



RHSQ

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland

Commissariat Store
a museum built by convicts
115 William Street

PO Box 12057
BRISBANE GEORGE STREET QLD 4003
Telephone: (07) 3221 4198
www.queenslandhistory.org
info@queenslandhistory.org.au
ABN: 34 217 251 028

16 August 2021

Chair
Regional Telecommunications Review
Australian Government
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Email: secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

PROVISION OF WI-FI CONNECTIVITY AT THE BURKE & WILLS DIG TREE

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland (RHSQ) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review as well as participating in the online consultations on 10 August 2021, particularly regarding the provision of Wi-Fi connectivity at the iconic Burke & Wills Dig Tree.

Background

The Society is a voluntary not-for-profit organisation established in 1913 and is Queensland's peak history body.

In 1964, The Royal Historical Society of Queensland was made Trustee by the Queensland Government of the one-acre Dig Tree Reserve at the Bulloo Bulloo Waterhole on the bank of Cooper Creek in far south-western Queensland. This was gazetted on page 1083 in the Queensland Government Gazette dated 2 July 1964. Following a further survey of the Reserve in September 1985, on page 285 in the Queensland Government Gazette dated 24 January 1987, the following area was gazetted: R 7, being lot 1, on plan CPR4, an area of 4,470 square metres in the Parish Oontoo, County Cooper, on the bank of Cooper Creek.

The Dig Tree Reserve is of national historical significance as it was Camp site 65 in the tragic Burke and Wills Expedition from Melbourne inland to the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1860-1861. The Reserve is listed on both the Commonwealth and Queensland Government Heritage Registers.

The site includes the three historic Eucalyptus coolabah trees: the Dig Tree, the Brahe Tree and the Face Tree. It is located in remote far south-western Queensland 320 kilometres west of Thargomindah or more than 1300kms west of Brisbane. Even though it is so remote, it has been independently estimated that more than 40,000 visitors a year visit the Reserve and is a major tourist attraction in the district.

Current situation

Over the last seven years the Society has undertaken a major conservation upgrade and refurbishment of the Reserve with new signage, sculptured blazes showing the words carved on the coolabah trees plus a new disability access pathway and boardwalk. Also remedial work has been carried out to stop soil erosion caused by flooding from Cooper Creek around the Dig Tree on the Reserve.

The upgrade work was funded by the Society and all three levels of government for which the Society and the community are very grateful. The work was undertaken on behalf of the Society by the Bulloo Shire Council, an initiative to assist with generating local employment opportunities. Of note, the Bulloo Shire Council geographical area as the local government that includes the Dig Tree Reserve is larger than that of the state of Tasmania.

To promote all aspects of the Dig Tree both historically and culturally, the RHSQ now has a professionally designed website: www.thedigtrees.com.au . Its many features include:

- Details about visiting including “no shops, showers, water, power or internet”.
- History of the site
- Aboriginal people and their significance
- About the environment

To fund its responsibilities, the RHSQ has in place a Conservation Fee which was increased in July 2020 to \$20 a motor vehicle and \$60 a bus for entry to the site. This was the first increase since the fee was introduced in 1995. We ask the public to pay this, but unfortunately, we are not able to enforce such a fee. The fee covers the costs of employing a Ranger, which itself is very difficult because of its location and lack of facilities, plus the costs of maintenance and upkeep of the site and other additional expenses. Additionally, the Bulloo Shire Council provides a vehicle for the Ranger to perform their duties.

Although the public are able to place the Conservation Fee for entry in the ‘honesty box’ at the entrance to the area, many today do not carry cash or the correct cash so they are unable to pay even if they wish to. There is also the option to pay the fee online through the website; however, as there is no Wi-Fi connectivity at the Reserve, they are unable to pay that way or via the QR Code. All these details to enable visitors to pay online are on the signage at the entrance to the site and elsewhere on the Reserve. No Wi-Fi connectivity means that the RHSQ misses out on many people paying the Conservation Fee, a fee which is vital for its continued operation.

Again, because of the remote location of the Dig Tree Reserve, the Society is constantly concerned about the lack of Wi-Fi connectivity and mobile telephone services generally for the safety of visitors and the need for emergency contact. The Society receives many complaints each year about the lack of Wi-Fi facilities in this major tourist location.

It has to be recognised that the 14-kilometre road from the bitumen highway between Thargomindah and Innamincka is dirt and gravel and subject to major washouts in times of rainfall. Over the last two years the Society has had to contend not only with rainfall and washouts closing the roads but also with the implications of the COVID-19 virus.

Furthermore, with the lack of Wi-Fi communication facilities, it means that if people are stranded there could be considerable time before they are found.

Thus there are major security issues for the site and this has grown enormously in recent years as the numbers of visitors have increased significantly. As noted earlier, these days over 40,000 visit a year. Overall safety has become a greater issue over time.

Recommendation

The construction of a tower or facility for the provision of telecommunication services will encourage a much greater number of outback tourists to the location at a time when Commonwealth Government is constantly promoting tourism to these locations.

It is suggested that the main facility should be placed at the entrance to the site where the Conservation Fee is to be paid, which is roughly 300 metres before the entrance to the Reserve itself.

I invite members of the review panel and all those involved in this project to visit the Dig Tree Reserve as soon as possible to experience this famous part of the Australian nation.

Again, the RHSQ appreciates the opportunity of make these submissions and requests that the telecommunications authorities and companies provide a means for the people of Australia to have connectivity to this iconic site.

Looking forward to your favourable response as soon as possible,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Denver Beanland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Denver Beanland AM
PRESIDENT