

TOURISM NOOSA MEMBERS
NOOSA COUNCIL ELECTION FORUM

TUESDAY 27 FEBRUARY, 10am-12.30pm
NOOSA BOATHOUSE, GYMPIE TCE, NOOSAVILLE

MAYORAL CANDIDATES

NICK HLUSZKO
INGRID JACKSON
JOHN MORRALL
FRANK WILKIE

COUNCILLOR CANDIDATES

MAT BANKES
CHRIS DARWEN
KAREN FINZEL
FIONA JACOBS
JOE JURISEVIC
AMELIA LORENTSON
LEIGH MCCREADY
ANDREA NEWLAND
MICHELLE NGATAI-STOKES
JESS PHILLIPS
ALECIA STAINES
BRIAN STOCKWELL
TOM WEGENER
NICOLA WILSON

CANDIDATES' RESPONSES

Tourism Noosa invited all Mayoral and Councillor candidates in the 16 March Local Government election to respond in writing to three questions relating to the visitor economy.

Questions asked of each candidate by MC Kylie Lang at the forum will be based on their written response.

The candidates' responses are presented as provided to Tourism Noosa. Tourism Noosa has not verified statements or statistics contained in candidates' responses.

APOLOGY:

Chris Darwen, Councillor Candidate.

At this time, Tourism Noosa has not received written responses from Councillor Candidates Andrea Newland and Michelle Ngatai-Stokes.

MAYORAL CANDIDATES

NICK HLUSZKO – MAYORAL CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Tourism is clearly the economic backbone of our shire - it always was and will continue to be. What has become very evident is that there is a disconnect between Tourism strategy and other council strategy e.g. infrastructure and transport strategies. They are at odds with each other and must be resolved.

We need to commit to complete the DMP and do extensive consultation and an infrastructure and policy plan to implement it. Most of these directly involved in the Tourism business here with who I have spoken to feel it is taking too long/lost sight of it. Many do not understand the economic value of tourism in the community eg. that the Xmas crowds generate \$x or % of the local economy so have to be tolerated

Council has to and must do more than free buses. We now have nearly 50,000 visitors per week - time to stop putting our heads in the sand and invest in the infrastructure that makes residents and visitors lives better. A good recent example of the 'don't build it and they won't come' Council mentality is the upgrade to Noosa Pde. We had a golden opportunity to install a dedicated bus lane which would have gone a long way to solving many problems and might have abetted the park 'n ride concept but we did not!

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa's visitor economy across the region.

I have concerns that we are moving into segments of tourism which have not as yet been quantified nor qualified. Many are advocating diversification of the tourist economy. Before even going down this path I would want to see very detailed consumer insights research before we potentially 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' and move away from our core business.

We promote Noosa's natural assets. If we list the say top 12-15 natural assets e.g. Hastings St; Main Beach; Sunshine; etc and ask visitors to rate and rank each (current and potential domestic and international) then do the same with as yet unproven tourist offerings e.g. biosphere, hinterland events, etc, we should have a much clearer picture as to where to invest and focus not only marketing funds but infrastructure investment.

I discourage any vague statements or references to idealism concepts which are not based in empirical evidence. The other major concern is that if the tourism strategy does not consider the impact upon especially hinterland communities - roads, parking, development, accommodation needs,, etc, etc there are likely to be adverse impacts that will detract from everyday life and Noosa's brand.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?

My greatest concern is that of the \$3.3mill income that NT receives annually only 33% actually goes to marketing the rest goes to SG&A. While the effectiveness of marketing efforts suggest some success in terms of contribution to the local economy and visitor numbers I feel that we have to challenge ourselves to find creative ways to convert SG&A to more marketing funds.

The basis of my view is that when analysing the future bookings - competitor analysis, the trend for Noosa (while better than Douglas, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast) is still trending down dramatically for 2024-25. Then when you examine overnight visitors Year on Year. 2023 was actually the lowest of the past 5 years as at 12/2024. This is of concern especially when the average length of stay has not changed over the same period. In summary, the trends are not great and with scant marketing funds this will only get worse.

INGRID JACKSON – MAYORAL CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Tourism is a significant contributor to Noosa's economy. In addition to income for local tourism businesses and providing jobs for residents, the success of the tourism sector has a positive flow on effect to other local industry sectors.

As part of representing the value add of the tourism sector, the Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes not only direct tourism sales and employment figures but also the value add to other industries. For example, data for 2021/22 shows direct sales in the Noosa Shire tourism sector was \$280million and additional sales in other sectors was \$359million. The value add for employment in other sectors is similarly beneficial. (see www.economy.id.com.au available on the Noosa Council website)

To preserve Noosa's attractiveness as a destination and keep Noosa a wonderful place for residents requires a balanced approach to visitation, ideally attracting high value visitors at low volumes, which has been a Tourism Noosa strategy for many years. At the same time, tourist facilities also need to continue to be available to suit visitors with all levels of income. The goal is a thriving visitor economy without overtourism.

A well planned Destination Management Plan based on research and impact analyses is vital to managing the influx of visitors from the growing South East Queensland and the international capacity of the Sunshine Coast airport. The economic benefits of tourism and economic impacts more broadly need to be part of this planning, as must modelling of carrying capacity.

Addressing infrastructure, roads, transport, traffic management, parking, waste, the river and the environment are vital, together with a finely tuned planning scheme and local laws to regulate and enforce compliance and keep Noosa Shire a beautiful place to visit, work and live.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa's visitor economy across the region.

As the local government, the role of Council is to establish the framework and settings that facilitate a successful and well-managed tourism sector.

Some of the levers available to Council include an evidence-based Destination Management Plan, the Noosa Plan which delineates zoning and STA limits, local laws to regulate compliance, and the priorities and measures agreed in the Tourism Noosa Funding Deed.

It is up to Tourism Noosa to work within the set parameters to achieve its goals by marketing, facilitating initiatives, and providing support to tourism businesses.

As Mayor, I will be seeking for Tourism Noosa to take a strategic approach to underpin its strategies by not only reflecting Noosa values, but by carrying out periodic SWOT analyses, market research and tracking global and domestic economic and tourism trends.

The research and analysis reports thus derived can also be provided to assist Tourism Noosa's member businesses and as an input to Noosa Council's destination management planning. Ongoing research and analysis is vital for sustaining Noosa's visitor economy.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?

For the record, the 2023 Tourism Noosa Strategy states that "The Noosa region attracted just over 2 million visitors in the year ending March 2023, including domestic overnight visitors and day-trippers, for a record \$1.7B."

In this question, there is no evidence provided to demonstrate a causal relationship between Tourism Noosa activities and the visitor expenditure.

If I become Mayor, I would hope that, in order to reassure Council of the value its \$2.5 million annual investment, Tourism Noosa would provide more sophisticated assessments. I would encourage Tourism Noosa to seek expert input to estimate the extent to which tourism expenditure in Noosa Shire can be attributed to Tourism Noosa activities.

This would require a methodology to estimate the difference between tourism expenditure with versus without Tourism Noosa interventions over the years.

As Mayor, I would also want to see the Tourism Noosa funding deed to contain measures indicating Tourism Noosa's value add, professionally calculated, i.e. what percentage of gross tourist expenditure is attributable to Tourism Noosa, and what percentage would have been expended regardless.

JOHN MORRALL – MAYORAL CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts about tourism in Noosa?

Tourism is a fascinating and dynamic industry that plays a significant role in Noosa Shires economy. Tourism can stimulate economic growth by generating revenue, creating job opportunities, and supporting local businesses. It contributes to the development of infrastructure and services in tourist destinations. Tourism promotes cultural exchange and understanding between people from different backgrounds.

Travelers can immerse themselves in new cultures, traditions, and lifestyles, fostering mutual respect and appreciation. Tourism can enhance social connections and relationships by bringing people together from diverse backgrounds. It can also promote community engagement, cultural preservation, and heritage conservation in tourist destinations. The tourism industry is constantly evolving, with new travel trends emerging, such as experiential travel, adventure tourism, ecotourism, and digital nomadism. Technology has also transformed the way people plan and experience their travels.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa’s visitor economy across the region.

1. Diversification of Tourism Offerings: Develop a wide range of attractions and activities to cater to different types of visitors. This can include cultural experiences, outdoor adventures, culinary tours, eco-tourism, and sports. Look outside the square.
2. Infrastructure Development: Invest in infrastructure to improve accessibility, accommodation options, transportation, and facilities for visitors. This can enhance the overall visitor experience and attract more tourists.
3. Sustainable Tourism Practices: Embrace sustainable tourism practices to protect the environment, preserve local culture, and support the community. This can include promoting eco-friendly initiatives, reducing waste, and supporting local businesses.
4. Marketing and Promotion: Implement effective marketing strategies to reach a wider audience and attract more visitors. Utilize digital marketing, social media, and partnerships to promote tourism offerings.
5. Collaboration with Stakeholders: Collaborate with local businesses, government agencies, and community organizations to create a cohesive tourism strategy. This can involve working together to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities.
6. Visitor Engagement and Experience: Focus on enhancing the visitor experience by providing excellent customer service, personalized experiences, and unique offerings. Encourage feedback and continuous improvement to meet visitor expectations.

By implementing these strategies, you can sustain the visitor economy and ensure long-term success in the tourism industry.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5m annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7b overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?

This is an amazing return on investment and if these numbers are correct well done to TN To be completely honest I would need to more fact to determine how you came to this conclusion that the \$2.5mil returned the figure of \$1.7b.

FRANK WILKIE – MAYORAL CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Tourism in Noosa must be a balance between Noosa’s identity as a community first and also a highly successful visitor destination, upon which many resident families depend.

If we make Noosa a great place to live and raise a family, it will also remain an attractive place to visit and set up a business. Many permanent residents, myself included, first saw Noosa as a visitor.

For many of us, it is only our children who are true Noosa locals. Either way, we must collectively act as custodians to do everything to ensure we leave the shire in a better place for our younger generations. Putting in place measures to better manage the impacts of tourism is key to this.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa’s visitor economy across the region.

This question of sustainable or regenerative tourism is a central theme of the Destination Management Plan and its answer will very much be shaped by feedback from the community and industry.

My view is that, among other things, Noosa’s visitor economy must involve skilled, strategic and targeted marketing to attract a high-spending visitor who respects Noosa’s environment and community.

There must also be incentives for visitors to access key areas by means other than the car and participate in activities that respect and enrich the shire’s natural attributes.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?

Noosa Council raises approximately \$15million in rates annually from visitor accommodation and currently contributes \$2.5Million to Tourism Noosa to promote Noosa as a tourist destination to the high-yield traveller, typically the interstate or overseas visitor who tend to stay longer, spend more and not contribute to traffic congestion because they usually fly in.

The available data estimates this returned \$1.7billion into Noosa’s economy which represents the high end of a trend of increasing spend over the past decade from below \$1b. This appears to be all positive.

What these statistics don’t show is the impact of Noosa’s success as a tourist destination has had on the community, principally through the spread of Short Term Accommodation (STAs) through residential neighbourhoods and our environment through extra waste generated, waste to landfill and resource recovery.

It’s the social and environmental cost of this success that has prompted the need for a reassessment of where we are heading as a community, via the Destination Management Plan.

The focus of this community conversation must be on how we can improve the Noosa experience for the residents and the visitor.

COUNCILLOR CANDIDATES

MAT BANKES – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. On Sustaining Noosa's Visitor Economy:

Sustaining Noosa's visitor economy demands a pragmatic approach. We need strategic investments that not only boost tourism but also prioritise the long-term well-being of our community. My focus lies in fostering responsible tourism practices through collaboration with local businesses, environmental organisations, and the Council. This means investing in sustainable infrastructure, supporting cultural events, and ensuring that economic benefits are shared equitably among residents.

2. On Council's \$2.5M Annual Contribution to Tourism Noosa:

The Council's annual \$2.5 million contribution to Tourism Noosa is a substantial investment that has proven its worth. The \$1.7 billion return in visitor expenditure for 2022-23 underscores the economic impact. To optimise this, we need a targeted and data-driven approach. Strategic allocation of funds in marketing, infrastructure, and sustainable tourism practices is key. Collaboration with the private sector and community organisations will amplify our efforts, ensuring a resilient and adaptable visitor economy.

3. On Tourism in the Noosa Shire Region:

Tourism in the Noosa Shire Region is not just about picturesque landscapes but about economic vitality and community engagement. My vision is to balance economic growth with responsible tourism practices. This involves investing in eco-friendly initiatives, supporting local businesses, and empowering the community. By fostering a sense of ownership and pride, we can create a robust visitor economy that benefits both tourists and residents.

KAREN FINZEL – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Answer: Tourism Noosa provides one of the many economic resources by which Noosa positions itself for success now and into the future.

The diversity and opportunities, hopes and desires for a thriving and sustainable future for all sits at the heart of what underpins this non for profit, membership based organisation.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa's visitor economy across the Region.

Answer: Envisioning the dream of a Noosa into the future as a celebrated destination to live, work and play definitely includes cultivating confidence in an economy that is underpinned by the values reflected in our community to include care for our environment and each other.

The visitor economy provides essential input into the creation of local employment, educational and trade opportunities along with the desire to attract and retain our young people.

The burgeoning arts and cultural industries are synonymous with Noosa and rapidly gaining traction especially in the area of building resilience together.

Collectively, we are facing the everyday realities of disaster management, impacts and recovery in our daily lives providing each of us a call to action in finding new ways of attracting visitors to the region to participate in all we share and while doing so, bringing unlimited potential to innovate, stimulate and sustain our local lifestyle.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?

Answer: The economic contribution from Tourism Noosa throughout the Shire's historical narrative is embedded into our social and economic ecosystems that over many years of careful cultivation is gradually maturing. My hope is this investment continues growing to bring benefit and balance to both residents and visitors alike.

FIONA JACOBS – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. Thoughts on Tourism in Noosa:

Tourism is undeniably intertwined with Noosa's history, economy, and future. But residents have expressed a desire for change, as indicated in the Destination Management Plan. This desire highlights the need for collaboration between Council, the community, and industry. We need to ensure we address challenges such as infrastructure, the accommodation crisis and the return of resident's amenity. I am committed to being part of this collective effort for positive change.

2. Ideas for Sustaining Noosa's Visitor Economy:

Sustainable tourism development in Noosa must consider existing infrastructure limitations and potential negative impacts on communities such as we have seen over the last few years with the proliferation of STA. To ensure a balanced and sustainable approach, it is imperative for the industry, Council, and communities to collaborate and develop workable plans, funding models, and measurable KPIs that are aligned with the Destination Management Plan.

3. Return on Council's Investment in Tourism Noosa:

While the \$1.7 billion overnight visitor expenditure seems impressive, it is essential to examine how much of that money remains within the shire. With some sectors of the community questioning the value of the \$2.5 million annual investment, it is clear that a more comprehensive analysis is needed. Transparency and accountability regarding the costs and benefits of tourism are crucial, and transformational change is necessary to ensure that tourism contributes positively to the Noosa community.

Transparency is paramount in fostering trust between Tourism Noosa and residents. By providing clear, concise and open communication regarding their activities, plans, and outcomes, Tourism Noosa can demonstrate their commitment to the DMP and therefore to community needs and concerns.

JOE JURISEVIC – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Tourism has been one of the pillars of the Noosa Economy for many years. It has both positive and negative effects on the region through the scale of economic benefit versus the impacts of visitor numbers on the lives and livelihoods of those that live and work in the region.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa's visitor economy across the region.

I think many of the initiatives that TN has introduced have shown us what can be achieved by tourism that can add positive benefit to the industry and the region and in keeping with the ideals that Noosa is renowned for. Welcome to Noosa & Refresh Noosa are examples of how the industry can drive improvement to ensure that it keeps up with the expectations of the market.

Trees for tourism, Plastic Free Noosa & Plastic Free Events are examples where tourism can contribute to the Noosa ideals of environmental stewardship and be an exemplar of sustainable practices and hopefully attract visitors that come to enjoy, rather than impact, on the place they have come to visit. Take photos, leave footprints, or as Brownie used to say Don't destroy what you came to enjoy. Tourism has shown it can facilitate elements of stewardship and should so tourists go home espousing the ideas, ideals and benefits of visiting such a region as ours.

Tourism should also contribute more directly to the impacts it creates, especially in relation to negative impacts such as waste, overcrowding, facilities and congestion. Paid parking would be one example where visitors could contribute to something that benefits tourism as well as locals such as the cost of providing free buses everyday. Another example is resorts such as the RACV provide non polluting shuttle services and electric vehicles for guests. So that they are not reliant on vehicles when they visit. The ideal shouldn't be one of Council or residents, but the community as a whole and that includes business and tourism.

Without a sustainable mindset there will not be a destination that anyone wants to live in, let alone visit, in the future. The reason people have loved living here is the reason that visitors love visiting. Beware, the tide is beginning to turn.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. ~~Do you feel this represents a good return on the Council's investment and why?~~ What are your thoughts on this?

I think you're asking the wrong question. Based on these figures, I could expect that TN should be more self sustainable and be looking at ways to lever the benefits from that sort of input rather than reliant on a long term investment. Numbers like this impress if they show the industry thriving for long term and minimising negative impact on the community. However, I have seen many seemingly successful businesses close over the years.

You have to ask yourself why and what can be done? What number of restaurants and cafes are viable if they are to survive? What are the benchmarks for sustainable tourism? The benefits should far outweigh the negatives if figures like this are to be held up as a mark of success in my humble opinion. What is the true measure of success? Is marketing all it takes, or all there is? What does it take to facilitate a more sustainable and manageable tourism future without killing the goose?

AMELIA LORENTSON – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Tourism in Noosa is a vital component of the local economy, generating \$1.7 billion in overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy, and supporting various sectors such as small businesses, education, healthcare, hospitality, and services. It provides employment opportunities for locals and contributes to their livelihoods, ensuring bills are paid and children can attend school. Additionally, tourism fosters cultural exchange and interaction with people from diverse backgrounds, enriching the community experience.

However, alongside its economic benefits, tourism also presents challenges, particularly in maintaining the balance between economic prosperity and preserving the local lifestyle and environment. The increasing influx of visitors may strain local resources, infrastructure, and natural landscapes if not managed effectively. Therefore, there's a need for sustainable tourism practices that prioritize the well-being of residents, safeguard the environment, and uphold the unique identity of Noosa.

Achieving this balance requires collaboration among stakeholders, including residents, businesses, Council and tourism operators. By implementing responsible tourism strategies, such as sustainable development, community engagement, and environmental conservation, Noosa can continue to thrive as a desirable destination while preserving its charm and quality of life for both residents and visitors. This approach ensures that tourism benefits not only the economy but also enhances the social, cultural, and environmental fabric of the community.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa's visitor economy across the region.

We need to implement measures in alignment with the Local Economic Plan, Social Strategy, Transport Strategy, Environment Strategy, and the Noosa Planning Scheme in order to achieve a balanced approach to tourism that benefits both residents and visitors while safeguarding the region's unique environment and community character.

For example:

- **Improved Beach Access and Parking:** Enhance beach accesses along the Eastern Beaches and improve parking facilities to accommodate visitors without compromising the local environment or residents' access to amenities.
- **Walking Paths and Cycleways:** Develop better walking paths and cycleways to encourage sustainable transportation options and improve connectivity between attractions, neighbourhoods, and natural areas.
- **Worker Accommodation:** Enable worker accommodation in appropriate locations to address housing issues and ensure the availability of a skilled workforce to support the tourism industry.
- **Enforcement of Local Laws:** Manage and enforce compliance with short-term accommodation (STA) laws to mitigate negative impacts on neighbourhoods and ensure a harmonious coexistence between residents and visitors.
- **Community Engagement and Consultation:** Prioritize genuine consultation and engagement with the community to incorporate their feedback and concerns into tourism planning and decision-making processes. This ensures that the Destination Management Plan (DMP) reflects the needs and aspirations of both industry stakeholders and residents.
- **Better Infrastructure:** Invest in infrastructure upgrades, such as priority bus lanes, surfboard sheds and lockers prioritizing residents, improved public toilets and end-of-trip facilities, and enhanced disability parking and changing places toilets to improve accessibility and convenience for both residents and visitors.

- **Hinterland and indigenous Tourism:** Promote and invest in Hinterland and Indigenous tourism to diversify offerings and attract visitors interested in unique cultural and natural experiences, while also supporting local communities and preserving heritage.

3. “Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?”

I choose to abstain from providing commentary on this matter. It's my belief that publicly expressing an opinion on this matter could potentially lead to a conflict of interest when the funding agreement is deliberated upon by the Council.

LEIGH McCREADY – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

**Disclosure – I am currently a Board Director of Tourism Noosa.

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Tourism is an important part of the Noosa lifestyle. Noosa became a tourism destination originally for workers in the timber industry who lived west in Gympie, which was then followed by farmers and dairy businesses that established in the hinterland towns of Cooroy, Pomona, and Cooran. By the 1870s, gold miners from the Gympie gold rush were holidaying along the banks of the Noosa River and in Noosa Headland.

Tourism provides considerable value added to the Noosa economy, both directly and indirectly, and employs 1 in every 10 people, with many more jobs positively and indirectly impacted by the flow of tourists into the region. A survey completed by Tourism Noosa and Noosa Council just prior to the Covid pandemic indicated that 75% of businesses would be less profitable without tourists, and of these, 42% indicated that they would cease operations without the tourist trade.

The report this survey was presented in also states that “many businesses surveyed perceived that the existence of tourism allowed for further investment by public and private sectors”. In industries which are most impacted by tourism (accommodation, hospitality, retail and real estate services), businesses also reported that “events produced positive impacts on their turnover. On average, these businesses indicated that in an event period, their turnover could increase by around 25 percent.”

Additionally, and not unexpectedly, tourism and events were seen to contribute to the social and cultural environment of Noosa in a significantly positive way. The report states that: “Based on the responses of those surveyed, the appeal of Noosa and the overall aesthetics of the natural and built environment produces considerable social benefits.”

Anecdotally, many residents and business owners began their relationship with Noosa via being a tourist themselves, with common claims that they “fell in love” with the town when they visited. Many residents started their connection with Noosa with buying a holiday home, and then upon retirement or with the advent of flexible working, moved permanently north, generally from the cities.

In recent years, discussion about the value of tourism and whether a post-Covid Noosa is being ‘over-loved’ has begun, with conversations on public forums such as Facebook Groups peaking during the busy summer, when accommodation is full booked and traffic congestion is widespread across Noosa Heads and around the River.

Long-term locals are sanguine about the situation, having seen it year after year for decades. Newer residents find it confronting and implore Council to 'take action' and 'do more'. Ideas for improving parking and congestion include multi-level car parks, additional roads in and out, one-way roads, subsidised bus routes, pedestrian zones and bus lanes.

To date, none have successfully resolved the congestion that peaks during holidays and events in specific areas. In this regard, Noosa is similar to many other tourist destinations.

For me, it is impossible to imagine Noosa without the tourism industry. The benefits created including economic development, prosperity for our local small and family businesses, the energy and joy of our backpackers and the supply of temporary workers for our café, restaurants and hotels are a part of what Noosa has been, is and always will be.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa's visitor economy across the region.

Noosa Council's management of and relationship with the tourism industry is critically important. A supportive and collaborative partnership between the two exists currently, with communication frequent and respectful.

If elected, I would be a vocal advocate for Tourism Noosa on Council and would continue to support the collaboration between the two organisations. I would continue to support the Executive Team to deliver the Tourism Noosa Strategic Plan and assist where required with adapting the Strategic Plan, based on the outcomes of Council's Destination Management Plan.

I would also continue to engage with the businesses which Tourism Noosa represents, including members and not-yet-members, listening to their ideas and concerns, and actively manage these with TN and/or NSC. I feel that particularly now, it is important for tourism businesses to speak in a cohesive and collaborative way with one voice, demonstrating to stakeholders that tourism businesses are united, professional and have Noosa's best interests at heart. I feel that Tourism Noosa is the best body to represent this voice and encourage members to work with the TN team to continue to improve how the industry represents itself publicly and contribute ideas which can help make Tourism Noosa as a representative body even more successful.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?

I think it's a great return!

There must always be a balance between the people who live here, the businesses which support our lifestyle and the environment which needs to be protected. Our environment is one of the reasons that people and businesses want to be in Noosa.

We have an organisation in Tourism Noosa which actively manages the attraction and flow of tourists to our Shire and works to appeal to tourists who bring higher value to the Shire. Without this active brand management, there would be no structured way to attract the tourists we all want.

If Tourism Noosa did not exist as the designated marketing organisation for the destination, tourism businesses would all need to work independently to attract tourists, and there would be no way to control the messaging or promote the brand in a consistently successful way.

This I believe would result in a poorer outcome for the whole Shire, with a detrimental impact on the Noosa brand and a deterioration in the performance of the industry as measured in the TN Strategic Plan, which shows the significant increase in overnight spend and visitor numbers compared to the pre-Covid period.

If elected, I look forward to being a conduit between the tourism industry, residents and Noosa Council, ensuring the relationships between them are harmonious and productive.

JESS PHILLIPS – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. I wholeheartedly support a sustainable and thriving Tourism Noosa. Tourism is integral to our local economy, and to be approached responsibly. My focus is on promoting sustainable practices that protect our environment, engage the community, and ensure a balance between economic benefits and preserving Noosa's unique charm. Tourism in Noosa is a cornerstone of our local identity and economy. I see it as a dynamic force that brings economic opportunities but also at times poses challenges, especially in preserving our environment.

Striking a balance is key, and I am committed to implementing sustainable tourism practices. This involves supporting initiatives that protect our natural resources, engaging with the community to ensure responsible tourism behaviour, specifically our young people who visit and working with local businesses to enhance the overall visitor experience.

2. To sustain Noosa's visitor economy, I propose a multi-faceted strategy. First and foremost, I advocate for investing in infrastructure that not only supports the tourism industry but also benefits the local community. This includes maintaining and improving essential facilities, transportation, and public spaces. Additionally, I believe in fostering partnerships with local businesses to create unique experiences for visitors, promoting Noosa as a destination with a commitment to environmental sustainability.

3. The Noosa Council's annual contribution of \$2.5 million to Tourism Noosa, resulting in a \$1.7 billion overnight visitor expenditure in 2022-23, signifies a strong return on investment. However, I would like to continue building the working partnership with Council and TN to ensure that these funds are used effectively. I am committed to conducting ongoing analysis to ensure that the council's investment remains effective in the changing economic landscape, providing tangible benefits for our community, especially considering evolving financial challenges faced by residents. Continued transparency and regular evaluations will be priorities to guarantee that the economic benefits translate into tangible improvements for residents, including job opportunities, infrastructure development, and the overall well-being of the Noosa community.

ALECIA STAINES – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

Noosa is a tourist destination and tourism is the main economic driver of our community. Many local businesses rely on the tourism sector. Residents benefit from tourism through employment and the range of hospitality venues to choose from. I appreciate the efforts to develop strategies to ensure the whole Shire benefits from tourism and the showcasing of events throughout the Hinterland. The Visitor Information Centres are well-staff and knowledgeable and I think they're a great asset to the community and our visitors.

Tourism needs to occur in a balanced and sustainable way to ensure ongoing economic prosperity for our region, which I support TNs commitment with their marketing strategy to attract high value-low volume visitation aimed at ensuring visitors, businesses, local community, and the environment benefit.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa’s visitor economy across the region.

The role of an elected Councillor is to represent the community’s interest. My role is to listen to stakeholders and develop suitable strategies. As a candidate, the biggest issue raised with me regarding tourism is congestion. My involvement would be to work with key stakeholders to develop suitable strategies to reduce traffic congestion and hope this is supported by fellow elected representatives. Campaign government for suitable funding for infrastructure to aide this.

Industries such as the wedding industry which generate over \$80 million into our economy have made suggestions to Council such as upgrading toilet facilities along the beach, and maintaining a better cleaning schedule would ensure visitors (and residents!) have a better experience at our beaches. When elected, I will support better engagement with key stakeholders to ensure we continue to support industries that showcase Noosa’s natural assets to visitors.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. Do you feel this represents a good return on the Council’s investment and why?

Noosa needs a marketing arm to control the message to consumers, so we attract sustainably minded people who appreciate nature and respect what we have to offer.

Whilst I appreciate this question is likely on the back of propaganda around residents funding tourism and the anti-Tourism Noosa sentiment that I hear in the community during my 12 months of campaigning, it is up for those who contribute to the levy that funds Tourism Noosa to decide if their return on investment is representative of good value. Noosa Council isn’t getting the \$1.7 billion, it is going to businesses within our Shire and they are the ones who contribute to its funding.

BRIAN STOCKWELL – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

The Noosa experience is something we all share. Whether we have lived here since birth or just visit for a week; the forests, waterways, beaches and the village scale of our community provide the backdrop to our experience and the backbone of our economy.

For too long we have squabbled over petty differences while the rest of the world looks at what we have with envy. We have in recent years seen a peak in demand as a tourist destination. While the economic impact is estimated above the billion dollar mark, fracture lines have opened as questions about the impacts of tourism are raised by the community and visitors alike. This is not a ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ tourism issue, this is about defending the attributes of our place that make it attractive to both residents and visitors alike.

The Tourism Noosa (TN) record breaking “Enter the Biosphere” campaign was based on an understanding that destination Noosa has long been synonymous with its environmental qualities and ethic of ecologically sustainable development. Trip Adviser, for example, highlights that the Noosa National Park, Main Beach and the Noosa River are the top 3 experiences people come to Noosa to enjoy. These are great experiences whether you have to travel 100 metres or 10,000 kilometres from home to get there.

Add to this the emerging relationships with local producers that is helping to reignite our long-held reputation of quality food tourism in a way the imbues a sense of place in those who partake.

Many destinations similar to Noosa have been loved to death, because they failed to defend those qualities that make the experience attractive to people who like to live and play close to the coast, river and the bush. Between 2019 and 2023, ‘Day Tripper’ numbers increased by over 100,000 people per annum while contributing less than 10% of the spend of ‘Domestic Overnight’ visitors. We can’t be sure at what point the experience of living and visiting Noosa is permanently diminished by having to share it with too many people, too many cars encountered along the way, or too much loss of the natural values and too little care for the village character of the place? We can be sure that the best time to address the risks and come together as a community to define and defend the experiences we know and love is NOW.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa’s visitor economy across the region.

Most of the answer to the last question wasn’t penned for this election forum. They were largely part of the discussion paper I developed after discussions with the Chair of TN Board, leaders of a number of community and environment groups and senior Council staff in 2020. It led to the budget for the Destination Management Plan. Since that time, we’ve seen some of those risks increase, with congestion, not only in our tourist precincts, but also throughout Tewantin as cars queue for kilometres for their North shore ‘wilderness’ experience. Together with the ongoing amenity impacts in our residential areas as a result of the digital disruption of on-line booking platforms, this has seen the industry’s social licence come under scrutiny.

A strong Destination Management Plan (DMP) will guide the way we look after our place to ensure we maintain and enhance the core environmental and lifestyle values of Noosa for future generations. If we get it right our management interventions will be designed to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the benefits of responsible tourism.

TN’s marketing strategy for some years has embedded the mantra of “value over volume”. This concept seeks to maximise visitor spend while minimising tourism impact, frequently associated with high volume low spend day trippers. Further, in 2018 Tourism Noosa elevated sustainability as a priority and appointed an Environment & Sustainability Manager, dedicated to driving initiatives that positively impact Noosa’s environment.

The ‘Trees for Tourism’, ‘Plastic Free Noosa’ and ‘Tread Lightly’ programs are forerunners of the trend toward ‘regenerative tourism’. I concur with Juanita Terry-Bloomfield, TN’s Head of Tourism Sustainability & Program Design, when she outlined that: "With increasing awareness of the climate crisis, people are traveling more thoughtfully, more creatively and more intentionally. For travellers today, sustainable travel means more than just recycling. With a growing respect for the world’s local communities, the environment and biodiversity, a regenerative philosophy is starting to influence decision-making. More people are seeking authentic cultural experiences that bolster and add value back into local communities, while actively avoiding over polluted and overcrowded destinations."

Research reveals this growing desire to travel sustainably has grown from 34% of global travellers in 2016 to 71% who reported they intended to in 2022. Tapping Into this regenerative philosophy will be an important part of the Destination Management Plan.

What will the Shire and the visitor economy look like in 10 years if the plan is a success?

- The distinctive character of each locale will be retained reflecting their natural and cultural heritage.
- There will be growth in tourism market segments that appreciate and respect our distinctive assets and a reduction of those segments that don't.
- High value tourist precincts will be 'people, pedestrian and pedal centric' with access and mobility facilitated by effective technology and public transport.
- Tourism will be based on local small businesses and civic groups that have built partnerships to promote and provide a distinctive, honest visitor experience to maximize tourism benefits that build on the shire's nature, history and culture, including food and drink, artisanry, performance and the visual arts.
- Local habitats, heritage sites, aesthetic appeal, and culture are sustained through keeping volumes of tourists to within agreed maximum acceptable limits.
- Residents, tourism enterprises and visitors are engaged in a continuous process of learning about our place and how to care for it, so that they enjoy a richer experience and commit to sustainable practices.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?

We need to be clear, the values and natural assets of the destination together with those who provide accommodation and experiences are the major contributors to the visitor economy. Successful and highly professional marketing and product development by TN contributed to the realisation of some of that return.

Tourism Noosa is no doubt one of the best performing local tourism bodies in the country. It is also believed to receive the largest ratepayer funded LTO budget allocation of any non-metropolitan Council in the state. Council considers how to allocate its economic development budget each year. There are three key questions that Councillors will need to deliberate on.

How much should be allocated to economic development? In which industries is ratepayer investment most likely to produce the highest amount of gross regional product or employment in the long run? And, finally, how best to most effectively use available funds to achieve these outcomes?

The existing TN Funding Agreement requires the organisation to respond to the Destination Management Plan on its adoption. The community was clear in their feedback to the Destination Management Discussion paper late last year - they want to see transformational change. So, the challenge in the coming term will be to get the balance right between investing in the long-term sustainability of the industry through effective destination management and how we market and promote the destination to attract a visitor demographic that the DMP seeks to encourage.

The catalytic role played by TN in the development of the Noosa Trail Master Plan is a good example of how Council, the community and industry can work together to take advantage of the opportunities the destination and our environment offer. The resultant Council and government investment in the Biosphere Trail Network is spreading the visitor experience into the hinterland and supports a range of events that don't rely on the Main Beach precinct.

Marketing of these experiences and events on top of the significant investment in infrastructure has resulted in the annual number of domestic overnight visitors who visited national parks/state parks and went bushwalking on their trip to Noosa increasing by nearly 86,000 people (15%) from 2019 to 2023. Google trends data showed interest for “hiking” in SE-Qld has more than doubled in the last 18 months; that there was a 68% increase in interest in the term “Noosa trail” between 2018 and 2022; while searches on the term “Noosa Hinterland” increased 35% from 2019-2023.

I see an ongoing leadership role for TN in marketing and promoting the destination and as a key stakeholder in the broader governance of the destination. My thinking about the way ahead aligns with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council recommended approach for destination stewardship. They suggest this approach should be underpinned by the local community working with government, non-governmental organisations and the tourism industry to maintain the cultural, environmental, economic and aesthetic integrity of their locality.

TOM WEGENER – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts on tourism in Noosa?

A great place to live is a great place to visit. I believe our tourism is based on resident amenity and care for the natural environment. The battles to save the Noosa National Park, the North Shore from sand mining, height limits on buildings etc... were fought by residents for residents. Residents made Noosa the paradise that it is. A byproduct of these efforts is a high dollar tourist trade and an infinitely valuable “Noosa brand.” The community of Noosa residents is the proverbial goose which continues to lay the golden eggs. Council’s primary duty is to look after the goose.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa’s visitor economy across the region.

See answer above: Look after the goose. However, a very important aspect of Tourism Noosa are the volunteers. They are the face of Noosa. I strongly support the Information Centres and the many TN volunteers. They provide a fantastic service for tourists and residents alike.

Tourism Noosa supports residents and businesses in many ways including collecting data and programs like Tread Lightly and Plastic Free Noosa.

3. Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. Do you feel this represents a good return on the Council’s investment and why?

This is an inappropriate question.

NICOLA WILSON – COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE

1. What are your thoughts about tourism in Noosa?

Tourism in Noosa is a hugely important industry that brings visitor income into the economy and provides jobs in hospitality, retail and other supporting industries. It also provides services that we residents enjoy and support. I enjoyed several trips to Noosa as a tourist before moving here in 2019. It is great to see the industry thriving, as well as businesses and TN looking for ways to make tourism more sustainable.

The tourism industry also attracts people to want to live in the area, and some residents, especially retirees, are effectively permanent tourists, frequenting the many restaurants and services. They also bring visitors to the region.

In the year ended June 2023, it is estimated that tourism from day-trippers and overnight domestic visitors was a record 2.2m visitors, and \$1.7B revenue (an increase on prior year of 51%). Income from international trade has not yet been quantified. Income from residents doesn't appear to be considered.

The figures of 2.2M and \$1.7B were sourced from National Visitor Surveys, Tourism Research Australia (a federal government agency). While this is a reliable source used widely across the industry, its methodology to estimate this data relies on phone surveys of up to 120,000 Australian residents per year. A review of TRA's website did not produce any specific statistics for Noosa, as TN has to pay to access that level of detail. Presumably the data collected is then extrapolated using a formula, but the method isn't readily available online. As the nature of this data is related to Australian residents only, it doesn't shed any light on international visitors.

I'd be interested to know whether these figures are cross checked with other data, e.g road and air traffic, number of beds available, utilisation rates, etc. In particular, does TN request data from members to corroborate these figures?

Given TN's 568 members, it could access rich data from industry participants to determine whether all members have enjoyed a 51% increase in revenue, and if they can reliably determine the split between daytrippers, domestic, international trade and residents, as presumably this data is often collected. Also important is whether this income generated profit, and where that is held. TN can better support members and the community when relying on actual, detailed financial data rather than an estimate.

2. Tell us about your ideas for how you will sustain Noosa's visitor economy across the region.

TN has noted that finding staff is a critical challenge for the industry. The lack of affordable housing for lower income workers contributes to this shortage, and the proliferation of self-contained short-term accommodation, comprising approx. 80% of available beds (Noosa Shire Destination Management Plan Discussion Paper) is taking away housing from workers, and customers from traditional tourist accommodation businesses such as resorts and hotels. I would like to see more AirBnB properties returned to the housing market for residents, hotels and resorts being able to operate profitably at full capacity, and staff housed locally.

However, I don't see a councillor's role as sustaining Noosa's visitor economy. There are over 7,000 businesses in the Noosa region (7,621 in 2022, source Economy.id.com.au), of which less than 1,000 are related to accommodation, food services and retail. I believe it is council's role to ensure all industries are supported.

Council’s role is to ensure services are provided to the community. This includes ensuring roads, bridges, traffic management, parking, waste and sewerage systems can support residents, local businesses, and the increasing numbers of tourists, and to support future population growth in line with the SEQ Plan.

It is unfortunate that the transparency over Council’s contribution to tourism has been lost by removal of the tourism levy. Residents had greater transparency over source and use of funds - Council collected the levy from tourist businesses, then passed it back to the participants via TN. Now, businesses may still be contributing to council income via increased rates, but it is less transparent to residents. I would support improved reporting to provide greater clarity around use of ratepayer funds. This would also help businesses in other industries, and particularly the hinterland, where business owners may feel less supported, to better understand the flow of funds.

3. “Noosa Council currently contributes \$2.5M annually to Tourism Noosa which in 2022-23 returned \$1.7B overnight visitor expenditure into the local economy. What are your thoughts on this?”

The wording of this question is problematic even in its revised form as it suggests TN is taking credit for the whole industry’s performance. TN did not return \$1.7B to the economy, it was generated by the tourism industry (and the estimated figure of \$1.7B also includes daytrippers). The wording also leads us to thinking that council’s contribution of \$2.5M was the only cost in producing that revenue, and therefore produces a false ROI. In addition, that revenue is not “returned” to council. It may also not be returned to the local economy given the high proportion of accommodation revenue that will go to STA property owners living outside of the Shire.

In considering Council’s contribution of \$2.5M it’s important to also consider TN’s other income, and how the total budget is spent.

TN’s Revenue

TN is a small, member-based not for profit organisation, but despite record breaking growth in the industry, generates less than 10% of its revenue from members. TN’s strategy does not outline any plans to grow membership, which has declined in recent years (980 in 2021, and 600+ in 2022). This decline is also not mentioned in the annual report.

	2023	2022
Revenue		
Grant income	162,381	406,566
Council Funding	2,520,000	2,520,000
Membership income	179,151	175,061
Visitor Information Centre	127,285	133,862
Other	280,925	213,270
	3,269,742	3,448,759

Council’s funding is set out in the Tourism Noosa Funding and Performance Deed and is offered for an initial term of two years (1 July 2023 to 30 June 2025) subject to a number of performance conditions being met. We don’t have access to any reports on progress against those conditions. A further two year term is available (1 July 2025 to 30 June 2027) “subject to the parties being in compliance with their obligations under this Deed”. The parties may, but are not obliged to, agree to the Further Term. Discussions will take place in the second half of 2024.

Conditions relate to agreed priorities, one of which is additional revenue stream, and a subclause to “review options for generating greater revenue from the Visitor Information Centre”. That revenue fell between 2022 and 2023.

TN’s Expenses

TN’s stated purpose is to “promote the diversity of the Noosa region to domestic and international visitors, the tourism trade and media”, by “implementing marketing strategies that attract high value-low volume visitation through targeted marketing and promotions”. These marketing strategies support the whole industry, they are not exclusive to members. With total industry revenue estimated at \$1.7B, it is hard to measure how much was generated by TN’s \$1.1M expenditure on marketing and events (plus staff costs of \$1.3M).

Expenses			
Employee benefits	(1,284,662)	(1,441,747)	40%
Marketing	(1,097,014)	(1,164,349)	34%
Legal and compliance fees	(69,099)	(119,277)	2%
Other corporate costs	(200,774)	(193,810)	6%
Auditor fees	(24,706)	(23,449)	1%
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(125,784)	(115,419)	4%
Sustainability	(116,846)	(157,006)	4%
Visitor Information Centre	(122,867)	(124,049)	4%
Special projects expense	(90,536)	0	3%
Other	(79,940)	(87,053)	2%
	(3,212,228)	(3,426,159)	

The annual report does not disclose how many staff make up this cost of \$1.3M (which does not seem unreasonable, given the level of activity), or their roles.

I question why such a high level of “corporate” type expenses are required in a small NFP organisation, making up approx. \$400k, and whether this is in line with the agreed priorities outlined in the Tourism Noosa Funding and Performance Deed. Why does TN need so much legal and compliance advice, and what are the “other corporate costs”?