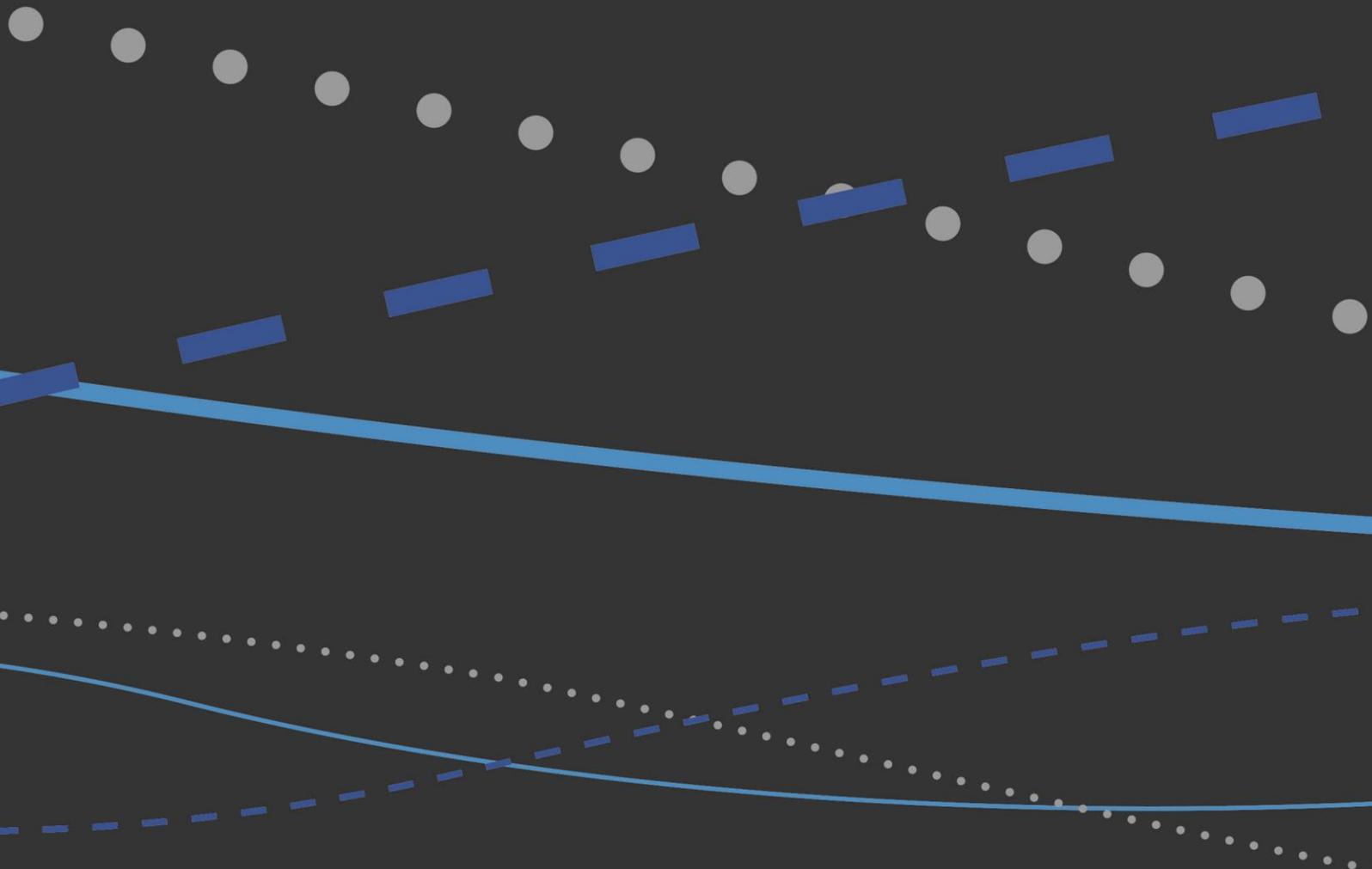




Whitsunday Planning Scheme 2017 Major Amendment: Short-term Accommodation

Consultation Report

Date: 1 October 2025



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Document History

Title	Version No.	Date	Author	Reviewer	Approved by
Report	1.0	15 August 2025	Jonathan Cutting	Artiqua Harrison & Neil McGaffin	
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1. Executive Summary

The Whitsunday Region is a popular destination for visitors, many of whom choose holiday home-style accommodations, which can conflict with permanent residents, from an amenity, residential character and housing supply perspective.

To refine the balance of managing diverse visitor accommodation options and resident impacts, Council proposed to amend the *Whitsunday Regional Council Planning Scheme 2017* to include additional assessment benchmarks for Short-term accommodation within dwellings in the Low-density residential zone. The benchmarks aim to:

- Identify 10 precincts where Short-term accommodation may be supported in the Low-density residential zone, removing support in all other locations zoned Low density residential.
- It applies to Short-term accommodation (STA) within a Dwelling, Dual occupancy or Multiple dwelling, defined as:

'The use of one or two, existing or proposed Dwellings for short-term accommodation for tourists for a temporary period of time not exceeding three consecutive months.'

Consultation was open from Wednesday 11 June – Sunday 20 July 2025, a period of 40 days. A total of 84 individual submissions were received during the consultation period. Key feedback included:

- Wide variety of similar and contrary views.
- General support for the intent of the amendment that provides greater clarity to investors and protects residential character of areas considered to be dormitory residential suburbs.
- Recognition of the important role and contribution of STA, particularly for accommodating a positive visitor experience for group or family travel, which is essential to support peak season, events and future Olympic accommodation needs.
- Mix of feedback regarding STA restrictions, including desire for:
 - More restrictions to limit or require public notification within Low-medium residential zone dormitory suburbs, prioritise housing supply or establish STA neighbourhood cap to preserve residential character.
 - Less restrictions to promote investment, quality visitor accommodation supply for groups/family travel, and concerns about government controls over private property, preferring improvements to property management over more red-tape.
- Identification of several areas to be considered for inclusion, exclusion or STA neighbourhood cap within proposed Low density residential zone precincts
 - Consideration of areas around Cannonvale Foreshore, parts of Jubilee Pocket and Jones Road (Cannonvale)
 - Desire to exclude or cap STA within Airlie Hill surrounds (Summit, Hill Crest & Ocean View Ave), Beacons, Ocean Rd and Gloucester/Nelly Bay enclave, due to concerns about residential amenity, traffic, parking and transience that affects residential character.
 - Balanced feedback regarding the inclusion of the Shute Harbour precinct
- Commentary on housing supply influence from STA, with industry identifying that STA is predominately luxury dwellings, AirBnB noting limited evidence of linkage to affordability and Whitsunday Chamber of Commerce desire to prioritise housing over STA given current shortages impacting business's staff retention.
- Frustration from owners and industry over extensive red-tape and costs associated with converting to STA, including suggestions to remove need for planning application in supported STA zones/precincts where meeting requirements, reduction

in unnecessary local law permit inspections where qualified persons certificates are provided and flexible capacity limits for effectively managed large houses.

- Considerations for STA local law amendments, including
 - Recognition and incentives scheme for good property management, offering 'gold star' marketing advantage or flexibility for suitable properties to host more than 8 persons where property & manager have good management history.
 - Strong support of 3-strike rule, but desire to improve resourcing to ensure all STA's are registered, complaints are managed transparently, and poorly managed properties are efficiently shut down.
 - Identification of challenges for property management in high density units, where property management of individual units is non-existent or external to the hotel/strata manager.
- Strong support for ongoing advocacy to the State Government to establish a consistent statewide approach to licencing STA, with displaying licence identification to be a mandatory requirement to host a property on a booking site.

All submission contents have been collated in this report. Submission themes will be considered by Council to inform next steps for the *Whitsunday Regional Council Planning Scheme 2017* Short-term accommodation major amendment.

WRC will report back to the community to close the loop and demonstrate how the feedback was taken into consideration.

2. Background

Finding a balance between enabling sufficient visitor accommodation to support a growing tourism industry and protecting the integrity of 'dormitory' residential suburbs is a challenge..

STA plays an important role in the visitor accommodation make-up, especially given that existing hotels and tourist parks are often operating at full capacity during peak season. Occupancy levels beyond 90% place a ceiling on visitation that limits the capacity of events, peak season and impacting on our competitiveness with other destinations. Feedback from Tourism Whitsunday and Property Managers indicates that occupancy levels during peak season are approaching 90%.

In 2023, guests using short-term accommodation platforms, such as Airbnb, contributed significantly to the local economy, with \$174 million spent on accommodation and even more spent in the local community on food and grocery, tourism experiences and shopping.

The previous Planning Scheme major amendment consultation was completed in October 2023. Public consultation for this amendment attracted 1,331 submissions. Of these submissions, a total of 348 submissions included reference to short-term accommodation, including:

- Short-term accommodation should not be supported in low density residential zones, and
- Short-term accommodation should be made impact assessable within the Low-medium density residential zone.

Over the last six years Council has received a total of 150 submissions during public consultation periods for development applications for short-term accommodation within the Low-density residential zone. The primary concerns raised by submitters included:

- Number of STA properties in locality
- Privacy concerns
- Noise
- Security concerns from increased number of tourists
- Impacts to long-term accommodation supply

- Parking
- Rubbish, and
- Behaviour of visitors.

3. Overview of the Consultation

The consultation process occurred between Wednesday 11 June – Sunday 20 July 2025, for a period of 40 days utilising our Online Engagement Portal. Communication tools to raise awareness of the consultation period included:

- Project page, fact sheet, mapping and how to make a submission information on our Online Engagement Portal - Yoursay Whitsunday.
- Social media post (4)
- Newspaper notice (4)
- Direct email of key stakeholders and Yoursay members interested in the amendment (959)
- Interviews by Council Officers with key stakeholders (8)
- Information stalls at markets and shopping centres (4)
- Poster on digital noticeboards and hardcopy surveys in customer service centres
- A3 Public notice on customer service centres
- Planning Scheme Amendment and explanatory materials available in customer service centres and online
- Notices on the corporate website.

Four Facebook posts received above average reach, including:

- Post impressions – 84,985 - The number of times a post was on screen.
- Post reach – 28,512 - The number of people who saw posts at least once.
- Link clicks – 1,437 - The number of times people engaged with a link in a post

Our Online Engagement Portal *Yoursay Whitsunday* attracted 1,161 'informed' visitors during the consultation period. 'Informed visitors' interacted with fact sheets or links on the project page.

3.1 Purpose of the consultation

To consult with Whitsunday Region residents on the proposal to amend the *Whitsunday Regional Council Planning Scheme 2017* to include additional assessment benchmarks for Short-term accommodation within dwellings in the Low-density residential zone. Under the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, WRC was seeking to **consult** the community.

3.2 Who was consulted

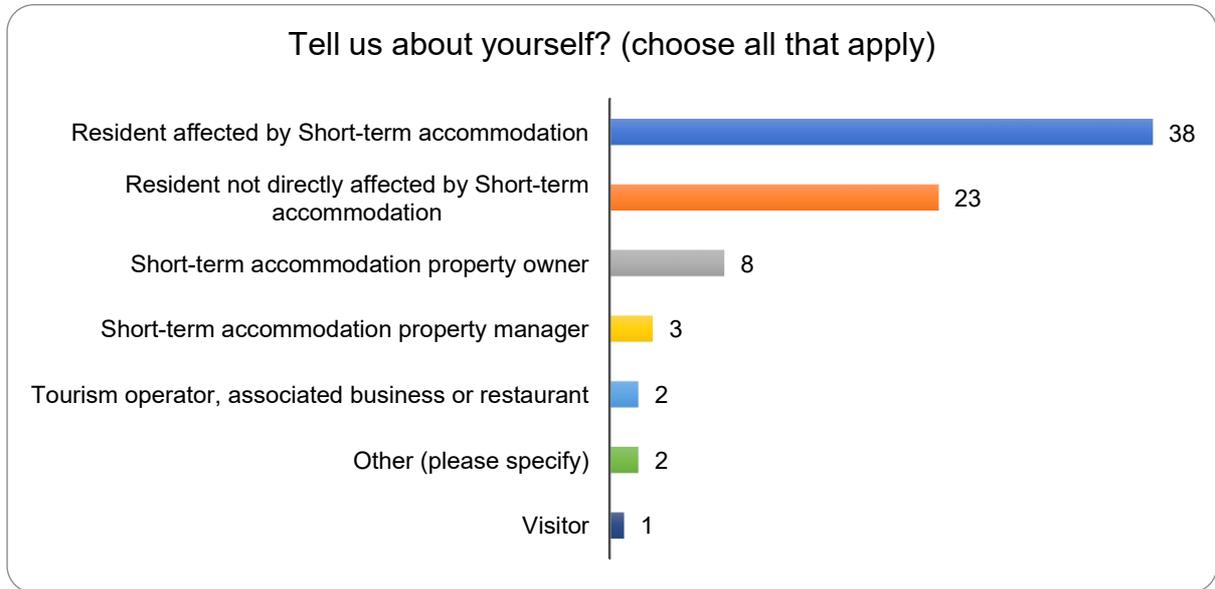
All residents in the Whitsunday Region were invited to participate and the consultation was open to anyone online. Targeted efforts included information stalls at shopping centres, interviews with key stakeholders and direct email to local schools, youth centres, sport clubs, interested community / business groups and interested residents.

4. Overview of the Responses

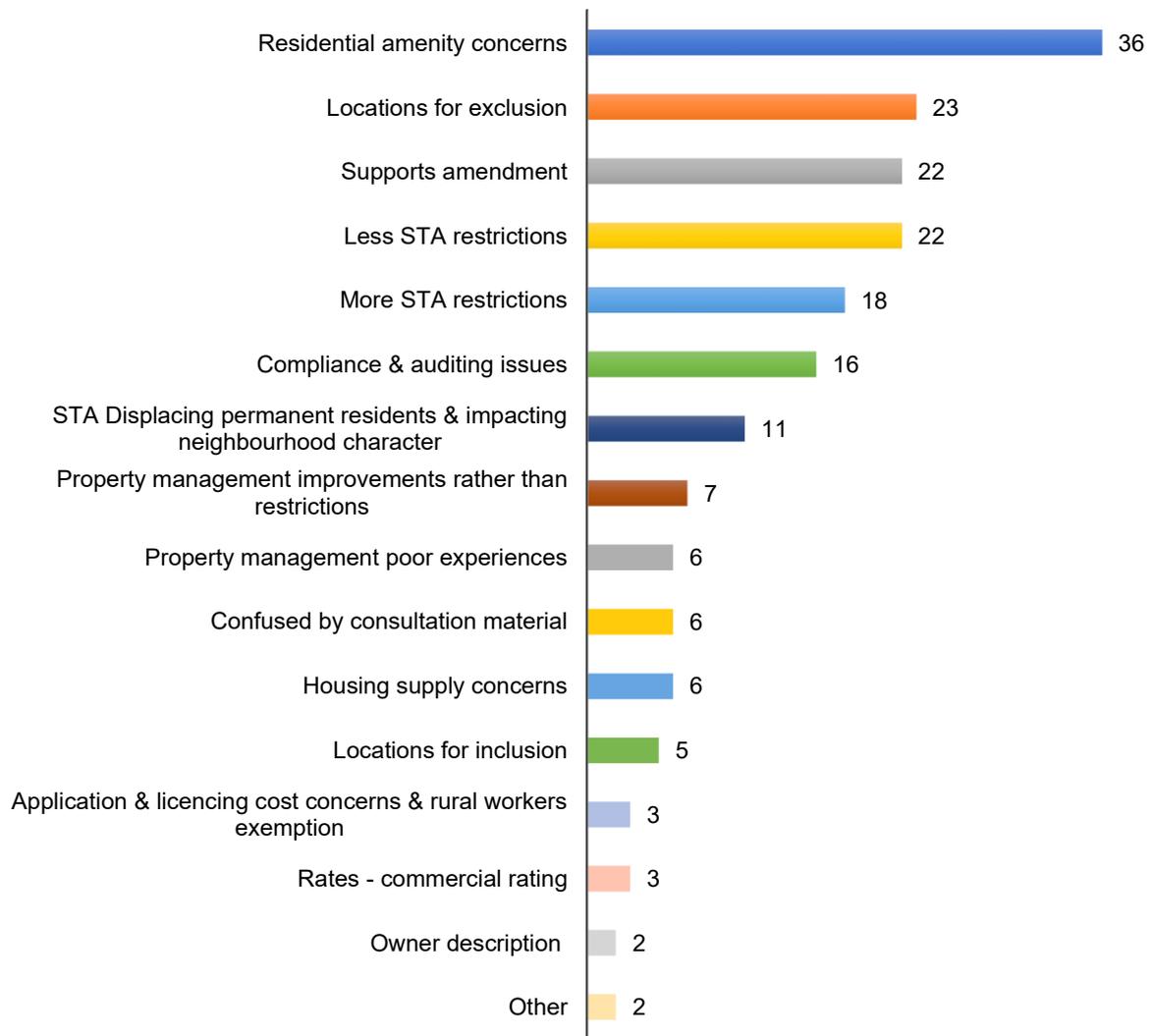
Overall, there were 84 'properly made' individual submissions received during the consultation period. The consultation sought feedback via written submission or online open survey questions. Consultation results are set out below:

Note – ‘Properly made submission’ includes specific details like names, addresses, and grounds for the submission. There were no improperly made submissions.

4.1 Analysis of Responses



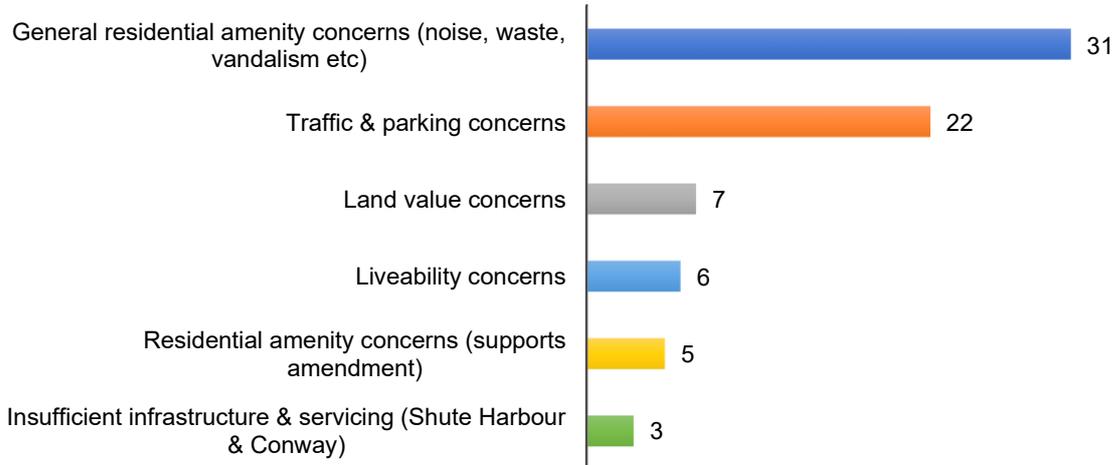
STA Amendment - All Themes



'Other' included:

- Amend Strategic Framework section 3.2.1.2 (11) to include '*housing for people with a disability*'
- Suburb name - Hydeaway vs Hideaway - finalise with State Department Natural Resources

Residential Amenity Themes



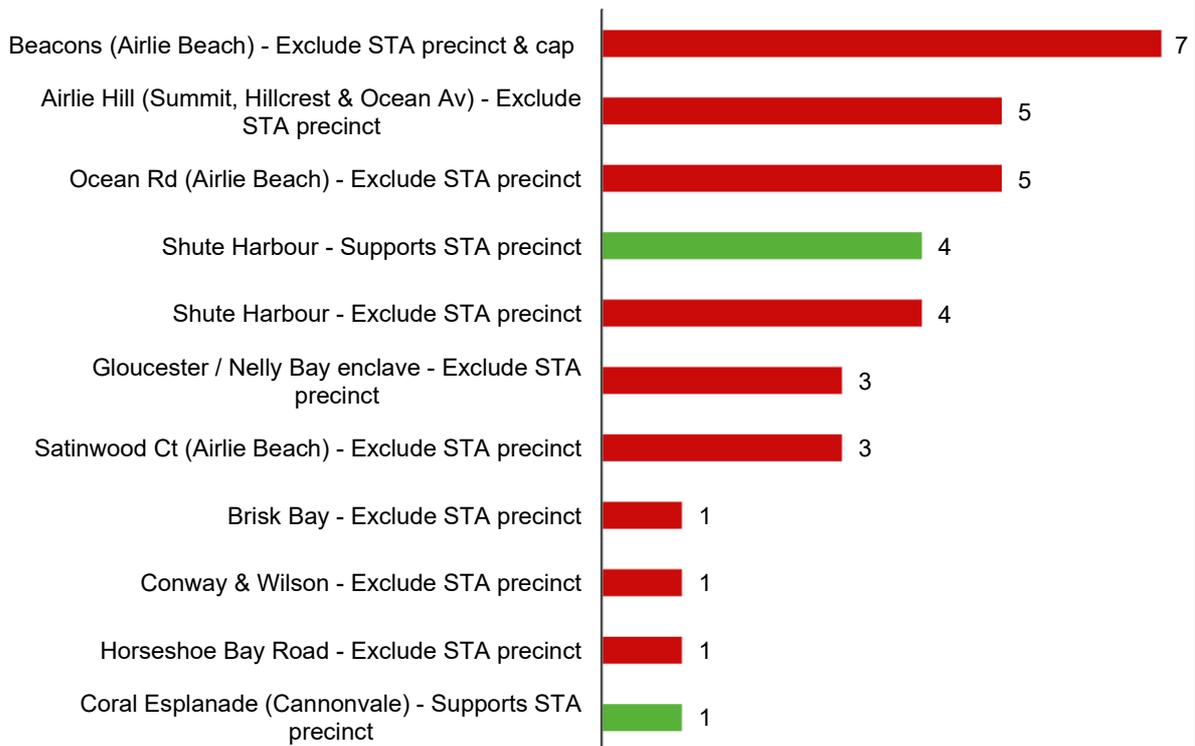
Note – 36 individual submissions related to ‘Residential amenity themes’. Five noted residential amenity concerns caused by STA in residential areas but supported the amendment.

Further explanation:

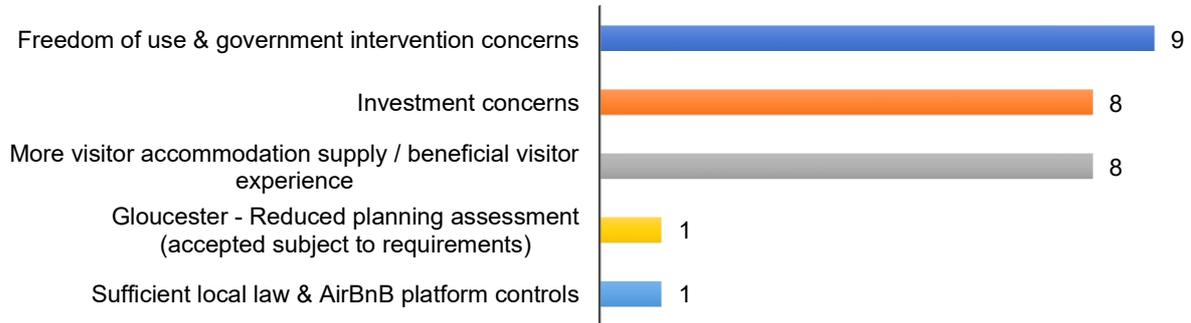
Locations referenced when communicating amenity related concerns are captured in the following graph. Notable patterns included:

- Challenges with narrow or steep streets creating safety, traffic and parking issues i.e. Shute Harbour, Beacons, Ocean Rd, Airlie Hill surrounds (Summit, Hillcrest & Ocean Ave) and Satinwood Ct (Airlie Beach)
- Land value and liveability concerns i.e. Airlie Hill surrounds, Beacons, Ocean Rd and Satinwood Ct
- Insufficient waste management (Conway), or infrastructure servicing (Shute Harbour)

Location Specific Themes



Less STA Restrictions Themes



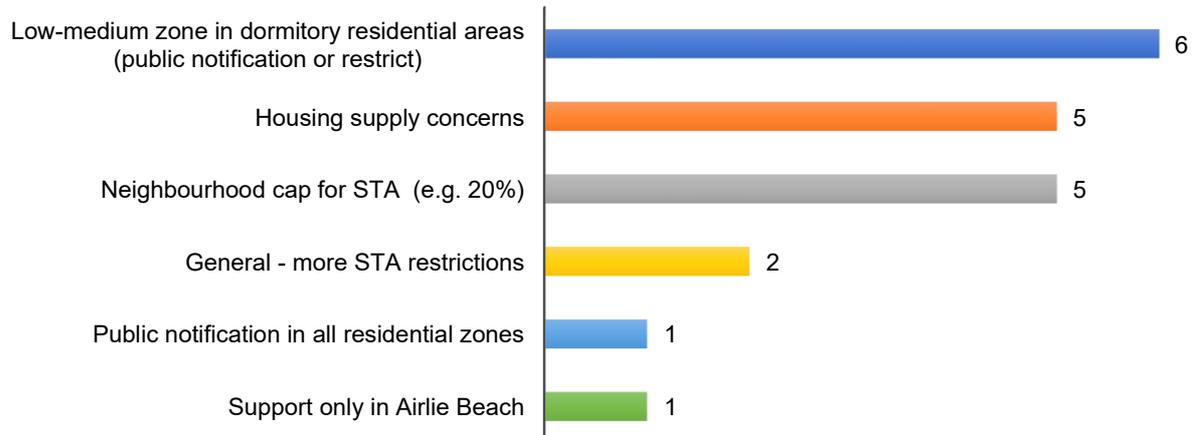
Note – 22 individual submissions related to ‘Less STA restrictions’

Further explanation:

Theme - Gloucester – reduced planning assessment

- Submitter noted unnecessary red-tape and cost in completing a planning application when the location and zoning supports the STA use. Notes assessment is duplicated by Local law application, hence suggests, planning application is *Accepted development, subject to meeting requirements.*

More STA Restrictions Themes



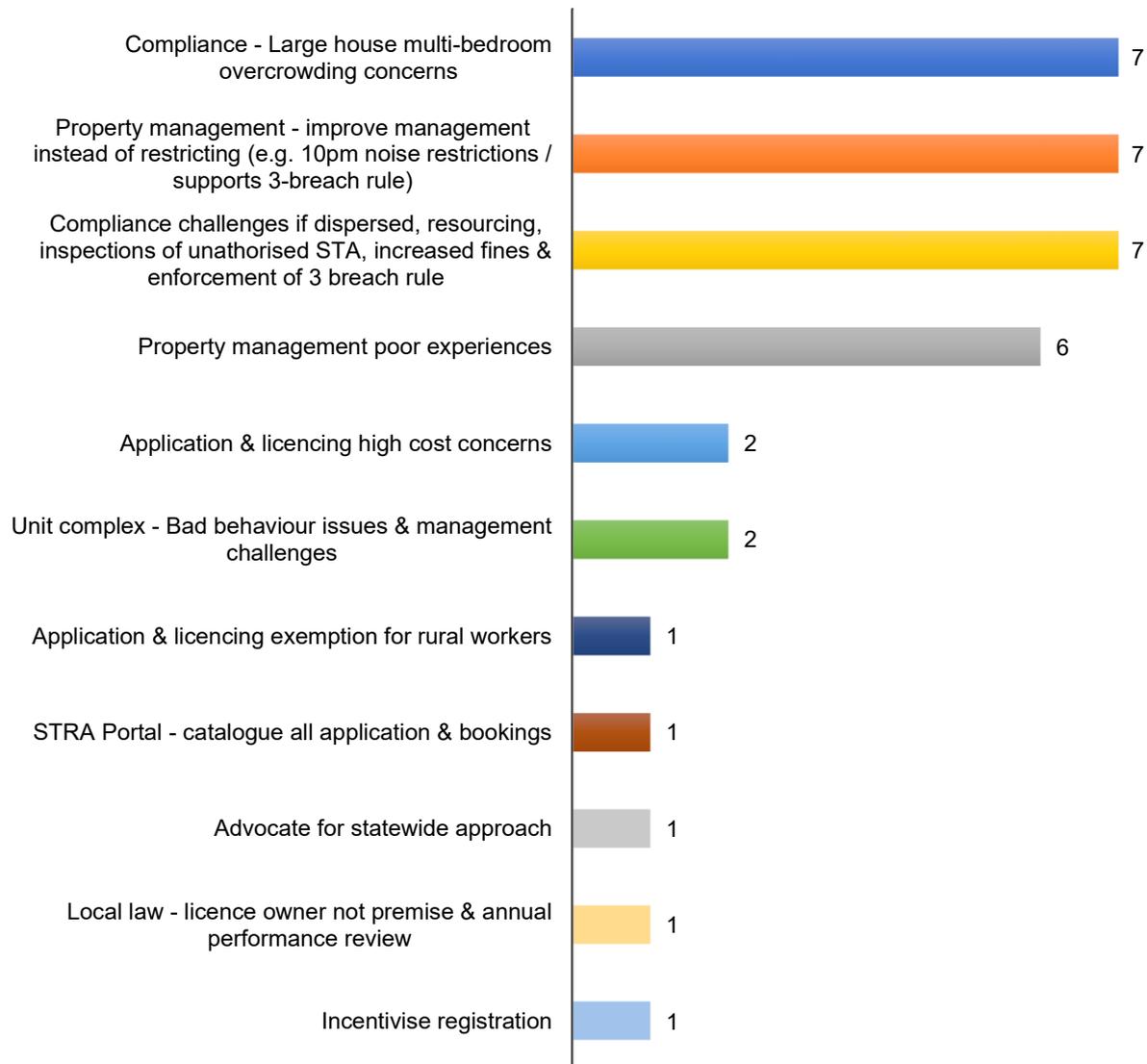
Note – 18 individual submissions related to ‘More STA restrictions’

Further explanation:

Theme - More STA restrictions within Low-medium residential zone in dormitory residential areas (public notification or restrict)

- Two submissions made specific reference to Cannonvale and one submission made specific reference to Airlie Summit Apartments, Seaview Drive.

Property management, Compliance & Application Themes



Further explanation:

Theme - Compliance – large house multi-bedroom overcrowding concerns

- Four references were specific to Shute Harbour
- One suggested rescinding licences for large STA in dormitory suburbs due to higher likelihood of residential amenity impacts caused by larger visitor groups.

Theme – Poor property management experiences

- Related to historic complaints to Council (3)
- Related to historic complaints to property managers (2)
- Not specific (1)

Theme - Unit complexes

- Submitters identified issues with on-site unit manager vs external property manager, where on-site manager has limited control over externally managed STA but are often called upon where external managers have failed in their duty.
- Higher exposure to STA amenity issues due to proximity and impacts to communal spaces in higher density units.

4.2 Key Stakeholder Interviews

AirBnB

- In the Whitsundays, STA guests contributed \$174 million to the local economy, with broader benefits to food, retail, and tourism sectors.
- STA is essential for meeting growing visitor accommodation demand, especially during events and peak periods.
- Opposes the proposed planning scheme changes, warning that restrictions, especially in low-density zones could reduce housing options for tourists, workers, and emergency stays, and disadvantage everyday homeowners.
- Notes limited evidence STA restrictions meaningfully address housing affordability or availability.
- Regulatory burden concerns, noting STA is already highly regulated by stringent local laws, significant application and licence fees, and commercial rates.
- Airbnb has a strong commitment to safety and quality, implementing strict global measures to reduce nuisance behaviour, including a party ban, high-risk reservation screening, neighbour support lines, and listing verification. Over 400,000 low-quality listings have been removed globally since April 2023.
- Preference for Statewide Regulation, but willing to collaborate at local level to develop balanced policy - Airbnb supports a fair, statewide STA framework and urges Council to advocate at the state level rather than create exclusion zones that unfairly penalise ratepayers in certain suburbs and creating inequality for homeowners wishing to access the share economy that can't afford to live in STA precincts. Notes, the *AirBnB STRA Policy Toolkit* to help balance growth and regulation with Local Government.
- Notes STA can have diverse uses and benefits beyond visitor accommodation, including long-term stays, crisis accommodation, by insurance companies and construction firms needing accommodation for workers.

Tourism Whitsundays

- The low-density residential zone precincts are supported as they provide clarity for owners considering short-term accommodation (STA) conversions.
- Acknowledges difficult challenge for Council to manage balance between STA, tourism needs, housing and residential amenity.
- Identified STA very important to visitor accommodation make-up with notable strong trends post Covid, particularly for domestic families, to want to stay in STA dwellings rather than hotel for affordability reasons.
- Desire to see QLD Government led State register for consistent and cost-efficient approach to STA applications process, monitoring and compliance.

Whitsunday Chamber of Commerce

- Support for defining STA precincts to prevent spread into residential 'dormitory' areas, protect housing availability, and maintain residential character.
- Housing prioritised over STA - Consensus that addressing housing shortages for staff is critical, with suggestions to revoke STA licenses in residential 'dormitory' suburbs and promote higher density housing options like townhouses and units.
- Recognition that STA will play a very important role in Olympics accommodation to support sailing teams and visitors before and during the 2032 Olympics. Identified demand for more hotels and strategies to manage accommodation supply.
- Support for local law property management rules (e.g., 3-strike policy), desire for increased compliance resources, and advocacy for a statewide STA register to ensure better control and data collection.

Bowen Collinsville Enterprise

- No issues are raised with the proposed Planning Scheme changes for short-term letting.
- Concerns remain around the lack of local law controls for privately managed short-term rentals, especially those without on-site managers or systems.
- There's a need for clearer requirements on registration, signage, noise policies, and compliance for private or externally managed short-term rentals in unit complexes.
- Questions are raised about whether these rentals are properly registered and what processes (e.g. planning applications, fees) are required.
- Australian Resident Accommodation Managers Association (ARAMA) is willing to meet again to discuss specific non-compliant examples.

Whitsunday Holiday Rentals

- Acknowledges need to protect residential areas but calls for more flexibility in precinct locations (e.g., Jubilee Pocket, Jones Road), arguing that additional visitor accommodation is urgently needed during peak times.
- Identified that STA has limited impact on housing supply. Owners primarily use properties as holiday homes and would likely leave them vacant rather than convert to permanent rentals, so stricter rules won't significantly increase housing stock.
- STA plays an essential role in tourism and creates a great visitor experience. Effectively caters to families and groups better than hotels, achieves high occupancy (94–98% in peak), and is vital for keeping the region competitive and supporting local businesses.
- Restrictions risks putting a ceiling on our tourism industry that flows onto operators / small business.
- Owners frustrated by red tape and lengthy process and costs for DA, local law, increased rates and 24/7 property management cost.
 - Query if STA is in supported area, why a DA is required – recommend amend to accepted development, subject to requirements – as all requirements are to be demonstrated for local law application anyway.
 - Query why Council local law inspections are required – takes time to organise, find availability and seems unnecessary given compliance certificates by suitably qualified person cover all aspects of inspection.
 - Local law requirement for evacuation floor plan for dwellings (not units) seems onerous, unnecessary and an additional cost frustrating owners. Showing in visible location within home can appear ugly for visitors also.

Note – Evacuation floor plans are a requirement for buildings classified as Class 1b (Short-term accommodation) under Building Fire Safety Regulation 2008.

- Supports a simplified approval process, flexibility for larger homes to accommodate more guests with strict property controls and property management incentives, such as recognition system to help business marketing of good property managers or allowance for managing larger guest numbers in 5 bedrooms houses
- Very strict on property management, offering one warning for noise before being asked to vacate with the assistance of key security – who give them 20 minutes to gather their belongings and leave.
- Have minimal issues through property management – strong vetting and proactive management processes to manage expectations for guests and ensure amenity is respected. Of complaints received – noise is main one and controlled quickly.

Ray White

- Welcomes Council's having clearer policy to describe where STA is supported
- Supports proposed precinct locations, particularly supportive of Mandalay Precinct. Suggests considering including Coral Esplanade, Beach Rd and Palm Dr in Cannonvale.
- Predominately manage luxury accommodations (3 – 5 bedrooms) in Greater Airlie Beach Area, which have a very important role in the visitor accommodation market and make significant contribution to local economy. Supports a mini economy of in-house chefs, cleaning, charter industry, group travel experiences as example.
- Luxury accommodation aren't typically affordable housing supplies.
- Very important to visitor accommodation supplies, supporting events and peak season
- Owners often investors from down south or Townsville, may stay for 4-6 weeks a year and rent out for STA the rest of the time.
- Rarely have challenges in property management, except for two properties (of 38 managed) that may receive vexatious complaints.
- Consider opportunity for incentives for good property management, enabling flexibility for clients to host more than 8 persons, marketing tags or annual licence fee reductions.
- Desire to facilitate some flexibility in guest limit of 8, particularly for unique properties seeking to create luxury tourism product, on large block with significant buffers from adjoining residents or existing luxury properties with 5+ bedrooms that have operated for a long time and hosted more people with no problems. Can only advertise these properties for 8 people to align with licence conditions, but this does impact booking and doesn't cater for large groups market.
- Acknowledge reasoning for blanket rule to manage amenity and parties, however, feel that good property management and history of no issues should allow flexibility.

PRD

- Supports the need to prevent STA overspread into purely residential suburbs to protect housing amenity, but requests more flexible precinct boundaries to support visitor demand — including areas like Beach Road, Coral Esplanade, Palm Dr, Pleasant Dr (Cannonvale) and key townhouse complexes (e.g. Baybreeze).
- Considers amendment may limit investment
- Manages a range of apartments, houses, and townhouses; most owners use properties part-time as holiday homes and rent them out the rest of the year.
- Does not see a strong link between STA and housing affordability. Notes that some properties shift to permanent rentals seasonally for consistent returns, with more rentals expected soon.
- Predominately families or group travel utilising STA
- Average occupancy around 60 – 70%, increasing up to 80-90% in school holidays
- Management and regulation - STA is highly regulated, with few complaints mainly related to noise.

Hydeaway Holidays

- The low-density residential zone precincts are supported as they provide clarity for owners considering short-term accommodation (STA) conversions.
- Gloucester has been historically marketed as a holiday house area, resulting in STA being evenly distributed throughout the area, lacking any permanent resident enclaves.

- All STA in Gloucester are houses (no units), mainly catering to families with minimal party-related issues. Occasional parking complaints occur, however, local relationships with neighbours and working with visitors ensures concerns are managed effectively
- STA supply matches market demand and is important to support peak events like the fishing competition - there is a good mix of STA and permanent housing.
- Has noted in past that neighbour concerns often arise out during public notification of STA development applications due to the fear factor of what might be, rather than actual issues once they are in operation.
- In the past process and cost has turned some owners away from turning their property into an STA – happy with improved clarity of amendment process to avoid unnecessary legal costs or inconsistent decision making.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended the feedback submitted during the consultation process is considered by WRC when deciding upon next steps for the *Whitsunday Regional Council Planning Scheme 2017* Short-term accommodation major amendment.

The feedback demonstrates:

- Wide variety of similar and contrary views.
- General support for the intent of the amendment that provides greater clarity to investors and protects residential character of areas considered to be dormitory residential suburbs.
- Recognition of the important role and contribution of STA, particularly for accommodating a positive visitor experience for group or family travel, which is essential to support peak season, events and future Olympic accommodation needs.
- Mix of feedback regarding STA restrictions, including desire for:
 - More restrictions to limit or require public notification within Low-medium residential zone dormitory suburbs, prioritise housing supply or establish STA neighbourhood cap to preserve residential character.
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- Frustration from owners and industry over extensive red-tape and costs associated with converting to STA, including suggestions to remove need for planning application in supported STA zones/precincts where meeting requirements, reduction in unnecessary local law permit inspections where qualified persons certificates are provided and flexible capacity limits for effectively managed large houses.
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- Identification of challenges for property management in high density units, where property management of individual units is non-existent or external to the hotel/strata manager.
- Strong support for ongoing advocacy to the State Government to establish a consistent statewide approach to licencing STA that requires displaying licence identification to be a mandatory requirement to host a property on a booking site.

6. Next Steps

Council will consider this report when determining the next steps for the *Whitsunday Regional Council Planning Scheme 2017 Short-term Accommodation Major Amendment* and future Local law amendments.

Any further changes to the amendment will be assessed against the '*significantly different*' test. Where feedback leads to major policy changes from the version consulted on, further community consultation will be required. What is considered *significantly different* is defined by Schedule 2 of *Ministers Guidelines and Rules 2024*.

In deciding whether to proceed, Council will weigh community feedback and the significantly different test against the urgency of addressing current short-term accommodation issues in the Low-density Residential Zone. This includes considering whether potential changes should be explored through future amendments rather than delaying the current proposal.

If no or only minor administrative changes occur to the Planning Scheme Major Amendment following public consultation, Council will write to the Minister requesting to adopt the Planning Scheme and whether it considers any proposed amendment is *significantly different* from the version for which public consultation has been undertaken in accordance with Chapter 2, Part 4, Section 21.3 of *Ministers Guidelines and Rules 2024*.

It is important to close the loop with residents and show how their input has affected the outcome. A Consultation Summary infographic document has been prepared, which will be released to the public and distributed via the website and social media. The Summary will show key statistics and outcomes of the consultation process.

A database of participants has been collated during the consultation process and a direct email will be sent to those participants with a copy of the Consultation Summary.