

18 May 2022

Sustainable off-reef surf tourism key to region's growth: KAP candidate

KATTER'S Australian Party candidate for Dawson, Ciaron Paterson, has outlined his mission to secure a Kelly Slater-style "surf ranch" for the area inland from Whitsundays in a bid to boost tourism in the region and diversify the economy of the Dawson electorate.

Surf ranches utilise cutting-edge technology to produce artificial waves which can be up to one kilometre long, and can be constructed on any body of water, such as lake.

Mr Paterson said the Kelly Slater surf ranch in California is 150 kilometres inland and produces waves of such a high standard the venue is certified by the World Surfing League for competition.

Mr Paterson said Australians have access to some of the best surfing in the world, but would still be impressed by how far artificial wave technology has come in the last few decades.

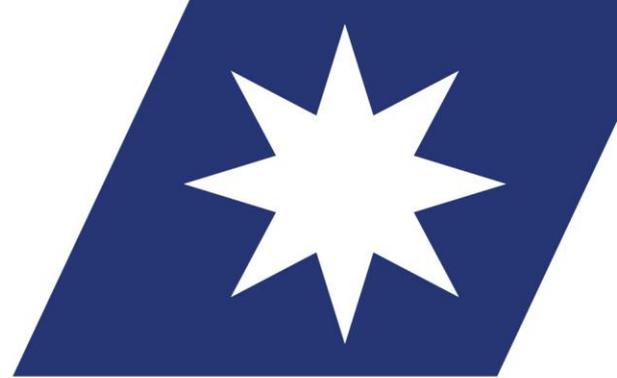
"If you look at some wave technology all it does is produce a surge of chop which is OK if that's the experience you want.

"The surf ranches can produce perfect barrels every time so there's no chilling on your board out the back, that's the only difference.

"And there's no sharks or crocs!"

Mr Paterson said the project would not only bring jobs during construction, but ongoing employment in maintenance, hospitality, life saving, transport and many others, in areas which may currently be missing out on the tourist dollars because they are not connected to reef tourism.

He said a facility could have restaurants and bars as well as a range of accommodation to suit a variety of needs from families to corporate retreats.



"We have world-recognized attractions up and down the coast, but the beauty of the surf ranch concept is you are building a coastal experience any number of kilometres away from the coast, taking pressure off the beaches, the reef and the islands.

"These kind of unique attractions will keep tourists in the regions longer, which means more dollars in the pockets of local shop owners and hoteliers."

Mr Paterson says there is already considerable competition from other parties interested in gaining the rights to the exclusive technology, and has committed to make an immediate start on getting the project off the ground if elected.

Mr Paterson said the cost of getting the initial wave machine going in California was 30 million US dollars, but that included research and development costs, and said he expects it could be done for a lot less.

"We would need all levels of government to work together on this, to secure the permits and so on, and would be looking at both public and private investment.

"An investment in a waterpark can be upwards of \$40 million, with governments quite often kicking in a third or more to get the attraction off the ground.

"I am confident that a business case could be put together within 12 months."

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