

Road push gains ground



Picturesque: The site of a proposed \$1.5 billion development, and an approved eco-resort at Ella Bay, near Innisfail.

FLYING Fish Point residents' push for a proposed \$1.4 billion resort town's main access road to go through rainforest rather than their seaside community is gaining ground.

Member for Mulgrave Warren Pitt backed concerned residents yesterday, saying he believed the rainforest route was the least disruptive option for a major resort planned for Ella Bay near Innisfail.

"I want to know why it's been taken off the table," Mr Pitt said.

The proposed eastern access road – which would run from Garradunga to Ella Bay and pass through about 1km of Wet Tropics rainforest – is not included among the four road options in a newly-released

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environmental impact statement.

Witt Property Group co-developer Warren Witt said it was not favoured by the Environmental Protection Authority because it segregated rainforest habitat.

Mr Pitt said he understood freehold rainforest could be handed over by developers to achieve the western access route.

"We need to be practical – this is the least disruptive option and we may be able to have a net increase of rainforest under protection, which has got to be a benefit as well," Mr Pitt said.

The four alternatives on the books are

two routes along the beach, one on the existing road and another through bushland behind the small community.

An Environmental Protection Authority spokesman would not comment on the beachfront road – which would cross in front of absolute beachfront homes on some land that is currently underwater – because it was on the table.

But he said the department had advised against the western route because of "the severe impacts which road construction and vehicular access could place on the endangered southern cassowary".

The vine forest, with its small tracts of rainforest, was a vital link between northern and southern sections of Ella Bay National Park, he said.

Abundant water major lure north

ABUNDANT water will be used as a major lure in an upcoming Country Week exhibition designed to encourage people to move to the Far North from the drought stressed southeast corner of Queensland.

"It's about moving people to the water and not the water to the people," Country Week chief executive officer Peter Bailey said.

But Australia's most precious resource will not be the only attraction used at an upcoming Country Week Exhibition designed to sell the Far North to our southern cousins.

Mr Bailey, who was in the region this week to attract councils and industry bodies to take part in the July exhibition, said the idea behind it was to attract professional, skilled people to Far North Queensland.

But he said it was not just about attracting people to Cairns but also to regional centres such as Mareeba, Atherton and Innisfail.

Mr Bailey said a number of factors including long commutes to work and the increasingly frenetic pace of southern Queensland, was making the Far North's relaxed lifestyle increasingly attractive.

"We think a lot of peo-



Bailey: Encouraging people to the Far North.

ple in the southeast corner want to head to the Far North," Mr Bailey said.

"A similar program in New South Wales has seen hundreds of people move from Sydney to the regions."

Queensland Communities Minister Warren Pitt said he was 100 per cent behind the exhibition.

"I encourage councils, businesses, employment services and others with an interest in developing a sustainable, liveable and prosperous rural Queensland to seize this opportunity to highlight what their region has to offer those considering a tree change," he said.

It was funded by the Queensland Government Blueprint for the Bush Program.

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Savvy investors making a killing

SAVVY Cairns property investors are making a killing from escalating rents and the lowest national rental vacancy rate on record.

New research by real estate website – realestate.com.au – showed more than half of Australian home buyers indicated these conditions motivated buyers to purchase a property for rental purposes only, a view endorsed by REIQ Far Northern Zone chairman Chris Gay.

With the rental vacancy factor in Cairns running at

1.7 per cent for March (1.4 per cent for houses, 2 per cent for units), the demand for accommodation is particularly high.

Mr Gay said this was generally good news for Cairns as it showed people wanted to live here.

"From our point of view it makes things a little bit difficult as we would like to be able to provide people with accommodation," Mr Gay said.

He said the situation was not new despite plans for new rental units in Cairns and the situation was unlikely to change

soon. "I know there are a lot of people on the government (housing) waiting list," he said.

Mr Gay said he was concerned not enough government accommodation was being built.

"At the moment there's unlikely to be great relief in these areas," he said.

Mr Gay said he was aware there were significant numbers of people on the government waiting list and there was a need for more government housing.

Meanwhile, the number of investors searching for property on realestate.com.au more than doubled in the past 12 months, now representing one in five visitors to the realestate.com.au site.

Website general manager Shaun Di Gregorio said there was a pattern in recent months where investment demand had fuelled a rising trend in the number of loans going to investors rather than to home buyers or for renovations and makeovers.

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