



# Inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland

**Report No. 52, 57th Parliament  
Community Support and Services Committee  
August 2024**

## **Community Support and Services Committee**

|                     |   |
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### **Acknowledgements**

The committee acknowledges the contributions of the former Economics and Governance Committee at the commencement of the Inquiry. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided by the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, Tourism and Events Queensland, as well as stakeholder organisations and individuals who helped inform the committee's deliberations.

All web address references are current at the time of publishing.

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## Chair's foreword

The Inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland commenced on 18 September 2023 by the former Economics and Governance Committee, after that committee recognised the significance of ancient fossil discoveries in Outback Queensland, and the attraction that discovery sites and nearby communities holds for visitors.

The Economics and Governance Committee self-referred inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland was initiated from evidence and comments made by prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism stakeholders, during the committee's examination of the Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, which generated huge interest in the establishment of a Queensland fossil emblem.

On 13 February 2024, the Legislative Assembly amended Schedule 6 of the *Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly* to change portfolio committee arrangements, and consequently transferred the Inquiry to the Community Support and Services Committee for detailed consideration.

This report presents a summary of the Community Support and Services Committee's examination of the Inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland. The committee sought stakeholder views, and in May 2024 held a public hearing in Quilpie and visited the Eromanga Natural History Museum. The committee also considered evidence garnered by the former Economics and Governance Committee from submissions, public hearings and site visits in October 2023 to Winton and Muttaburra.

As a member and Chair of this inquiry, I also had the honour and privilege of being a member of the former Economics and Governance Committee, prior to the inquiry's transfer to the Community Services and Support Committee. This opportunity, being present across both Committee's hearings, gave me a detailed insight into the challenges facing this sector, as it builds to make itself more attractive, and to capture a growing local, interstate and overseas market. Make no mistake, this industry is on an upward trajectory, and its value to Queensland tourism, and to the field of prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo research, can't be overstated. The industry will need ongoing support to maximise its full potential in Queensland.

On behalf of the committee, I thank those individuals and organisations who made written submissions, spoke at public hearings and welcomed committee members to their communities. I also thank our Parliamentary Service staff, the Committees' secretariats; as well as the Department of Tourism and Sport, and Tourism and Events Queensland for their assistance.

I commend this report to the House.



Adrian Tantara MP

**Chair**

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

6

The committee recommends the Legislative Assembly note the report.

### Recommendation 2

23

The committee recommends the Queensland Government consider the findings in this report and develop a strategy to enable the future growth and cooperation of Outback Queensland's dinosaur and paleo tourism industry. In particular, we recommended the government focus on:

- the need for greater infrastructure
- attracting an international market
- promoting educational and research opportunities
- mitigating the distance between tourism attractions
- promoting Outback Queensland's tourism attractions as a unified tourist proposition.

## Report Summary

The Inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland was introduced into the Queensland Parliament on 18 September 2023. On 13 February 2024 and following machinery-of-government changes, the Legislative Assembly transferred the Inquiry from the former Economics and Governance Committee to the Community Support and Services Committee for detailed consideration.

Adopting the terms of reference for the inquiry from the former Economics and Governance Committee, the committee inquired into the following:

- recent developments and initiatives to build prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Queensland
- the value of prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism to the Outback Queensland economy
- challenges and opportunities for the further development of the industry into the future.

The committee considered submissions from stakeholders, and the evidence provided at public briefings and hearings held in Brisbane, Winton, Muttaburra, and Quilpie.

Outback Queensland is a rich source of marine, dinosaur and megafauna fossils. Among the discoveries made are new species of dinosaur and more recent ancient megafauna that predates contemporary Australian wildlife. Museums have been built on location to display fossil discoveries and continue scientific research. Local communities have responded to these developments with the construction of infrastructure, accommodation and related tourist attractions.

The committee recognises that prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism is an important contributor to the Outback Queensland economy and, given the unique and extraordinary discoveries of fossil remains in recent years, has the potential to further grow as more visitors from Australia and overseas journey to see unique fossil collections and displays.

The Community Support and Services Committee's first recommendation is that the Legislative Assembly note this report. The committee further recommends that the Queensland Government assess and report on the success, future needs and ongoing challenges facing the dinosaur and paleo tourism industry and consider strategies to enable its future growth with a particular focus on the need for improved infrastructure, attracting the international visitor market, promoting educational and research opportunities, and promoting Outback Queensland's dinosaur and paleo tourist attractions as well as local communities, as a unified tourist proposition.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Inquiry referral

The Inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland (Inquiry) was referred by the Legislative Assembly to the Community Support and Services Committee (committee) on 13 February 2024. The Inquiry was transferred to the committee from the former Economics and Governance Committee (former EGC) by an amendment to Schedule 6 of the *Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly*, which made effective certain machinery-of-government and portfolio committee changes, including the transfer of committee responsibility for a number of on-going inquiries.<sup>1</sup>

On 18 September 2023, the former EGC resolved to conduct an Inquiry into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland. The terms of reference adopted by the former EGC were that the committee inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly on:

- recent developments and initiatives to build prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Queensland
- the value of prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism to the Outback Queensland economy
- challenges and opportunities for the further development of the industry into the future.

At the transfer of responsibility on 13 February 2024, the Community Support and Services Committee endorsed the same terms of reference for its examination of the Inquiry. The committee later resolved to undertake regional consultation in Quilpie and Eromanga in May 2024, and report on the Inquiry to the Legislative Assembly by 30 August 2024.

### 1.2 Inquiry process and stakeholder consultation

#### 1.2.1 Proceedings of the former Economics and Governance Committee

The Inquiry was established by the former EGC in reference to that committee's examination of the Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 (Bill) - since enacted as the *Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2023* - which officially established the *Muttaburrasaurus langdoni* (the Muttaburrasaurus dinosaur) as the State's fossil emblem.

The former EGC recognised that the establishment of the new fossil emblem represented the latest development in a series of initiatives which have helped build a prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism industry, now an important contributor to Outback Queensland's economy and employment. Noting this, and the significant paleo resources and characteristics Outback Queensland has to offer (and further opportunities for industry expansion), the former EGC resolved to inquire into prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland while examining the Bill.

The former EGC called for submissions on the Inquiry's terms of reference on Monday 18 September 2023. In addition, this committee held a public briefing on 25 September 2023 on the Bill and the Inquiry, with departmental officers from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the former Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (former DTIS).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The former EGC ceased to exist on 13 February 2024 by a motion of the Legislative Assembly. Submissions and related publications received prior to 13 February 2024 are located on the former EGC inquiry webpage: [parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-Committees/Inquiries/Inquiry-Details?id=4285](https://parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-Committees/Inquiries/Inquiry-Details?id=4285).

<sup>2</sup> All public briefing and public hearing transcripts are available on the CSSC Inquiry webpage: [parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-Committees/Committees/Committee-Details?cid=165&id=4331](https://parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-Committees/Committees/Committee-Details?cid=165&id=4331).



*Members of the former Economics and Governance Committee at the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum, Winton, 4 October 2023.*

The former EGC visited Winton and Muttaborra from 3 to 5 October 2023 to conduct site visits and welcome input from local stakeholders in relation to the Bill (particularly its establishment of the *Muttaborrasaurus* dinosaur as the State’s fossil emblem) and the Inquiry terms of reference. The former EGC held a public hearing in Winton on Wednesday, 4 October 2023; a public forum in Muttaborra on Thursday, 5 October 2023; and a subsequent public hearing in Brisbane on Monday, 23 October 2023, at which the committee heard from tourism organisations and palaeontologists.

### **1.2.2 Consultation undertaken by the Community Support and Services Committee**

The committee visited Quilpie to hold a public hearing on 27 May 2024, at which the committee heard from stakeholder organisations, businesses and community members. The committee travelled from Quilpie to Eromanga, to conduct a site visit on 28 May 2024 at the Eromanga Natural History Museum.





*Community Support and Services Committee, Quilpie public hearing, 27 May 2024.*



*Members of the Community Support and Services Committee at the Eromanga Natural History Museum with Museum representatives, 28 May 2024.*

### 1.3 Significant fossil rich attractions in Outback Queensland

*Robyn Mackenzie OAM, Museum Director, Eromanga Natural History Museum, 27 May 2024*

*Queensland is in the fortunate position of having the lion's share of Australian dinosaur, megafauna and marine reptile discoveries. Added to this are the many other equally important fossil fauna and flora localities dotted across the state, ranging from fossils the size of a sand grain to the largest animals that ever walked on earth. This has undoubtedly provided significant opportunities for the community to not only preserve these fossils in context but also realise the economic, scientific and social benefits through paleo tourism.<sup>3</sup>*

Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) identified that dinosaur and paleo tourism is a growing tourism niche across the globe, whereby dinosaur fossil sites are transformed into geo-tourism destinations through open-air or field museums, interpretive centres, local museums, or paleontological parks.<sup>4</sup>

#### Queensland's key prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism sites

There are currently 10 major outback locations in Queensland that have emerged as 'paleo hubs', consisting of museums with displays of locally discovered fossils, active digging sites and established tourist facilities.

- Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum, Winton. Housing the world's largest collection of Australian dinosaur fossils and comprising a fossil preparation laboratory, reception centre and the *March of the Titanosaurs* exhibition at Dinosaur Canyon.
- Dinosaur Stampede National Monument, Lark Quarry Conservation Park, near Winton. Features a purpose-built building at the discovery site of the fossilised dinosaur stampede, as well as guided tours and gift shop.
- Kronosaurus Korner, Richmond. A marine fossil museum with approximately 1,150 unique fossil specimens, and opportunity for visitors to dig for fossils.
- Flinders Discovery Centre, Hughenden. Housing an exhibition of dinosaurs from around the world, an extensive and growing display of fossils from the local area, and 'Hughie', a life-size replica of a *Muttaborrasaurus* dinosaur found in the Flinders Shire region.
- Muttaborra Interpretation Centre, Muttaborra. Home of the *Muttaborrasaurus* dinosaur, discovered in 1963, the Centre features interpretive displays and replicas.
- Eromanga, near Quilpie – Eromanga Natural History Museum. Location of Australia's largest discovered dinosaur, named 'Cooper' (*Australotitan cooperensis*), the museum features exhibits, a fossil preparation laboratory with visitor observation access, a hands-on zone where families may take part in fossil preparation, a gift shop and café.
- Riversleigh World Heritage Area, near Mount Isa. Situated within the Boodjamulla National Park, home to fossils dating back 25 million years and one of the richest and most detailed continuous fossil records of changes in flora, fauna and habitat over time.<sup>5</sup> Managed by Traditional Owners, the Waanyi people, and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Boodjamulla National Park features walking tracks and camping sites.

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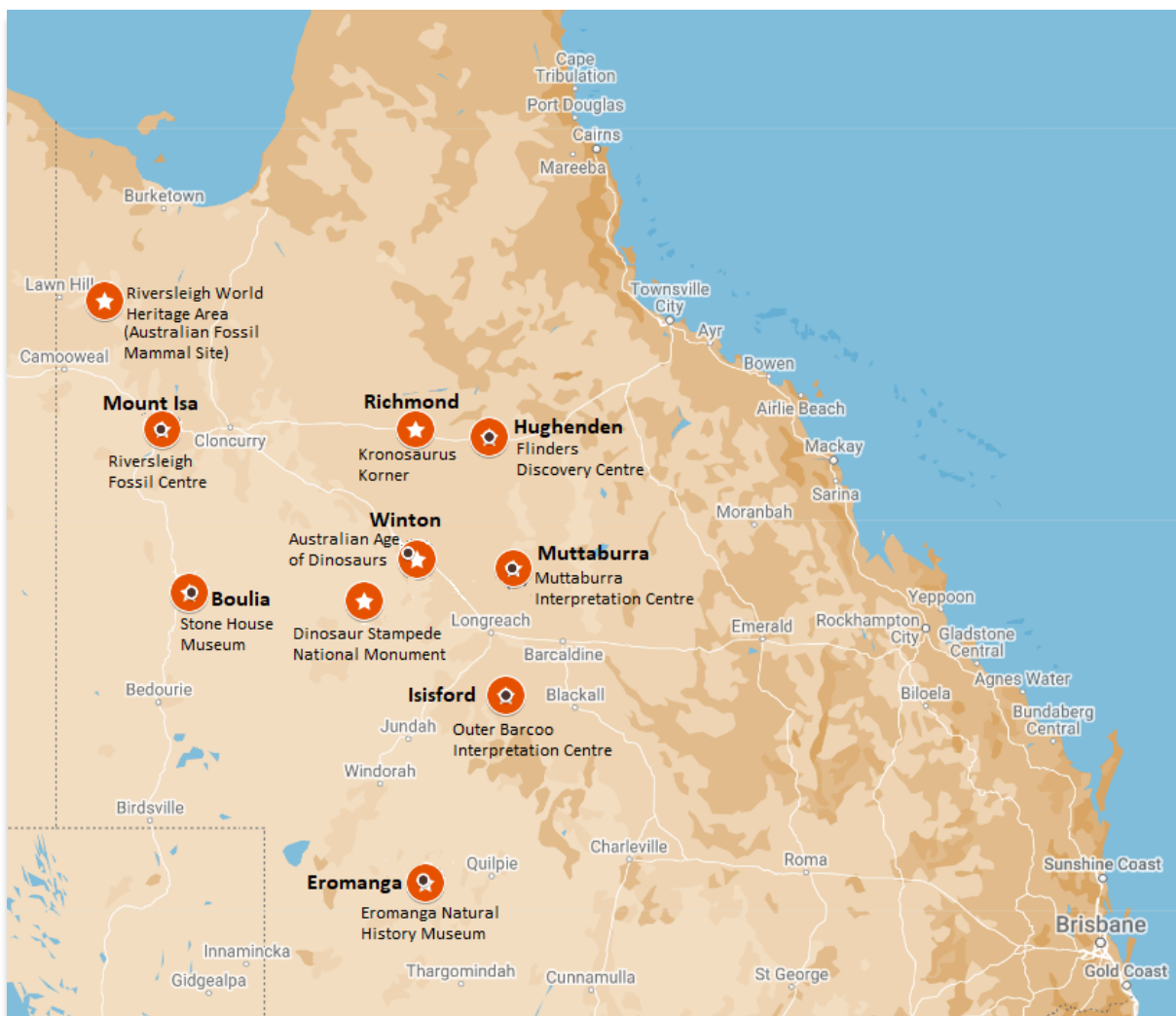
<sup>3</sup> Eromanga Natural History Museum (ENHM), public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 3.

<sup>4</sup> Former Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport (former DTIS) and Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ), correspondence (DTIS and TEQ correspondence), 18 October 2023, p 1.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, *Queensland's World Heritage Areas*, [environment.desi.qld.gov.au/management/world-heritage-areas/current](http://environment.desi.qld.gov.au/management/world-heritage-areas/current); the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites consists of two distinct areas listed as a combined World Heritage property, the Riversleigh section in Queensland and the Naracoorte section in South Australia.

- Riversleigh Fossil Centre, Mount Isa. Showcases fossils found in the Riversleigh World Heritage Area. The centre offers guided tours and access to the Riversleigh fossil laboratory situated within the Centre.
- Boulia Stone House Museum, Boulia Heritage Complex, Boulia. Features farm machinery, Indigenous artifacts, early pioneer history and 100-million-year-old marine fossils from the region, including an 80 per cent complete *Plesiosaur* or long-necked marine reptile fossil, found in the region.
- Outer Barcoo Interpretation Centre, Isisford. Includes a life-sized replication of the 98-million-year-old fossil of *Isisfordia Duncani*, an ancient crocodile-like reptile, as well as displays of local fauna, flora, reptiles and fish fossils from the region.

Map of Queensland featuring the 10 major paleo hubs in Outback Queensland.



For the year ending June 2021, Outback Queensland's paleo and dinosaur attractions accounted for an estimated 11 per cent of all visitors to the region, equivalent to approximately 134,400.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, the then Minister for Tourism, Innovation and Sport highlighted the mutually beneficial nature of the developments in the state's dinosaur towns, given 'visitors often visit several communities when on an Outback Queensland trip, particularly if they are on a drive holiday'.<sup>7</sup>

Refer to section 2.2 of this report for a consideration of the value of prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism to Queensland.

### **Committee comment**

The committee notes that stakeholders who contributed to the Inquiry were in general agreement that there continues to be significant opportunities for growth in prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland, and that the potential for growth in this sector presents significant flow-on opportunities for Outback communities.

### **Recommendation 1**

The committee recommends the Legislative Assembly note the report.

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<sup>6</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, 18 October 2023, p 1.

<sup>7</sup> Then Premier and Minister for Trade, Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, and then Minister for Tourism Industry Development and Innovation and Minister for Sport, Hon Stirling Hinchliffe MP, 'Premier launches new roadmap to grow dinosaur tourism in outback Queensland' (Roadmap launch), media statement, 2 May 2021, [statements.qld.gov.au/statements/92001](https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/92001).

## 2 Examination of Inquiry terms of reference

This section discusses key issues raised during the committee’s examination of the Inquiry.

### 2.1 Recent developments and initiatives to build prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism in Queensland

*Mr Darcy Slattery, General Manager, former Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, 25 September 2023*

*Dinosaur or paleo tourism experiences in Outback Queensland form an important part of the breadth of experiences visitors can enjoy. Dinosaur tourism is a hero experience for Queensland and is part of the Queensland story and represents where our competitive advantage lies.<sup>8</sup>*

Stakeholders to the Inquiry emphasised the importance of creating experiences around the paleolithic fossils that have been discovered in Outback Queensland, in response to public interest as well as to attract tourists to local communities. A number of stakeholders attested to this ‘chicken-and-egg’ situation, whereby tourists will not visit a community if the community, state or council has not invested in the infrastructure, facilities and accommodation to attract them.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, expanding on dinosaur tourism is highly dependent on local museums having the capacity to discover, identify, describe and publish new species. In this regard, some stakeholders called for more state funding to facilitate research and grow museum collections.<sup>10</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Outback Queensland Dinosaur Roadmap

The 3-year Outback Queensland Dinosaur Roadmap (the Roadmap), which commenced in 2021, is an initiative jointly funded by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and TEQ. It is not a tourist route to drive, but rather a strategy to facilitate Outback tourism with dinosaur tourism experiences.<sup>11</sup> The Roadmap was created following recognition that while Outback Queensland has one of the smaller tourism economies in Queensland, the region also has ‘a rare and unique opportunity to dramatically grow the tourism economy’ through the discovery of dinosaur remains and other ancient flora and fauna.<sup>12</sup>

Then Minister for Tourism, Innovation and Sport, Hon Sterling Hinchliffe MP, spoke to the wider benefits of the Roadmap at the time of its launch in 2021:

This roadmap will provide operators in the palaeontology tourism space a clear strategy and unified approach to promote and grow these natural history experiences over the next three years and beyond.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Former DTIS, Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 25 Sept 2023, p 2.

<sup>9</sup> Public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, pp 5, 10, 19; public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 16.

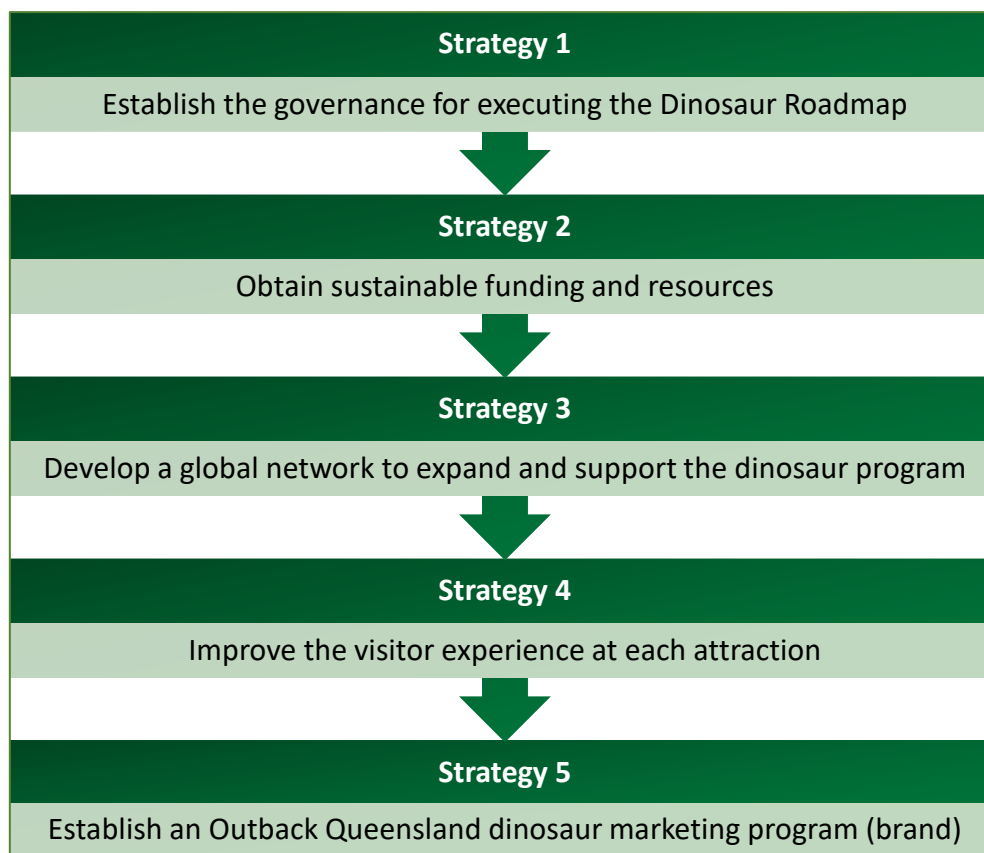
<sup>10</sup> Dr Matt Herne, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 25 September 2023, p 17.

<sup>11</sup> TEQ, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 2.

<sup>12</sup> TEQ, *Outback Queensland Dinosaur Roadmap* (Roadmap), tabled at public hearing, Quilpie, 27 May 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Roadmap launch, media statement, 2 May 2021.

The Roadmap included funds allocated to website content, and signage and brochures to help paleo-enthusiasts plan their holiday to attractions in Eromanga, Winton, Muttaburra, Hughenden and Richmond.<sup>14</sup> The Roadmap outlined 5 primary strategies:<sup>15</sup>



TEQ acts in an advisory capacity to assist with the development of committee set-up, ongoing governance, and dinosaur experience development opportunities. As at October 2023, TEQ advised it continues to work directly with the Outback dinosaur industry to assist in the delivery of actions under the Roadmap.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.1.2 Dinosaur Tourism Collective

One of the first key actions of the Roadmap was the establishment of an interim Dinosaur Tourism Advisory Panel, which in turn established the Dinosaur Tourism Collective (DTC) in June 2023. The DTC is purported to have the industry leadership necessary to drive activities across the outback regions that will grow dinosaur tourism.<sup>17</sup> The DTC consists of an independent Chairperson, a program manager, and the following four dinosaur experience operations accepted into the collective via an expression of interest process:

- Eromanga Natural History Museum
- Kronosaurus Korner
- Flinders Discovery Centre
- Outback at Isa – Riversleigh Fossil Discovery Centre.

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<sup>14</sup> Ellie Grounds, 'Tourists flock to paleo attractions in outback Queensland, with new discoveries added to dinosaur trail', *ABC Western Queensland* (online), 14 May 2021, [abc.net.au/news/2021-05-14/dinosaur-tourism-boom-outback-queensland/100131422](http://abc.net.au/news/2021-05-14/dinosaur-tourism-boom-outback-queensland/100131422).

<sup>15</sup> Roadmap, p 2.

<sup>16</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, p 1.

<sup>17</sup> Hon Sterling Hinchliffe, MP, Queensland Parliament, Record of Proceedings, 15 November 2023, p 3,566.

The expression of interest process is available to all Outback dinosaur experience operators that meet the following criteria:

- they are a Best of Queensland Experience (BOQE)
- they have achieved a BOQE Global Review Index (GRI) of over 88 percent in the 2021 round of the BOQE Program
- they are domestic and/or international market ready.<sup>18</sup>

The DTC operates as a company trading under the name Dinosaur Experiences Australia. Dinosaur Experiences Australia was incorporated on 14 June 2023.<sup>19</sup>

Dinosaur Experiences Australia aims to:

- position Dinosaur Experiences of Queensland as the one-stop source for finding Dinosaur and Prehistoric experiences across Australia and collectively be the authority of dinosaur and paleo tourism in Australia
- create communications with clear messaging about the initiative
- tell uniquely Queensland stories through Dinosaur experiences
- explore partnerships both domestically and internationally
- create and distribute information for the consumer, trade, and media
- provide advisory support in product development with existing and potential new DTC members
- retain and grow membership and ways to become more self-sufficient
- increase member engagement, communicate value and return on investment, and increase knowledge sharing among members.<sup>20</sup>

Ingrid Sellarulo, Program Manager, Dinosaur Experiences Australia, described the objectives of the company for the committee:

we aim to present Outback Queensland's rich dinosaur experiences to the world. We accelerate demand by facilitating lead opportunities for the members of Dinosaur Experiences Australia and driving increased interest and visitation. We elevate the profile of our collective and showcase the unique experiences we offer in key markets globally to attract more visitors. We expand market opportunities, connect with new audiences, broaden our market reach and tap into diverse consumer segments.<sup>21</sup>

Current Chair of Dinosaur Experiences Australia, John Fitzgerald, further emphasised: 'Our collective strengths will amplify the appeal of these incredible attractions, attracting more visitors and providing enriching, memorable experiences that showcase Australia's unique paleo heritage.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, p 3.

<sup>19</sup> Submission 4 to former EGC Inquiry, p 1.

<sup>20</sup> Submission 4 to former EGC Inquiry, p 2.

<sup>21</sup> Dinosaur Experiences Australia, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 13.

<sup>22</sup> Dinosaur Experiences Australia, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 14.

### **Committee comment**

The committee notes the considerable progress that has occurred since the rollout of the 3-year Outback Queensland Dinosaur Roadmap commenced in 2021, including the establishment of the Dinosaur Tourism Action Committee, the Dinosaur Tourism Collective, and Dinosaur Experiences Australia. Given 3 years have elapsed since the announcement of the Roadmap, we also consider it a good time to reflect on its outcomes, assess how successful it has been, and decide what steps are required to ensure the future vibrancy and growth of dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland.

#### **2.1.3 Queensland Government investment**

The department advised that since 2016-17, TEQ has expended \$842,000 on activity to specifically support dinosaur and paleo related experiences including understanding the potential and the market through research, developing the Roadmap, and establishing the DTC with 3 years of funding.<sup>23</sup>

The Queensland Government has also provided funding for eight capital projects relating to dinosaur and paleo tourism, totalling \$10.219 million, on projects with expected or actual completion dates from 2020 to 2024. A summary of the supported projects is provided in Appendix D of this report.

The department described these capital investments as ‘an economic enabler for the Outback region, with visitors spending more than seven times what they spend at the attraction in the local economy before and after their visit to the attraction’.<sup>24</sup>

Most local area councils include a paleo strategy or paleo specific content in their Tourism Development plans. The Outback Queensland Tourism Authority’s Destination Plan identifies dinosaurs and fossils as one of Outback Queensland’s main competitive strengths and a key area of focus and action.<sup>25</sup>

The Queensland 2023-24 Budget included a \$15 million Growing Future Tourism Program, which invited projects including for ‘Dinosaur paleo tourism infrastructure and experiences’. A second, \$7 million round of Growing Future Tourism funding was rolled out in early 2024.<sup>26</sup> An additional \$8 million is allocated for the program in the 2024-25 Budget.<sup>27</sup>

The 2023-24 Budget included funding of \$20 million for the Tourism Experience and Infrastructure Grants Program, to ‘support tourism experience development in priority areas with focus on First Nations, sustainability, eco/nature, accessibility and paleo’.<sup>28</sup> In the 2024-25 Budget, a new program, the Build Bush Tourism Fund, schedules \$10 million over 2 years to support new and enhanced tourism products or infrastructure.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, p 3.

<sup>24</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, p 1.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example: the ‘Flinders Shire Council Tourism Development Plan’, [flinders.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/276/tourism-development-planpdf](https://flinders.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/276/tourism-development-planpdf); ‘Cloncurry Shire Council Tourism Strategy’, [cloncurry.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/1441/cloncurry-tourism-strategy](https://cloncurry.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/1441/cloncurry-tourism-strategy); Winton Shire Council Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan, [winton.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/1102/winton-economic-development-strategy-action-plan](https://winton.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/1102/winton-economic-development-strategy-action-plan); Outback Queensland Tourism Authority Destination Plan 2021-2024, [teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/strategies/destination-strategies/OQTA-2021-2024-DMP.pdf](https://teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/strategies/destination-strategies/OQTA-2021-2024-DMP.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> DTS, ‘Growing Future Tourism’, last updated June 2024, [dtis.qld.gov.au/tourism/funds/growing-future-tourism](https://dtis.qld.gov.au/tourism/funds/growing-future-tourism).

<sup>27</sup> Queensland Budget 2024-25, Budget paper No.4 – Budget Measures, p 90.

<sup>28</sup> Queensland Budget 2023-24, Budget Paper No.4 – Budget Measures, p 93.

<sup>29</sup> Queensland Budget 2024-25, Budget paper No.4 – Budget Measures, p 91.



The first round of recipients included a Riversleigh Fossil Trail at the Cairns Aquarium and Reef Research Centre; and the Eromanga Natural History Museum, to construct a children's dig pit.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2 The value of prehistoric, dinosaur and paleo tourism to the outback Queensland economy

According to TEQ, Queensland's dinosaur hotspots attract up to 135,000 visitors a year, and account for 17.6 per cent of the state's Gross Regional Product.<sup>31</sup> The former DTIS advised that:

In the year ending March 2023, Outback Queensland's domestic overnight visitor expenditure reached a record \$865 million. That is up 8.8 per cent on average over the past three years. That is data from Tourism Research Australia within Austrade. With just over one million visitors over this period, Outback Queensland's share of Queensland's total visitors is similar to that of Townsville and slightly more than some other regions like the Whitsundays as well.<sup>32</sup>

According to 2022 government figures, paleo and dinosaur attractions also account for more than 11 per cent of tourism's \$470 million contribution to the Outback economy (and 26 per cent of leisure tourism, as well as supporting nearly 10 per cent of all Outback Queensland jobs).<sup>33</sup>

Beyond economic value, dinosaur tourism also helps to tell the unique story of Queensland's communities and plays a role in the management and conservation of their heritage.<sup>34</sup>

In announcing the *Muttaborrasaurus* dinosaur as the winner of the public vote for the State's fossil emblem (a voting process which followed a petition spearheaded by Winton's Age of Dinosaur's Museum, a subsequent consultation process, and the nomination of 12 fossil candidates),<sup>35</sup> Minister Hinchliffe stated:

The big winner of our search for the State's fossil emblem is Outback Queensland tourism where many of the southern hemisphere's greatest dinosaurs are found.

Thousands of visitors travel to Outback Queensland every year to walk in the footsteps of dinosaurs and discover our rich palaeontological history.

Everybody loves dinosaurs, they generate millions of dollars for the visitor economy, and we want to see Outback Queensland continue to grow as Australia's paleo capital.

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<sup>30</sup> Premier, Hon Steven Miles MP, and Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Trade and Investment, Hon Cameron Dick MP, and Minister for Tourism and Sport, Hon Michael Healy MP, 'Miles Doing What Matters: Budget boost injects \$80 million into regional tourism', media statement, 20 June 2024, [statements.qld.gov.au/statements/100637](https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/100637).

<sup>31</sup> Glenn Morrison, 'Making hay from old bones: Outback digs driving golden age of paleo tourism', *Cosmos*, 17 March 2023; when introducing the Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, Hon S Hinchliffe MP cited 122,000 visitors per year, 14 September 2023, Record of Proceedings, p 2,711.

<sup>32</sup> Former DTIS, public briefing transcript, 25 Sept 23, p 4.

<sup>33</sup> Former DTIS, 'New features at Eromanga dinosaur museum to attract paleo tourists', media release, 23 March 2022, [dts.qld.gov.au/news/latest/2022/new-features-at-eromanga-dinosaur-museum-to-attract-paleo-tourists](https://dts.qld.gov.au/news/latest/2022/new-features-at-eromanga-dinosaur-museum-to-attract-paleo-tourists); former Minister for the Environment and Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs, 'Fostering fossil tourism the focus of newly-appointed Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee', media statement, 23 August 2022, [statements.qld.gov.au/statements/96004](https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/96004).

<sup>34</sup> Public briefing transcript, 25 September 2023, p 4.

<sup>35</sup> Former EGC, *Report No. 52, 57<sup>th</sup> Parliament, Emblems of Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023*, p 6.

That's why the Palaszczuk Government is investing in a dinosaur tourism roadmap to highlight Queensland's best prehistoric experiences.<sup>36</sup>

### **2.2.1 Overnight visitors and overnight visitor expenditure – domestic**

For the year ending March 2024, TEQ reported Queensland had 24.9 million visitors (down 4.2 per cent from year ending March 2023), with a total of \$28.0 billion total expenditure (down 4.6 per cent from the year ending March 2023). Of this, \$14.2 billion accounted for expenditure from holidays, \$4.5 billion for visiting family and friends, and \$5.4 billion from business trips.<sup>37</sup>

Due to variability in the data, because of sample sizes, figures for Outback Queensland are not compared to the year ending March 2023; instead, trends are compared over a 3-year period. For the year ending March 2024, the number of visitors to Outback Queensland remained steady, at 859,000 (0.1 per cent change over three years). Of these, 209,000 were holiday visitors (down 3.9 per cent). Overnight visitor expenditure grew to \$762.1 million (up 12.5 per cent) and the average spend per night of visitors increased to an average of \$196 (up 18.1 per cent). Strong growth in interstate visitation (up 21.9 per cent to 189,000), was offset by decreases to the much larger intrastate market (down 3.8 per cent to 670,000).<sup>38</sup>

### **2.2.2 Overnight visitors and overnight visitor expenditure – international**

TEQ's statistics for international overnight visitors compared the year ending March 2024 with pre-Covid-19 rates from 2019.

TEQ reported Queensland had 2.1 million visitors in the year ending March 2024 (representing a 75.5 per cent recovery to 2019), with a total of \$6.1 billion total expenditure (representing a 100.9 per cent recovery to 2019). Of this, \$1.197 billion accounted for expenditure from holidays, \$733,000 for visiting family and friends, and \$178,000 was from business trips, and \$82,000 was for education. In order, the top 5 international markets visiting Australia were, by expenditure, New Zealand, China, the UK, Japan, and the USA.<sup>39</sup>

In Outback Queensland, for the year ending March 2024, total overnight visitor expenditure was \$17.9 million: 20 per cent above 2019 levels. This recovery is due to an increase in the average stay in the region, increasing from 11.0 to 25.1 nights. International visitation, in the year ending March 2024 was 18,000, up 69.0 per cent compared with 2019, with 11,000 holiday visitors (71.3 per cent of 2019 levels).

### **2.2.3 Length of stay in Outback Queensland – domestic and international**

Data from TEQ dated the year ending March 2024 indicates that the average length of stay for domestic visitors to Outback Queensland was 4.5 nights, above the overall average length of stay for Queensland at 3.9 nights.

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<sup>36</sup> Minister for Tourism, Innovation and Sport and Minister Assisting the Premier on Olympics and Paralympics Sport and Engagement, 'The dinosaur Queenslanders dig', media statement, 22 October 2022, [statements.qld.gov.au/statements/96403](https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/96403).

<sup>37</sup> TEQ, *Domestic overnight visitors to Queensland*, accessed 9 August 2024, p 1, [teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/research/other-research/Domestic%20Infographic%20YE%20March%202024.pdf](https://teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/research/other-research/Domestic%20Infographic%20YE%20March%202024.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> TEQ, *Domestic tourism snapshot*, accessed 9 August 2024, p 3, [teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/research/other-research/Domestic%20Tourism%20SnapShot%20%20-%20Mar%202024.pdf](https://teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/research/other-research/Domestic%20Tourism%20SnapShot%20%20-%20Mar%202024.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> TEQ, *International visitors to Queensland*. [teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/research/other-research/International%20Infographic%20YE%20March%202024.pdf](https://teq.queensland.com/content/dam/teq/corporate/corporate-searchable-assets/industry/research/other-research/International%20Infographic%20YE%20March%202024.pdf), accessed 9 August 2024, p 1.

As noted above, TEQ's data on average length of stay for international visitors to Outback Queensland was 25.1 nights, higher than the state average for Queensland of 24.5 nights and a significant increase by 11 nights, on average, since 2019.

This data indicates that a significant proportion of visitors to Outback Queensland are currently part of the drive tourism sector and willing to stop and/or side-step to tourist attractions. There are also opportunities for growth in the fly and drive market, with tourists flying to Outback towns and driving short distances to attractions.<sup>40</sup>

#### **2.2.4 The value of dinosaur tourism in Outback Queensland**

TEQ noted that dinosaur tourism in Outback Queensland, including dinosaur, megafauna, and marine fossil attractions, accounts for 26 per cent of all leisure travel to the region. Or, excluding travellers visiting family or relatives, it accounts for 41 per cent.<sup>41</sup>

The AEC Group undertook research and prepared the report *Value of Dinosaur Tourism: Outback Queensland* (AEC Report). This research was commissioned by TEQ and completed in 2022. The AEC Report found that:

- the ten dinosaur tourism attractions accounted for an estimated 11.0 per cent of all visitors to Outback Queensland, equivalent to approximately 134,400 dinosaur tourism visitors (or 500,000 visitor days / nights) in 2020 – 2021
- dinosaur tourism is estimated to account for approximately 17.6 per cent of Gross Regional Product (GRP) generated by the tourism sector in Outback Queensland and 18.9 per cent of employment, including both direct and flow-on activity
- dinosaur tourism attractions are an economic enabler with visitors spending more than 7 times what they spend at the dinosaur attraction in the local economy they visit.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> DTS, *Outback Queensland Tourism Association, Queensland Tourism Industry Reference Panel Submission*, [dts.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1583559/outback-queensland.pdf](https://dts.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1583559/outback-queensland.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, p 1.

<sup>42</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, attachment 1 (AEC Report), p 2.

The AEC Report considered both the direct and indirect effects of the industry in Outback Queensland:

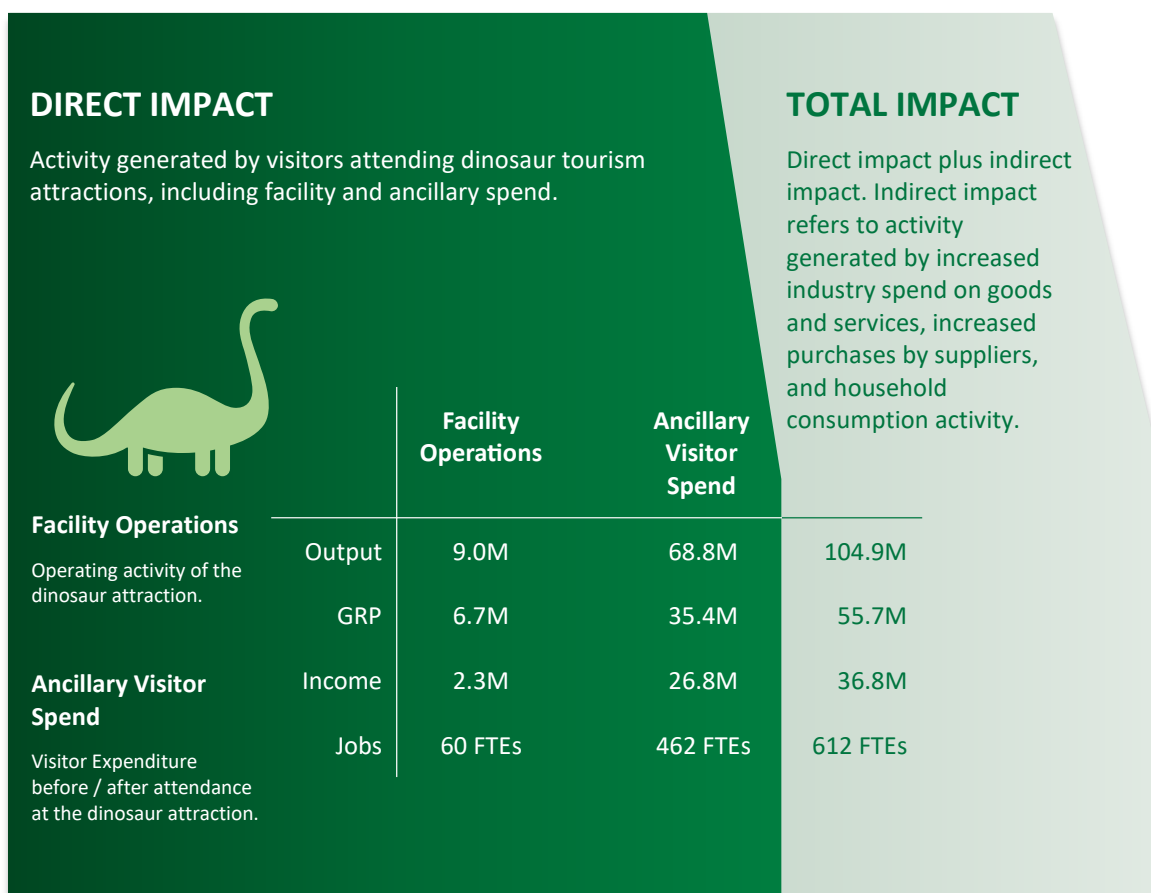


Table 1: Sourced from *Value of Dinosaur Tourism: Outback Queensland* [report], p 2.

### 2.3 Challenges and opportunities for further development of the industry

Stakeholders to the Inquiry identified a number of challenges and opportunities for growth in dinosaur and paleo tourism.

*Dr Scott Hocknull, Palaeontologist, 27 May 2024:*

*A key challenge for regional paleo tourism is finding ways to sustainably resource the discovery-to-interpretation pathway for the regional paleo tourism products. For Queensland paleo tourism to host a series of world-leading attractions, products and events, we need to maintain this pathway in a more sustained manner. How this is achieved is an open question and needs good answers.<sup>43</sup>*

#### 2.3.1 Tourism growth potential

Palaeontologist Dr Scott Hocknull told the committee many exciting new paleo discoveries are being made all around Australia, which brings opportunities for collaboration in forming an ‘Australia-wide paleo trail that links fossil hotspots’. Queensland, he noted, ‘is definitely well positioned as the jewel in the crown for Australian palaeontology’. Dr Hocknull expressed the potential for paleo discoveries to impact Queensland’s tourism, museums, academic research, and creative fields.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Dr Scott Hocknull, Palaeontologist, Public hearing transcript, Eromanga, 27 May 2024, p 10.

<sup>44</sup> Dr Scott Hocknull, Palaeontologist, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 10.

About the tourism potential of Outback Queensland, TEQ stated:

Outback Queensland has a unique opportunity to grow its tourism economy by consolidating the region behind the unique selling proposition of dinosaurs, complementing its existing tourism appeal.<sup>45</sup>

As noted in section 2.1.1 of this report, TEQ said it continues to work with the Outback paleo industry to implement the Outback Queensland Dinosaur Roadmap in an advisory capacity.<sup>46</sup>

The AEC Report identified 4 key levers that might be employed to ‘consolidate the unique value proposition of the dinosaur tourism market and realise the future potential of the sector as it moves towards best practise’. These are:<sup>47</sup>



The AEC Report noted that the potential for the sector to contribute to Outback Queensland’s tourism and broader economy is significant. It stated:

Visitation is expected to increase to 1.2 million visitor days/nights over the next fifteen years, as targeted marketing campaigns are coordinated across the majority of operators. This level of activity will be supported by investment in infrastructure and ancillary facilities to grow tourism activity and increase the length of stay in the region. Repeat visitation is expected due to the enhanced offering.

Dinosaur tourism is estimated to more than double in its contribution towards industry output, gross regional product, incomes, and employment over the next fifteen years (2035 - 2036).<sup>48</sup>

Based on these projections, the AEC Report predicted the following growth by 2035-36:

| DIRECT IMPACT |        | Facility Operations |            | Ancillary Visitor Spend | TOTAL IMPACT |
|---------------|--------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|--------------|
|               | Output | 20.9M               | 153.7M     | 235.4M                  |              |
|               | GRP    | 15.6M               | 79.2M      | 125.4M                  |              |
|               | Income | 5.3M                | 60.0M      | 82.7M                   |              |
|               | Jobs   | 139 FTEs            | 1,029 FTEs | 1,373 FTEs              |              |

Table 2 Sourced from *Value of Dinosaur Tourism: Outback Queensland* [report], p 3.

<sup>45</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, p 1.

<sup>46</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, p 1.

<sup>47</sup> AEC Report, p 3.

<sup>48</sup> AEC Report, p 3.

### 2.3.2 Infrastructure – roads and accommodation

One notable theme raised during consultation was the vital need for suitable infrastructure to support tourism in Outback Queensland. During a public hearing in Muttaborra, Mr Sean Dillon, Mayor of Barcaldine Regional Council noted that during peak tourist season, a community of Muttaborra's size can see its population double. Mayor Dillon continued:

If I was to emphasise anything, it would be that physical tourism infrastructure such as the road network, the extension of sealed corridors and the maintenance of already sealed corridors is really important for the drive market. There are very few private charters used at the Muttaborra airstrip, so the drive destination—which is what Muttaborra is—requires a resilient and well-constructed road network. The sealing of Aramac-Torrens Creek Road has been a major positive step in that direction. It now allows fully sealed access on the Mount Isa to Townsville corridor as well as, obviously, the sealing of the Cramsie-Muttaborra Road, which is a terrific boost not only for locals but people wishing to visit from the south, ensuring that can happen in a much safer and smoother manner.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, Mr David Elliott OAM, Executive Chairman of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History (Australian Age of Dinosaurs), noted that growth in the Winton region is contingent upon suitable accommodation and infrastructure to support increased visits. Mr Elliot advised that the museum currently relies on nearby towns to handle the overflow. He said, 'There is a chicken-and-egg scenario here and one has to come before the other'.<sup>50</sup>

Mr Gavin Baskett, Mayor of Winton Shire Council, advised that a feasibility study in 2021 highlighted that motels in the region were booked out most nights of the tourist season, which resulted in the loss of 35,000 beds per year.<sup>51</sup>

Mayor Baskett also raised issues about roads, speaking of initiatives that had been undertaken by Winton Shire Council, including sealing the road to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs, and contributing 20 per cent to seal the road to the Dinosaur Stampede National Monument at Lark Quarry Conservation Park, near Winton. Mayor Baskett confirmed the council has lobbied the federal government to seal the section that remains. Of the importance of roads, he said:

sealed roads are a priority to grow tourism. Most large bus companies and certain tourists will not travel on gravel roads and it comes at a significant cost to council to maintain these gravel roads. If we could get the section to Dinosaur Stampede sealed—the 15 kilometres which is in our shire sealed—that will just grow those numbers. Some 17,000 people go to Dinosaur Stampede now and we could envisage that doubling, if not more, which also adds to overnight stays in town.<sup>52</sup>

Another impediment raised by Mayor Baskett was the incomplete sealing of the Hann Highway, which, when completed, could 'get your Juicy vans heading down this way full of backpackers'.<sup>53</sup>

Road issues were also raised in Quilpie. Ms Lyn Barnes, Councillor of Quilpie Shire Council told the committee that roads were an issue. The road from Quilpie to the Eromanga Natural History Museum, for example, has 'narrow patches of road that need widening. They are safety issues'.<sup>54</sup>

Ms Barnes confirmed the Quilpie region will soon offer hire cars at the Quilpie airport, which will make travel easier between sites in the region. Of transport in the area, Ms Barnes said,

We feel that if this trail gets off the ground that creates business opportunities for people to look at tours, to look at buses, to look at picking up people from the airport or the train and taking them to Eromanga.

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<sup>49</sup> Barcaldine Regional Council, Public hearing transcript, Muttaborra, 5 October 2023, p 2.

<sup>50</sup> Australian Age of Dinosaurs (AAoD), Public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 5.

<sup>51</sup> Winton Shire Council, public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 7.

<sup>52</sup> Winton Shire Council, public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 7.

<sup>53</sup> Winton Shire Council, public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 7.

<sup>54</sup> Quilpie Shire Council, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 3.

It does create opportunities. Transportation wise, it generally will be a self-drive thing or an outback Aussie tour type thing.<sup>55</sup>

In Maranoa Regional Council's submission, it recommended that further investment be put into projects such as the Natural Sciences Loop to 'continue to enhance the key collections of paleo tourism in Southwest Queensland' for both domestic and international markets. The council also recommended there be investment into paleo-tourism before the 2032 Olympic Games, so that the industry may capitalise on domestic and international visitors.<sup>56</sup>

Submitter Milynda Rogers stated it is crucial there is further investment in 'this niche sector' in preparation of the Olympic Games. The submission urged Queensland Government to provide continued funding to grow dinosaur tourism:

By doing so, we can ensure that our region is ready to welcome the influx of international visitors during the next Olympic Games and provide them with an unforgettable experience. This investment will not only benefit the tourism sector but also contribute to the economic growth of our region as a whole.<sup>57</sup>

The Eromanga Natural History Museum's submission echoed the call for investment in infrastructure. It stated that infrastructure development is directly correlated with building capacity and keeping operations sustainable. The submission stated:

The ENHM is Outback Australia's premier natural history/dinosaur Museum. To attract and deliver international standard experiences, increased investment in line with the 2032 Olympics planning is required to compete on the world paleo stage.<sup>58</sup>

In its submission, Bengal Energy proposed new infrastructure be developed to connect Eromanga to other tourist destinations in the Natural Science Loop, such as Northern New South Wales and the Strzelecki Desert.<sup>59</sup>

### **2.3.3 Attracting an international market**

To date, most Queensland fossil visitors have been domestic in origin and self-drivers (98 per cent), with international tourists currently among the very few. This international market has been identified as an opportunity for growth.<sup>60</sup> Ms Robyn Mackenzie, Museum Director of the Eromanga Natural History Museum, advised that Queensland is uniquely positioned to capitalise from a vibrant dinosaur and paleo tourism industry. Ms Mackenzie stated:

It is apparent that there is exceptional growth potential to develop paleo tourism in Queensland, especially through partnerships with investment attraction. Australia and particularly Queensland can now take the opportunity to fully embrace the emerging paleo tourism industry on its own shores and compete and collaborate with our international counterparts.<sup>61</sup>

Ms Mackenzie said that projects such as the Eromanga Natural History Museum help to develop interstate tourism and scientific partnerships. She made several suggestions relating to improving the industry globally, including:

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<sup>55</sup> Quilpie Shire Council, Public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 4.

<sup>56</sup> Submission 1 to former EGC Inquiry, p 1; see also, submission 3 to former EGC inquiry, p 1.

<sup>57</sup> Submission 3, former EGC Inquiry, p 1.

<sup>58</sup> Submission 2 to former EGC Inquiry, pp 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> Submission 1, CSSC Inquiry, p 2.

<sup>60</sup> Yen Zhuang, 'Aussie Farmers Unleash Dinosaur Rush as Fossil Findings Rewrite History', *The New York Times* (online), 11 June 2023, [nytimes.com/2023/06/11/world/australia/australia-dinosaur-fossil.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/11/world/australia/australia-dinosaur-fossil.html).

<sup>61</sup> ENHM, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 5.

- recognising paleo-tourism as a unique point of difference for Queensland from the rest of Australia, on par with its beaches, islands and reefs. To elevate its global profile, significant investment and promotion of paleo-tourism are necessary
- recognising strategically located and regionally catalytic dinosaur and paleo tourism projects as projects of state tourism significance, further cementing Queensland as the Australian authority on this tourism sector.<sup>62</sup>

The former DTIS identified that there are challenges for the international market ‘in terms of access and accommodation—access from road, rail and air and accommodation in terms of the quality of accommodation that particular segments of the international market may be looking for.’<sup>63</sup>

As well as the impact of infrastructure such as roads and accommodation (noted in previous section 2.3.3 of this report), the lack of availability of flights to paleo-tourism sites is considered a barrier.

In Winton, Mayor Baskett stated the future demand following the construction of the Museum of Natural History will include the need for airport upgrades. International tourists, he said, often have high expectations on accommodation standards, and if they are time-poor, might prefer charter flights, ‘but our airport is not up to the standard to handle large charter planes’. Mayor Baskett told the committee that A.B. Paterson College has built a facility that can accommodate 200 students, and the intention is for this to be made available for other schools to use,

We would need daily flights into town. As you have done, you flew into Longreach and driven across and driven back. Imagine the benefits for this small community if we could have daily flights and the Traveltrain through to Winton.<sup>64</sup>

Issues with the airport upgrade were noted during the public hearing in Quilpie, with Councillor Barnes stating they’ve had problems due to the project being assessed at \$2.2 million, but being quoted at \$9.5 million.<sup>65</sup>

TEQ acknowledged the barriers to, and potential benefits of, supporting Outback Queensland as a tourist destination. TEQ said that international growth is broadly an outback tourism issue, not related just to dinosaurs, but to the region itself:

The number of locations and connectivity into the region, the accommodation opportunities that need to grow I think in parallel with these experiences has to be brought into the picture for that to potentially grow sustainably into the future.<sup>66</sup>

TEQ advised a dinosaur tourism committee was established to ‘tell the world what we have’.<sup>67</sup> TEQ also highlighted the potential for international development in the education market, and the business side of palaeontology,

Internationally, we know that America, South America and even areas of Mongolia have significant dinosaur experiences that they are growing as well and these are on par with those types of experiences. We can promote as much as possible into the international market, but we still need to connect them with a flight to the region or a long drive to the region and get them into accommodation and into an experience.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> ENHM, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 6.

<sup>63</sup> Former DTIS, Public briefing transcript, 25 September 2023, p 4.

<sup>64</sup> Winton Shire Council, Public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 7.

<sup>65</sup> Quilpie Shire Council, Public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 3.

<sup>66</sup> TEQ, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 1.

<sup>67</sup> TEQ, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 2.

<sup>68</sup> TEQ, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 2.



One key area for development, according to TEQ, is the collaboration of tourism providers throughout Outback Queensland. The attractions have tended ‘to work in silos with regard to their merchandising’, and ‘there are ways they can work better together to depict merchandise of the actual attractions and bones and things that we are digging up’.<sup>69</sup> Cooperation challenges and opportunities are discussed in section 2.3.6 below.

Mr Elliott of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs noted that international tourists seem happy to travel during the summer months, when locals tend to avoid it. Mr Elliott said it is not necessary for large numbers of international tourists to visit many of these towns and tourism businesses to keep them viable.<sup>70</sup>

### 2.3.4 Education and hands-on research opportunities

Stakeholders identified the education market as a potential area for growth.

#### 2.3.4.1 School programs

In terms of school age student visitation, TEQ advised that the Outback Queensland Education Experience Program provides a subsidy of between \$55 and \$130 per student to reduce costs of an excursion for Queensland schools.<sup>71</sup> The subsidy is available to all Queensland schools taking students in years 1 to 12 on a camp within the boundary of Outback Queensland.<sup>72</sup> The subsidy is paid directly to schools and is allocated according to round-trip distance travelled. The subsidy is designed to reduce the costs for individual students.<sup>73</sup>

As noted above, A.B. Paterson College, based on the Gold Coast, has invested in a remote facility for schoolchildren in Winton. ‘Barty’s Place’ was opened in July 2023, and features a purpose-built group accommodation facility comprising a large hall, dormitory-style rooms, a fully appointed commercial kitchen and dining room. Students from the college undertake activities in and around Winton, including a visit to the Dinosaur Museum. The facility is available for other schools and corporate groups for hire.<sup>74</sup>

In respect to initiatives to encourage students to Outback paleo sites, Matt Bron of TEQ advised:

Potentially I would love to see opportunities for those programs to grow by way of doing a reef and outback experience and then building into the curriculum, as you say, the story of Australian dinosaurs.<sup>75</sup>

#### **Committee comment**

The committee encourages the Queensland Government to investigate the viability of school appropriate accommodation facilities to support school group visitation to dinosaur and paleo tourism sites in Outback Queensland.

<sup>69</sup> TEQ, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 2.

<sup>70</sup> AAoD, Public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 3.

<sup>71</sup> TEQ, Public briefing transcript, 25 September 2023, p 6. Subsidy amount per student is calculated on distance travelled from school (round trip); see TEQ, *The Outback Queensland Experience (The Outback Queensland Experience)*, accessed 20 August 2024, [qldeducationexperiences.org.au/outback-experience/](http://qldeducationexperiences.org.au/outback-experience/).

<sup>72</sup> The program defines Outback Queensland as the local government areas of ‘Flinders, Richmond, McKinlay, Cloncurry, Mount Isa, Barcaldine, Blackall-Tambo, Longreach, Winton, Barcoo, Boulia, Diamantina, Murweh, Paroo, Quilpie, Bulloo, Croydon, Etheridge, Burke and Carpentaria’; *The Outback Queensland Experience* (webpage).

<sup>73</sup> *The Outback Queensland Experience* (webpage).

<sup>74</sup> A.B. Paterson College, *Barty’s Place Winton Bookings*, accessed 20 August 2024, [abpat.qld.edu.au/services/bartys-place-winton-bookings](http://abpat.qld.edu.au/services/bartys-place-winton-bookings).

<sup>75</sup> TEQ, public hearing transcript, 23 October 2023, Brisbane, p 4.

#### 2.3.4.2 *Paleo research experiences*

Opportunities for immersive paleo experiences for undergraduate or graduate palaeontologists, as well as interested visitors, was also identified by a number of stakeholders as a potential for growth.<sup>76</sup> Eromanga Natural History Museum, Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum and Kronosaurus Korner offer programs for paying visitors to experience hands-on fossil preservation tasks, or fossicking and excavation activities at designated sites.<sup>77</sup> The opportunity for this sector to grow was acknowledged by Dr Scott Hocknull, who stated at the Quilpie public hearing:

One possible answer comes from the added opportunity regional paleo tourism offers in terms of a primary catalyst for citizen science education hubs from primary and tertiary schooling through to vocational education, local creative industries, environmental management, domestic and international research and, of course, traditional knowledge incorporation and collaboration.

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs takes interns from the University of Queensland and the University of New England in New South Wales.<sup>78</sup> According to Dr Matt Herne, palaeontologist and curator at the museum, these programs offer great benefits to the excavation process, as well as the local economic benefits:

At the Age of Dinosaurs and the Museum of Natural History I run the Dig-a-Dino program. We have on average 40 paying participants per year. We have two back-to-back digs. There are four digs altogether of one-week duration each and we had at least 40 participants. These are people with a lifelong dream to go and dig a dinosaur. Yes, it costs money and they save up for whatever they do, but they do come along and experience it. It takes time. Some of these sites we go back and work over several years. An individual dinosaur can take several years to actually excavate. Most of the excavation is done by a team of people, including Dig-a-Dino experience visitors who pay money.<sup>79</sup>

Dr Herne indicated that there was capacity to increase the number of people participating in the immersion program, as demand is high, but there are currently limitations to expand the program in relation to staff and logistics.<sup>80</sup>

#### 2.3.5 Staffing

During the public hearings staffing was identified for its value to communities, and the committee heard of the challenges these seasonal operations face.

Mayor Baskett of the Winton Shire Council noted that the Australian Age of Dinosaurs is the second largest employer in the shire.<sup>81</sup> Ms Vicki Jones, the Owner-Operator of Red Dirt Tours, which provides chartered day tours in the Winton region and six-day tours of the Australian Dinosaur Trail, spoke of the rapid growth of her operation. Commencing in 2015 with 'myself, a bus, a computer and a mobile phone', Red Dirt Tours had only 16 seats. In 2023 it had 5 buses and 5 staff.<sup>82</sup>

Ms Jones said that, despite trying to run the business 12 months of the year, the work is seasonal: peak season is April until the end of October, the rest of the year is off-peak. During an October hearing she said, 'One of my staff has already left for the season. I have two leaving in another couple of weeks. One is a local person so I can call on her fairly regularly if I need to. There is not really any other way to do it'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> TEQ, public hearing transcript, 23 October 2023, Brisbane, p 2.

<sup>77</sup> Dinosaur Experiences Australia, public hearings transcript, 23 October 2023, p 9.

<sup>78</sup> Dr Matt Herne, palaeontologist, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 17.

<sup>79</sup> Dr Matt Herne, palaeontologist, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 18.

<sup>80</sup> Dr Matt Herne, palaeontologist, public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 23 October 2023, p 19.

<sup>81</sup> Winton Shire Council, Public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 7.

<sup>82</sup> Red Dirt Tours, Public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, pp 14-5.

<sup>83</sup> Red Dirt Tours, Public hearing transcript, Winton, 4 October 2023, p 16.

Mr Corey Richards, General Manager, Operations, Eromanga Natural History Museum, also noted the need 'to scale up and down seasonally'. Consequently, training was identified as a challenge. Mr Richards said, 'we are spending a huge amount of HR investment on training annually, which is just the nature of the beast, I guess'. Mr Richards said,

Streamlining our training has been a really massive thing. We do like to commend some of the things that are being done recently, like with the Queensland Tourism Industry Council when they are doing their microcredentialing programs. Accessibility to remote training is incredibly important to businesses like ours. The value proposition that we can give to potential employees is also really important.<sup>84</sup>

Mr Richards highlighted the benefits of cooperation to bolster and support the industry. Due to good relationships with council, for example, the museum is able to provide housing for staff. He suggested that the Queensland Government could support cooperation through facilitating partnerships. Due to different regions of Outback Queensland having peak seasons at different times of year, he proposed that staff could be mobilised to work in different sites, year-round:

We are looking at creating those connections between us and all of our facilities and universities, with schools as well. It is about connecting not so much business to business but business to education and business to other businesses in other areas that we can create connection with so that we can have ongoing employees.<sup>85</sup>

### **2.3.6 Cooperation between tourist operators**

Stakeholders agreed that Queensland's remote paleo attractions would benefit from cooperation with each other, and with other remote tourist attractions and communities. This would enable them to create touring itineraries that pass through 'clusters' of tourism products and local businesses, and would encourage visitors to stop at more than one location, stay longer, and explore nearby regions.<sup>86</sup> It is noted that a regional or hub approach would encourage new businesses and assist established operators to be more sustainable.<sup>87</sup> The approach offers visitors, whose length of stay in Outback Queensland is longer than the average in other regions of Queensland (refer to section 2.2.3 of this report), to achieve greater value for money by visiting more than one attraction on their journey.

Lyn Barnes, Councillor, Quilpie Shire Council, drew the committee's attention to the international opportunities for establishing a paleo touring itinerary. She stated:

Whilst paleo tourism has been around for a long time, paleo trails are only just starting to be mapped out. When googling 'paleo tourism' which means, according to Google, 'hands-on interaction with fossils', the results are mostly from South Africa and from our own outback, with some mention of paleo hiking trails in California. If we do not establish a dedicated paleo trail for our Queensland scientific attractions, we run the risk of not capturing the momentum that is currently evident.<sup>88</sup>

In 2004, Winton, Richmond and Hughenden partnered in the establishment of what was described at the time as 'Australia's first venture into paleo-tourism' - a self-drive experience referred to as Australia's Dinosaur Trail - between the 3 communities in central Queensland. Shared brochures and maps were created to guide tourists around the Dinosaur Trail which takes in 325 kms of the Kennedy

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<sup>84</sup> Dinosaur Experiences Australia, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 9.

<sup>85</sup> Dinosaur Experiences Australia, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 9.

<sup>86</sup> Submissions 1, 2, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Australian Government, Parks Australia, Submission 14 to Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia, Inquiry into opportunities and methods for stimulating the tourism industry in Northern Australia, 2017. See: [aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Former\\_Committees/Northern\\_Australia\\_46P/TourismIndustry](http://aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Former_Committees/Northern_Australia_46P/TourismIndustry).

<sup>88</sup> Quilpie Shire Council, Public briefing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 2.

Development Road and Flinders Highway.<sup>89</sup> The same group established a multi-day pass, which includes entry into the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum and Dinosaur Stampede National Monument in Winton, Kronosaurus Korner in Richmond, and Flinders Discovery Centre in Hughenden. The pass includes guided tours to the two Winton sites.<sup>90</sup>

Several stakeholders suggested the major attractions would benefit from a greater sense of unity and shared purpose. Sean Dillon, Mayor, Barcaldine Regional Council, said an atmosphere of competition between tourism providers can breed animosity. He submitted to the committee an expansion of the dinosaur trail to the benefit of neighbouring Outback attractions:

That is not where outback tourism needs to go because, let's face it, we are competing with the Great Barrier Reef tourism market. Let's be real; they are not always symbiotic. The people who go snorkelling off the Great Barrier Reef are not necessarily the same people in every instance who wish to experience outback tourism. To me, the possibility of expanding the triangle need not change the shape; it is changing what happens, branching off each point.<sup>91</sup>

Ms Barnes concurred, stating, 'It is a daunting task to create a standalone paleo experience, but if you know that there are others you can rely on and a trail to assist you, I think that would be extremely valuable'.<sup>92</sup>

The submission of the Eromanga Natural History Museum referred to wider opportunities for a trail to expand across borders into other Australian jurisdictions, noting the proximity of Eromanga to 'all capital cities in Australia and easily accessible by fully sealed roads and airports'.<sup>93</sup>

The committee noted that Dinosaur Experiences Australia has four foundation members but does not currently include a number of major dinosaur and paleo tourism operators.

According to Ben Hall, Mayor, Quilpie Shire Council, the Winton attractions do not currently work collaboratively with other Outback Queensland dinosaur facilities, outside of the Australia's Dinosaur Trail. Mayor Hall commented; 'They are operating individually in their own silos. That is the key issue, and this [proposed paleo trail] is predominantly to bring together some sort of coalition'.<sup>94</sup>

As stated in section 2.1.2 of this report, the key objective of Dinosaur Experiences Australia, operating as the company name for participants of the Dinosaur Tourism Collective, is to grow dinosaur tourism. According to Ingrid Sellarulo, Program Manager, Dinosaur Experiences Australia; 'Our strength is in our unity'.<sup>95</sup> Ms Sellarulo further stated:

Our collective approach offers strong outcomes and broadened reach across various markets, including education, paleo enthusiasts and, of course, the family market by supporting attractions to develop new experiences.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> 'Tourists to follow dinosaur footsteps', *Courier Mail (Brisbane)*, 1 September 2004; see Outback Queensland, *Australia's Dinosaur Trail*, accessed 21 August 2024, [australiasdinosaurtrail.com.au/](http://australiasdinosaurtrail.com.au/).

<sup>90</sup> Australia's Dinosaur Trail, *ADT Pass*, accessed 20 August 2024, [australiasdinosaurtrail.com.au/australias-dinosaur-trail-pass/](http://australiasdinosaurtrail.com.au/australias-dinosaur-trail-pass/).

<sup>91</sup> Barcaldine Regional Council, public hearing transcript, Muttaborra, 5 October 2023, p 4.

<sup>92</sup> Quilpie Shire Council, public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 1.

<sup>93</sup> Submission 2 to former EGC Inquiry, p 3.

<sup>94</sup> Public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 2.

<sup>95</sup> Dinosaur Experiences Australia, Public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 13.

<sup>96</sup> Dinosaur Experiences Australia, Public hearing transcript, Quilpie, 27 May 2024, p 13.

### **Committee comment**

The committee notes the potential for continuous economic, educational, and cultural growth to emanate from dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland. Owing to the state's exceptional array of palaeontological discoveries—of which we have only scratched the surface—and the world-class attractions established within these Queensland communities, we see an industry poised to thrive.

We also recognise that significant challenges remain, and that these challenges are largely linked and interdependent. Business growth is dependent on attracting tourists, but tourists expect a high quality of infrastructure such as roads and accommodation. Academic opportunities abound, but museums do not have money to fund their own research. Skilled staff are required, but work opportunities are limited by seasonal tourism.

The most consistent theme the committee identified was a need to foster a cooperative dinosaur and paleo tourism industry. Reciprocal relations and a sense of unity would make for an appealing tourist proposition. This is also challenging, given the remoteness of Outback Queensland, and the distance between these outstanding fossil discoveries.

The committee encourages further dialogue between the founding organisations within the Dinosaur Experiences Australia and other dinosaur attractions in Outback Queensland to grow the collective for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders. Similarly, the committee is of the view that Australia's Dinosaur Trail and the multi-day pass initiative could be expanded to include other major dinosaur attractions, allowing visitors the opportunity to access all dinosaur attractions across Outback Queensland through one ticket portal.

The committee believes the government should investigate further strategies in planning for the future of dinosaur and paleo tourism in Outback Queensland.

### **Recommendation 2**

The committee recommends the Queensland Government consider the findings in this report and develop a strategy to enable the future growth and cooperation of Outback Queensland's dinosaur and paleo tourism industry. In particular, we recommended the government focus on:

- the need for greater infrastructure
- attracting an international market
- promoting educational and research opportunities
- mitigating the distance between tourism attractions
- promoting Outback Queensland's tourism attractions as a unified tourist proposition.

## Appendix A – Submitters

### Submitters to the former Economics and Governance Committee

| Sub # | Submitter                       |
|-------|---------------------------------|
| 1     | Maranoa Regional Council        |
| 2     | Eromanga Natural History Museum |
| 3     | Milynda Rogers                  |
| 4     | Dinosaur Experiences Australia  |

### Submitters to the Community Support and Services Committee

| Sub # | Submitter     |
|-------|---------------|
| 1     | Bengal Energy |

## **Appendix B – Officials at public departmental briefing**

**25 September 2023**

### **Department of the Premier and Cabinet**

- Jessica Collins, Assistant Director General and Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet Office
- Kate Molomby, Acting Executive Director, Governance and Engagement
- Linda Keeshan, Director, Cabinet Office
- Yasmahne Hanel, Director, Governance and Engagement
- Andrew Timperley, Principal Policy Officer, Cabinet Office

### **Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport**

- Darcy Slattery, General Manager, Tourism

## **Appendix C – Witnesses at public hearings**

### **4 October 2023, Winton**

#### **Australian Age of Dinosaurs – Museum of Natural History**

- David Elliott OAM, Executive Chairman
- Naomi Miles, Head of Development

#### **Winton Shire Council**

- Cr Gavin Baskett, Mayor

#### **Barcaldine Shire Council**

- Cr Sean Dillon, Mayor

#### **Red Dirt Tours**

- Mrs Vicki Jones

#### **Flinders Shire Council**

- Cr Jane McNamara, Mayor

### **23 October 2023, Brisbane**

#### **Tourism and Events Queensland**

- Matt Bron, Acting Group Executive Commercial and Partnerships
- Henry Tuttiet, Corporate Affairs and Government Relations Director

#### **Dinosaur Experiences Australia**

- Ingrid Sellarulo, Program Manager
- Corey Richards, Board Member

#### **Dr Scott Hocknull, Palaeontologist**

#### **Dr Matt Herne, Palaeontologist**



**27 May 2024, Quilpie**

**Quilpie Shire Council**

- Cr Ben Hall, Mayor
- Lyn Barnes, Councillor

**Eromanga Natural History Museum**

- Robyn Mackenzie, OAM, Museum Director
- Corey Richards, General Manager Operations

**Stuart Mackenzie, OAM (private capacity)**

**Dr Scott Hocknull (private capacity)**

**Dinosaur Experiences Australia**

- Ingrid Sellarulo, Program Manager
- John Fitzgerald, Chairman

**Outback Gondwana Foundation Limited**

- Stuart Mackenzie, Chairman

**Tom Meakin (private capacity)**

**Jane Pike (private capacity)**

## Appendix D – Queensland Government expenditure on dinosaur and paleo tourism infrastructure

Projects supported by the former Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, 2020 to 2024<sup>97</sup>

| Recipient  | Project approved   | Total funding | Applicant contribution | Project value | Completion date |
|--|--|---------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Australian Age of Dinosaurs Limited (Winton)                                     | Dynamic Destination: Developing sustainable summer tourism: Expansion of the Museum's experiences to offer new year-round day and night tourism attractions.   | \$4,934,299   | \$208,558              | \$5,142,857   | 08/05/2021      |
| Grant David Smedley (operator)   | Capricorn Dinosaur Park, Cooberie Park Wildlife Sanctuary (Yeppoon): construction of 35 life-sized dinosaurs, a one-kilometre wheelchair and stroller-friendly dinosaur walk, an educational dinosaur fossil dig, mini golf, and a picnic and playground area.   | \$796,398     | \$77,600               | \$873,998     | 04/04/2023      |
| Outback Gondwana Foundation Limited (Eromanga Natural History Museum Foundation) | Viewing Galleries for Australia's largest dinosaur: Stage 2 Phase 2a to construct: An interpretation corridor with glazed viewing into preparation labs, glazed viewing of dinosaur bones, glazed viewing area into fossil collection room and plant room; Viewing area #1 – live fossil preparation eg. Skulls, large complete limbs etc; Viewing area #2 – taxidermy, entomology, microfossil sorting; Viewing area #3 – fossil (holotype) collection room; Project Design and Management; Fit-out; Supporting renewable power supply. | \$2,000,000   | -                      | \$2,000,000   | 24/03/2022      |
| Mount Isa City Council   | VR Experience at Riversleigh Fossil Centre (Project 1): Development of a Tourism Pipeline Project - Development of a virtual reality experience as part of the Riversleigh Fossil Centre.  | \$150,000     | -                      | \$150,000     | 13/08/2020      |

<sup>97</sup> DTIS and TEQ correspondence, 18 October 2023, attachment 3.

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|                                     |   |                     |                    |                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Richmond Shire Council              | Design to Support Refurb & Expansion of Kronosaurus Korner: The detailed design and tender documentation for the modernisation and expansion of Kronosaurus Korner in Richmond.                                     | \$75,000            | -                  | \$75,000            | 14/04/2020 |
| Mount Isa City Council              | Riversleigh Fossil Centre Revitalisation: Redesign and enhancement of the Fossil Centre to provide an engaging, educational experience for visitors that showcases the fossil stories of the local area.            | \$1,230,000         | \$410,000          | \$1,640,000         | 24/06/2020 |
| Outback Gondwana Foundation Limited | Interpretation Infrastructure: The project will provide for the design and construction of a full-sized scientifically accurate 3D printed and painted skeleton of 'Cooper', Australia's largest dinosaur.          | \$834,000           | \$116,000          | \$950,000           | 24/03/2022 |
| Australian Age of Dinosaurs Limited | Create, Captivate and Consolidate (CCC) project: Upgrade of helipad, reception centre enhancement and construction of exhibition development to house the significant Australian fossil collection being purchased. | \$200,000           | \$949,800          | \$1,149,800         | 31/01/2024 |
| <b>Sub-totals</b>                   |   | <b>\$10,219,697</b> | <b>\$1,761,958</b> | <b>\$11,981,655</b> |            |