



Southern Moreton Bay Islands Challenges and Opportunities October 2023

Background

The Southern Moreton Bay Islands (SMBI) comprise a population of 9,000-10,000 people living across four Islands in Moreton Bay. The Islands have an older-than-average population (median age 61 years), low labour force participation rate (13.5% unemployed) and high levels of disadvantage (lowest 4th percentile of the Australian population). Over the past few years there has been marked population growth with a younger generation moving to the Islands, employed on the mainland and/or building businesses on the Islands.

The Islands also have a thriving and dynamic artist and artisan community, which offers a unique ecotourism potential. Most businesses are island-based and are relatively small, with viability constrained by the high cost of materials and transport. While there has been significant investment in island infrastructure over the past few years, poor strategic planning at a State and Local level means that there is much more to be done to ensure economic and social stability.

Key challenges

Transport

Transport to the Islands is a key challenge. While there is a regular and reliable Translink ferry to Redland Bay (this is now approaching capacity) travel from the mainland ferry terminal is constrained by parking, commuter bus service (ill-equipped for transporting passengers laden with luggage), and long travel times to the Brisbane CBD. As such, many people are reliant on having a 'mainland car'. Barge access to the Islands is very constrained and relatively expensive. Many mainland businesses will not deliver to, or service the Islands because of barge availability. Costs on the Islands are higher than on the mainland.

Environment

The Islands do not have sewerage, creating environmental risk to the surrounding marine national park, and constraining commercial development. Though Redland City Council (RCC) is believed to have undertaken research into this issue, there is no clear strategy for the future.

Zoning and red tape

The nature of commercial and business development has changed since the original zoning of the islands and commercial/industrial precincts are poorly defined or absent. Environmental planning to protect habitat does not reflect the unique nature of the islands. Being a regional area within a major metropolitan

city is a key challenge. The 'one size fits all' planning approach to zoning and development does not meet the needs of the islands and impedes development and incentivizes inappropriate development on the Islands. An 6,000-lot capacity for new housing indicates the important role of the Islands in meeting growing housing demand in South Eastern Queensland, and its environmental status highlights the importance of this being done in a way that protects the environment and culture of the islands. Well-planned growth and infrastructure investment can showcase the islands as a gateway for cultural and eco-sensitive tourism to Moreton Bay and Stradbroke Island.

Why this paper is important

The issues and challenges confronting the islands have been subject to several reports and representation to local, state, and federal agencies and elected representatives. The development of this paper was initiated by the Southern Moreton Bay Islands Chamber of Commerce in January 2023 and has been refined in collaboration with Macleay Island Progress Association, Lamb Island Resident Association and Karragarra Resident Association. It has also involved consultations with clubs, local community organisations and members of the community.

Over the past eight months, we have had to opportunity to host visits to the islands and discuss these issues with Hon Henry Pike, Federal Member of Bowman; Hon Kim Richards, State Member for Redlands; Hon David Crisaful, State Member for Broadwater and Leader of the Opposition; Councilor Mark Edwards, Redlands City Council; Logan Redland Regional Development Australia Board; and the Economic Development Team Redland City Council. Building on these consultations, we have identified key issues and opportunities for the future development of the SMBI.

These issues are not an exhaustive summary of the opportunities to enhance the quality of life and economic development of the islands and broader region. The overarching issue is the need for a more collaborative and transparent planning process across all levels of government and engagement with the community. Most of the action items can commence with a 3–6-month lead period. The opportunities identified could be prioritised for detailed planning and implementation based on funding.

Community based planning

Issue	Description	Opportunity
<i>Inter-government strategic planning and investment</i>	Issues of transport, infrastructure and program funding require collaboration across all three tiers of government and the local community.	STATE: Investment in community development infrastructure on SMBI to engage in LOCAL GOVERNMENT-led strategic planning involving the local community to address key areas of infrastructure investment, transport, employment and training, zoning, environment protection and community capacity building.

Why community-based planning is important

To ensure that services are responsive to community need, it is important that the community is meaningfully engaged in service planning.

Regional status for SMBI

Issue	Description	Opportunity
<i>Reclassification of SMBI as regional</i>	The replacement of the “Building Better Regions Fund” with the “Growing Our Regions Fund” by the Federal Government has excluded SMBI from regional growth funds. This has been an important source of economic development for the islands.	FEDERAL: Consideration of submissions by Redlands Council, Logan Redland RDA, Federal Member to include SMBI in regional eligibility for “Growing Our Regions” funding.
<i>Dedicated federal/state budget allocation for Redlands</i>	Redlands and SMBI, in particular, are not well reflected in dedicated funding allocations to South East Queensland. Many of the infrastructure investment requirements of the Islands are outside of the capacity of Redlands Council to fund. A dedicated federal/state funding allocation is required to address priority infrastructure requirements including sewerage and roads.	FEDERAL/STATE: Upfront investment fund, with a proportion to be recouped through development fees as lots are developed. In effect a “user pays” model where services are put in first.

Why regional status for SMBI is important

Prior to 2023, SMBI was classified as a regional area. This was a critical factor in accessing regional growth funding to support economic development, for example upgrade of the Macleay Island Bowls Club, TIDE Festival and the Macleay Island Arts Complex. As an island, with restricted access to the mainland, high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and it is inequitable that SMBI should be excluded from regional growth funds while areas of the mainland Gold Coast are deemed eligible.

Integrated transport

Issue	Description	Opportunity
<i>Dedicated federal/state budget allocation for Redlands</i>	Redlands and SMBI, in particular, are not well reflected in dedicated funding allocations to South East Queensland. Many of the infrastructure investment requirements of the Islands are outside of the capacity of Redlands Council to fund. A dedicated federal/state funding allocation is required to address priority infrastructure requirements including sewerage, roads and related transport infrastructure.	FEDERAL/STATE: Upfront investment fund, with a proportion to be recouped through development fees as lots are developed. In effect a part “user pays” model where services are put in first and recouped through lot development and/or connection with services (e.g. sewerage).
<i>Weinam Creek Parking</i>	Priority for completion of parking committed through PDA and ‘soft’ options to better manage parking demand and mainland traffic flow.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT/ STATE: Address public transport constraints and secure park-and-ride opportunities for island and mainland residents. LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Transparent review, with community involvement, of PDA design options to meet SMBI parking demand, provide potential for future expansion and improve overall amenity of the area for Island and mainland residents. LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Additional car-share spaces to meet demand and security of lease to allow electrification of the car-share fleet.
<i>Island parking and gateway access</i>	The lack of public transport on the Islands, results in a reliance on private vehicles. Current parking at ferry terminals exceeds capacity.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Appropriately designed parking to enhance amenity and Island ferry terminals as the ‘Gateway’ to the Islands. STATE: On-demand public transport shuttles on Islands.
<i>Short-term Island parking arrangements</i>	Commercial land near ferry terminals is unused pending commercial development.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Temporary approvals to use vacant Commercial land for parking without Material Change of Use fees and infrastructure investment.

Issue	Description	Opportunity
<i>Marine transport strategy</i>	Work with the community to develop a 'Marine Transport Strategy' as required in the RCC's own SMBI Integrated Local Transport Plan of 2011. Review and recommendations regarding whether the current mainland terminal will be sufficient for a doubling of future SMBI population demand and larger passenger ferries.	STATE/LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Local government to lead planning process involving State and community.
<i>Vehicle ferries</i>	The number and frequency of barges make it difficult and costly to bring vehicles to the islands, impacting the availability of mainland services on the islands, and any services to the Lamb and Karragarra Islands, the overall cost of business, and contributing to resident demand for a mainland car.	STATE/LOCAL GOVERNMENT/SEALINK: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introduce inter-island barge – Review the cost of barges to increase affordability for businesses and residents – Reduce the need for mainland car parking.
<i>Inter-island ferries</i>	SMBI inter-island ferries are reaching capacity with some people being turned away at peak travel times. Access between islands is limited. Ferries have limited capacity to manage increased demand by passengers with mobility scooters, strollers, bicycles, etc.	STATE: Community engagement in the planning process to review of existing ferries (STATE, LOCAL, SEALINK, and COMMUNITY) and future growth requirements. This is a sub-component of an integrated transport strategy.
<i>North Stradbroke – SMBI – Redland Bay ferry</i>	A Translink-funded ferry from Redland Bay to North Stradbroke Island via one SMBI Island would provide the required staff for Stradbroke businesses, create employment opportunities for SMBI residents, foster tourism potential for SMBI and Redland Bay, and provide access to North Stradbroke Island by residents from the southern parts of Redlands and SMBI.	STATE: Translink ferry to North Stradbroke Island from Redland Bay via SMBI.

Why an integrated transport strategy is important

Transport problems facing the islands are complex and interrelated. A sustainable transport strategy requires close consultation with the community to address the availability and affordability of transport on the islands and mainland.

Economic development

Issue	Description	Opportunity
<i>Inadequate basic services to support growth.</i>	Planning for the original subdivision and land release on SMBI was inadequate. The SMBI population has outgrown its service base and the infrastructure is inadequate. Supply of electricity is variable; many areas do not have mobile phone coverage and many roads are unsealed and lack curbs and guttering.	FEDERAL/STATE: Dedicated regional growth funds to develop a schedule of works prioritised in consultation with the community.
<i>Affordable and environmentally friendly sewerage</i>	There is no sewerage on the islands. Council is unable to meet the upfront costs of sewerage and existing residents have already invested in septic systems and cannot afford sewerage connection.	FEDERAL/STATE/LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Transparent review of sewerage system as part of strategy for funding development.
<i>Ad hoc development and lack of town centres</i>	Island gateways are not welcoming to visitors and villages are poorly laid out. For example, Council depot and Energex depots occupy prime commercial areas at the gateway to Russell Island.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Community-led planning, resourced by local government to develop precinct plans for Village/Central Business Districts that improve access, usability and amenity of Commercial precincts.
<i>Positive encouragement for small business growth</i>	Council planning processes and costs act as a barrier to local businesses that do not have the market to recoup investment costs.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Review of Council planning requirements, minimising the impact of Council 'silos' on Development Applications. Implement a 'small business friendly' approach to planning.
<i>Commercial and industrial zoning</i>	The Commercial and Industrial zoning for the islands is not reflective of island needs and is often too little, or in the wrong place. This is exacerbated by inconsistent enforcement.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Review of island zoning in collaboration with Island businesses and community to meet needs and new business models.
<i>Employment and training for youth</i>	Distance and poor public transport connectivity to TAFE/University is a challenge for young people without a car.	STATE GOVERNMENT: Bring TAFE formal training to a base on, or accessible from SMBI to enable Island youth (especially those in need of practical rather than academic education) to access the skilled training competencies which complement their practical on-job component.

How we can support economic development

Regional infrastructure funding is critical for investments in economic development, including capital and infrastructure. Redland City Council, 'one size fits all' planning for a major metropolitan city does not accommodate the regional nature of SMBI, nor work to protect the environmental and cultural value of the community and the economic benefits that this can bring. Distance and lack of integrated transport is a key impediment to youth employment and training.

Developing eco-tourism

Issue	Description	Opportunity
<i>Maintain and improve ecological values.</i>	Current planning for residential development fails to recognise existing habitat. The existing 'one size' fits all approach of a major metropolitan city is destroying the local environment and habitat of the islands.	STATE/ LOCAL GOVERNMENT: working with the community to develop a locally based environmental and habitat protection plan. Continue to lobby the Federal government as to unnecessary over-SMBI flightpaths.
<i>Maximise opportunities for marine and ecotourism.</i>	Island access by passing boat traffic is poorly developed. Opportunities for walking/cycling tracks have not been realised. Cross-island opportunities (SMBI, Coochiemudlo, Stradbroke Island) are limited by poor transport connections.	STATE/LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Invest in an island destination-based tourism strategy, designed with the island communities.
<i>Improve marine access to all islands</i>	Need for visitor moorings and jetties at each boat ramp for recreational boats and waterborne tour boats. Additional jetty at Macleay Boat/Arts/Bowls Club location.	STATE/LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Investment strategy for visitor moorings and landing sites for SMBI.
<i>Maximise opportunity for creative arts</i>	SMBI has a high level of creative artists, musicians and entertainers on the Islands. This tourism potential is not realised.	See above.
<i>Increase the availability of short-stay tourism</i>	Council costs of a Material Change of use, additional parking requirements (not required for public transport-based tourism), and zoning restrictions, limit the development of short-stay accommodation.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Review of Council based processes and costs of island-based tourism and the impact it has on local tourism.

How we can support sustainable eco-tourism for the islands

Southern Moreton Bay is a marine and wetland area of designated international importance. This and the natural beauty of the Islands, its local fauna and the creativity of artists and artisan's resident on SMBI makes the islands well placed to become an ecotourism destination in SE Queensland. This requires the ability to leverage the marine transport corridors in which the islands are located, support the development of environment and arts-based tourism and short stay accommodation.

Health and well being

Issue	Description	Opportunity
<i>Funding strategy for open-space</i>	There are limited sporting spaces on Macleay and Karragarra Islands. Insurance limitations on using Council space, limited off-lead parks, etc. which limit recreational opportunities.	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Funding to achieve recommendations of current open-space strategy.
<i>Support a stable funding model for the delivery of on-island services that are island-based</i>	The current service provider does not engage with the community and has not advertised for island representation on its management board. Maximise delivery of SMBI social and health services by on-island organisations and premises. Provide consistent, continuing funding models rather than the present reliance on intermittent grant funding opportunities.	STATE GOVERNMENT: Funding for community-based services delivered to the island should be delivered by island-based services. Review existing contracts before auto-renewal.
<i>Provision of spaces for visiting health professionals and service organisations</i>	Current arrangements are ad hoc and not consistently planned or developed for growth.	STATE GOVERNMENT: Infrastructure investment on shared service hubs for the islands.
<i>Ageing in place</i>	While home-based care is available, residential zoning impedes the capacity for independent shared occupancy (multi-dwelling).	LOCAL GOVERNMENT: community engagement in planning to develop an aged housing policy that supports ageing in place.
<i>Access to specialist services</i>	Access to specialist appointments requires travel to principal referral hospitals. This can be difficult using currently available public transport.	STATE GOVERNMENT: Review outpatient strategies in other regional areas for appropriateness to the Islands, e.g., planned scheduling of appointments with shuttle bus from Redland Bay Satellite Hospital.

Why supporting health and well being is important

Given the socio-economic status of the islands, a median age of 61 years and increasing numbers of young families moving to the Islands there needs to be an increased focus by Council and State government on building health and supporting the community to come together. This means ensuring community-funded services are delivered by organisations based on the islands, accommodation is available for visiting health professionals and Council zoning supports ageing accommodation options for older people to remain on the islands, including multi-occupancy zoning and cohabitation housing models.