Project Manager,
Cairns Airport Land Use Plan Submissions
Cairns Airport Pty Ltd
PO Box 57
Airport Administration Centre
Cairns Airport, QLD, 4870

Dear Madam/Sir,

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Incorporated (CAFNEC) is pleased to provide the following submission relating to the Cairns Airport Draft Land Use Plan (“the Draft Plan”). The following submission predominantly addresses aspects of the Draft Plan that will directly impact on the natural environment. We also raise concerns regarding the noise impacts on neighbouring communities arising from anticipated increases in airport traffic.

This submission is made on behalf of the members of the CAFNEC organisation. Queries related to this submission can be directed to Ms Sarah Hoyal (CAFNEC Coordinator) on 40321746, or by email on coord@cafnec.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Ellen Weber
President – Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Inc.
Introduction

The Cairns Airport has prepared a Draft Land Use Plan ("the Plan"), effectively equivalent of a local government planning scheme, to guide future development at the site. Public comment has been invited for the Plan with submissions closing 25 February 2011. The following submission

CAFNEC is the peak regional non-government environment organisation for Far North Queensland. CAFNEC is incorporated as a not-for-profit organisation under the Qld Associations Incorporation Act 1981 and is one of nine regional conservation councils for Queensland. Our area of interest covers the area bounded roughly by the Torres Strait Islands in the north, to Cardwell in the south, the outer reef to the east and the Northern Gulf region to the west. As the peak environmental organisation for far north Queensland, the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Incorporated (CAFNEC)

CAFNEC recognises the contribution the Cairns Airport makes to the vibrant tropical community that we all enjoy in Cairns. We also recognise the need to provide for safe and efficient air travel to service the northern Queensland community. However, we do not believe that provision of this service needs to be at the expense of the natural coastal environment and neighbouring suburbs. We believe that all aspects of the

The submission comprises the following:

- a brief overview highlighting the site’s environmental values, many of which are not adequately considered or conserved by the Draft Plan;
- the aspect of the Draft Plan that is supported or opposed;
- reasons why the aspect is supported or opposed;
- where appropriate, the specific chapter or section or page of the Draft Plan that pertains to the aspect supported or opposed. Where mentioned, they are identified in bold font; and
- specific solutions that address concerns raised in this submission.

Site Environmental Values

GEOGRAPHY

The Draft Plan directly affects allotments (called “Airport Lots”) shown in Map 1.1. The airport lies at the southern edge of the Barron River delta, right at the Barron River mouth. The airport lies, to a large extent, below the highest astronomical tide level (Map 7.7(A)). Flooding of the delta is reasonably common1 whilst virtually the entire airport area is subject to a storm tide inundation <3.86 m AHD (Map 7.7(A)).

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In common with many deltaic environments, the Barron River delta has reconfigured itself several times within recorded history\(^2\), with, for instance, the river mouth moving from Ellie Point to its current location and Thomatis Creek joining up with the main stream of the Barron River within the last 100 years.

There are several areas within or near the airport area that are recognised for their environmental significance:

- wetland communities (Directory of Important Wetlands\(^3\), **Map 7.10**);
- places listed on the Register of the National Estate, including the Cairns Tidal Wetlands and the Great Barrier Reef Region (**Map 2.2**);
- areas containing potential acid sulfate soils (**Map 7.7(A)**);
- declared fish habitat area (**Map 7.7(B)**);
- erosion prone area (**Map 7.7(B)**);
- mapped remnant ‘of concern’ and ‘not of concern’ vegetation (**Map 7.7(C)**);
- the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

**TERRESTRIAL FLORA/FAUNA**

The natural vegetation of the airport area is dominated by mangroves. Smaller areas of chenopod-dominated salt marsh and acacia-dominated dune woodland\(^4\). Patches of the Commonwealth EPBC-listed littoral rainforest community are mapped to the east the Airport Lots and on Redden Island.

The airport area provides substantial areas of habitat for the EPBC-listed Vulnerable ant plant (*Myrmecodia beccarii*). Strand areas provide habitat for beach thick-knees (*Esacus magnirostris*). The Barron delta is also well known amongst bird-watchers for its migratory waders (EPBC-listed migratory bird species that are protected under international convention). They are known to feed on the exposed mudflats when tides are low. At high tide they rest on Casuarina Point at the Barron River mouth, and salt pans and marshes near Cairns airport\(^5\).

**MARINE ENVIRONMENT**

The Barron River estuary is reported as a spawning and nursery ground for a variety of fish and prawn species.\(^6\) Its value for these important functions is directly related to both the


health and extent of mangrove and wetland communities. The Airport Lots support a diverse and well developed mangrove community, and thus contributes substantially to these environmental parameters.

**SOCIAL**
The airport is surrounded by a substantial urban population, with several residential suburbs lying within the most commonly used flight paths, and are therefore subject to aircraft noise impacts. Yorkeys Knob, Holloways Beach, Machans Beach, Aeroglen, Cairns North and the CBD are identified as subject to airport noise (CairnsPlan, Map 7.5(E)).

**Review of the Draft Plan**

**ASPECT – ZONING**
CAFNEC strongly opposes the designation of existing mapped remnant vegetation areas (Map 7.7(C)) for the purposes of future airport expansion (Map 3.1).

CAFNEC believes the area devoted to Green Space (Map 3.1) is inadequate, and that provisions of the Green Space Zone Code are too free in allowing impacts on the zone.

**REASONS**
Our reasons for opposing the zoning as proposed in Map 3.1 are two-fold. Firstly, we are concerned with the substantial environmental impacts on important coastal ecosystems. Secondly, after the recent losses at Port Hinchinbrook associated with Cyclone Yasi’s storm surge, we are acutely aware of the potential effects of surges on important local infrastructure. An expanded airport would suffer even greater economic impacts.

Between 1952 and 1996, 180 ha of mangroves and salt marsh communities were lost from the Barron River delta, with almost two thirds of this attributed to land reclamation associated with the various expansion phases of the Cairns International Airport7. The Draft Plan zoning provides for a massive additional clearing of wetland, mangrove and coastal dune vegetation within its expanded “Movement Zone” and “Mixed Aviation Zone” to support its growth goals. Additionally, what little Green Space zoning remains can be cleared to for the construction of navigation aids and other unspecified “minor airport infrastructure” (Green Space Zone Code, Performance Outcome 3.2).

**RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS**

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