledges the importance of ensuring access to Mon Repos continues to be a community asset.

Initial stages – the First Step Deliverables

A number of proposed activities, subject to detailed design and costing, are able to be delivered within existing available budget and have a key objective to improve the visitor experience in the short term:

- Implement new tourism products to generate revenue from the smaller more engaged group offering;
- Develop new movie and visual products for visitors waiting at the visitor centre for the turtle encounter;
- Implement the ‘gateway’ offering and link to the SGBR;
- Identify and undertake staff resourcing and training to deliver the enhanced tourism product;
- Provide increased resources and training for staff to assist with delivery of the experience;
- Design and construct a new high quality landscaped entry feature, with integrated and illuminated signage, at the Mon Repos Road site access;
- Design and construct a tensile or insulated roof over the existing amphitheatre for increased visitor amenity. The new roof would need to incorporate side walls, fans and low level high pressure sodium lighting (subject to detailed design and costing); and
- Progress the investigation and implementation of a new governance model for the centre.

Long Term Deliverables

For the longer term vision, the proposal is to design and construct a newly expanded and contemporary visitor centre that could contain the following key elements: the year round turtle hatchling nursery, the relocated research facilities, the new interpretive centre, improved NPRSR staff facilities, the restaurant and dining area, retail and merchandising, and an upgraded car park. Longer term deliverables care subject to community consultation and funding.

Question:

Do you have any other comments on the draft master plan for Mon Repos?

Partnerships

Achievement of the proposed vision is dependent upon effective relationships with the community, key stakeholders, local and state government and tourism, event and recreation operators.

To achieve innovative partnerships with commercial operators, NPRSR is committed to ensuring red-tape is minimised and the business model is responsive to market conditions. In establishing arrangements with potential operators NPRSR will ensure the importance of conserving the natural asset is recognised. Commercial operators will need to be selected and accredited based on demonstrated commitment to best practice ecotourism.
Rationale for the Proposed Master Plan

The draft master plan includes proposed deliverables to be actioned within existing available resources and longer term vision which is dependent on securing private and public investment. Delivery of the proposed master plan offers the following benefits:

- Recognise and support the good work already being done by Rangers, researchers and volunteers at Mon Repos
- The delivery of greater year round experiences that are compelling and would attract significant visitors and the local community
- Upgraded and expanded, contemporary visitor centre that contains the facilities to cater for the peak viewing season as well as the research and Ranger operations at the site
- The creation of new high quality interpretive display facilities;
- The creation of a turtle nursery within the research area of the Visitor Centre including hatching pools and viewing decks;
- Entry fees and tiered experiences and pricing structures that provided more sustainable revenue stream for the centre and reflective of the tourism opportunity. Suitable retail and merchandise space to generate additional revenue.
- A new café and public toilets as well as covered dining area;
- New staff accommodation facilities and toilets;
- Covered access way from the car park into the Visitor Centre;
- Approximately 124 car parking spaces including People With Disability (PWD) spaces provided;
- Services access for food and beverage and research related services.
- Developing a shared vision for the conservation effort;
- Enhanced conservation outcomes for marine turtles through reinvestment of ecotourism revenue as well as funds from a Turtle Foundation).

The concept plan also addresses the current challenges with the site, including:

- Visitor centre is not adequate to cater for maximum group of 300 per night during peak season, particularly in humid weather. Conditions for visitors are cramped and uncomfortable.
- Food and beverages are inadequate. There is currently no space in the visitor centre to provide food or seating areas while consuming refreshments.
- Researcher and ranger offices and working space are currently removed from the visitor centre and interpretive and educational experience of the site. New facilities are required including office space and storage and amenities.
- The entry statement to the site is not adequate with lack of signage.
- On-site experiences to reduce potential boredom and discomfort associated with waiting times for the turtle viewing. Particularly in shoulder season or for later groups in the viewing list.
- Governance and business model required that enables visitor products to be developed that respond to market demand and for this revenue to be reinvested into the site development and management.
Have Your Say

Invitation to Comment on the Discussion Paper

We invite you to give your thoughts on the questions we have asked in the Discussion Paper to assist in the finalisation of the master plan. You can submit your feedback by completing an online survey before 21 February 2014.

Visit [www.nprs.qld.gov.au](http://www.nprs.qld.gov.au) for further information and to view the draft Master Plan. Below outlines the next steps in the consultation process.

Thank you for your involvement in this important project.

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**Public Release - 20 Dec 2013**
Public consultation 8 weeks; information at each Gateway Centre, on-line feedback form, community workshop and stakeholder consultation

**Consultation Report - late April 2014**
Review community and stakeholder feedback incorporating key elements of findings and provide Consultation report back to community.

**Final Master Plan - 30 June 2014**
Develop final Master Plan considering community benefits, financial considerations, site constraints and recreation opportunities.
## Summary of Survey Questions

### General

Do you support the draft concept for the redevelopment of the Mon Repos site?

Do you support the centre being re-named to the Mon Repos Turtle Centre?

### Ecotourism

Do you support the inclusion of a variety of ecotourism opportunities at Mon Repos?

With a view to improving financial viability, do you support the plan to engage with local tour operators and businesses to deliver some of services provided on site?

### Outdoor recreation

Are there any outdoor recreation opportunities you would like to see provided on site or in the adjacent conservation park?

### Environmental education and community use

Do you agree with Mon Repos encouraging curriculum based excursions for school groups?

Do you believe the site redevelopment will improve the quality of experience for school groups and the local community?

How would you like to see the local community involved in the delivery of the vision for the site?

Would you interested in returning to Mon Repos if new experiences were available to get ‘behind the scenes’ with turtle conservation and research?

### Wildlife experiences

Do you want to see opportunities for close encounters with turtles continued at Mon Repos?

Do you support the Master Plan proposal to investigate opportunities for a year round turtle experience with research and education outcomes?

Would you be interested in sponsorship or donations to a Turtle Fund if funds went directly to assist turtle research and conservation?

### Wrap up

Do you have any other comments on the draft master plan for Mon Repos?