

RESPECT SPRINGBROOK MOUNTAIN

Cableway No Way



Why a cableway through World Heritage rainforest is the wrong vision for the Gold Coast

A Community Information Booklet

Respect Springbrook Mountain Coalition — 16 community and environment groups



Foreword

Springbrook is one of Australia's most extraordinary natural places. It forms part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area — a globally significant landscape of ancient rainforests, exceptional biodiversity and profound cultural importance.

For more than 180 million years, these forests have evolved largely undisturbed. They shelter species found nowhere else on Earth and sustain critical water catchments that supply drinking water to the entire Gold Coast. They belong not only to Queenslanders but to humanity.



Looking across the Springbrook plateau — a living record of 180 million years of evolution

Today, this remarkable place faces a renewed proposal for a commercial cableway. Public funds are being spent without a named proponent, without a completed Environmental Impact Statement, and without genuine community consent.

“The Respect Springbrook Mountain Coalition believes there is a better future for Springbrook and for the Gold Coast. This booklet explains why.”

01

What Is Being Proposed?

The City of Gold Coast is currently spending ratepayer funds to investigate potential cableway routes through Springbrook National Park. The project is described by Council officers as an effort to 'de-risk' a cableway for future private investors.

\$1.49M

Ratepayer funds committed to date

10→3

Routes under assessment

0

Named proponents



The Gold Coast's most enthusiastic cableway critic

Despite significant public expenditure, the community has not been told who the intended private proponent may be, what the business model is, what infrastructure would be required, or what long-term liabilities ratepayers may ultimately bear.

What has – and has not – been done?

- A 2020 pre-feasibility study was completed – with no consideration of environmental impacts.
- \$500,000 was approved in late 2025 for route identification and preliminary consultation
- A further \$990,000 was approved in May 2026 to finalise a route and consult with First Nations.
- Ten possible routes are being reduced to three – no proponent publicly identified.
- No development application, no EIS, no cost-benefit analysis.

Who is steering this project?

The GCCC CEO is Tim Baker, previously Tasmania's Secretary of DPIPW – the agency that assessed the Mount Wellington Cableway proposal in Hobart. The Chair of Invest Gold Coast is Will Hodgman – former Tasmanian Premier whose government actively prosecuted the MWCC proposal before its rejection in 2022.

This Is Not a New Idea



Visitors already enjoy Springbrook's lookouts on foot — no cableway required.

A similar proposal was assessed and refused more than two decades ago. The lessons of that process are directly relevant today.

The NatureLink timeline

1998

NatureLink Cableway Proposal lodged – a gondola from Neranwood to Purlingbrook Falls on the Springbrook plateau.

1999–2000

Full Environmental Impact Statement process undertaken. Two-year community-led campaign mounted in opposition.

2000

Queensland Coordinator-General refused the proposal. Grounds: unacceptable environmental risk, fire and landslide hazards, water catchment impacts, World Heritage concerns.

2018

Mayor Tom Tate revived the cableway concept. Pre-feasibility study commissioned – no environmental assessment.

2024

Mayor revived the proposal with a commitment to ‘de-risk’ the project for private investors.

2026

Council allocates \$1.49 million in ratepayer funds. Ten routes under investigation, to be reduced to three. No proponent named.

“Many of the environmental, engineering and social concerns identified in 2000 remain directly relevant – and in several cases, the risks are now greater.”

— Leslie Shirreffs, former Qld Government World Heritage officer, 2026

Why Springbrook Matters

Springbrook is part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area – one of only a handful of places on Earth recognised for the combined significance of their biodiversity, ancient evolutionary history and exceptional natural beauty.



Purlingbrook Falls, Springbrook



Antarctic Beech — unchanged for millions of years

Outstanding Universal Values

- The most extensive areas of subtropical rainforest in the world
- All of the Antarctic Beech cool temperate rainforest
- Plants and animals unchanged from their fossil-record ancestors
- A living record of 180 million years of evolutionary history
- Species and ecosystems found nowhere else on Earth.



IUCN Conservation Outlook 2020: SIGNIFICANT CONCERN

Following the 2019–20 bushfires, the IUCN downgraded the conservation outlook for the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area. The 2019–20 fires burned 53% of the World Heritage property, including 26% of its rainforest. This is the same trajectory that preceded the Great Barrier Reef’s near-listing as In Danger.

Why It Will Fail Again – Six Critical Risks

1. Fire



The fire risk is not hypothetical — 53% of the World Heritage property burned in 2019–20.

Springbrook is one of the highest fire-risk areas in South-East Queensland. The 2019–20 bushfires burned 53% of the World Heritage property. Rainforest does not ordinarily burn.

A cableway would strand passengers in remote terrain during fire events and shift park management priorities toward protecting infrastructure rather than the environment. Previous fire events have lasted up to eight weeks.

2. Landslides and extreme weather



A cableway tower on an unstable slope in extreme rainfall — not a hypothetical risk.

Springbrook has a substantial history of major landslides. The plateau received 200mm of rain in a single day in May 2026. Ex-Tropical Cyclone Debbie delivered more than 600mm in 36 hours and closed road access for 18 months.

Cableway tower foundations, access tracks and earthworks would increase slope instability and exacerbate landslide risk. Climate change will make these events more frequent and more severe.

3. Drinking water



Water flows through the World Heritage Area



...into the Gold Coast's drinking water supply

The Gold Coast's entire water supply is filtered through the World Heritage Area into Little Nerang Dam and Hinze Dam. A cableway bringing up to 800,000 additional visitors annually to the plateau – with no reticulated sewage treatment – would directly threaten this supply. In 2000, Gold Coast City Council itself submitted objections to the cableway on water catchment grounds.

4. World Heritage law

The reformed EPBC Act now explicitly identifies World Heritage values as an unacceptable, non-offsettable impact. Federal referral and assessment will be mandatory. The World Heritage Committee expressed its strongest concern about a cableway's impact on Outstanding Universal Values in 2000 – before the area's condition was downgraded.

5. First Nations rights

Traditional Owners were not meaningfully consulted in 2000. The legal landscape has changed fundamentally. A native title claim (Danggan Balun) exists over the Springbrook area. The *Native Title Act*, *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act*, *Human Rights Act* and Free Prior Informed Consent principles all create substantive obligations. Traditional Owner representatives have publicly and clearly opposed a cableway.

6. Biodiversity and threatened species



Construction access tracks devastate habitat.



Tower installation displaces threatened species.

Approximately 60 threatened fauna and flora species occur within and around potential cableway corridors. The Albert's lyrebird – one of Australia's most iconic and threatened birds – is known from the Springbrook area. Cableway construction causes habitat loss, fragmentation, weed invasion, pathogen spread and noise disturbance. Many impacts are impossible to offset.

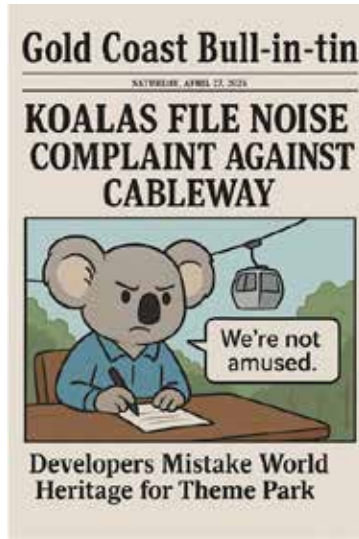


Albert's lyrebird — one of ~60 threatened species in potential cableway corridors.

The bottom line:

This proposal faces the same fundamental obstacles that defeated the 2000 NatureLink application – and several new ones. The legal, environmental and cultural barriers are more formidable today than they were then.

The Real Cost – What No One Is Telling You



The figure most frequently cited is \$170 million – a 2020 construction cost estimate. It is not, and was never intended to be, the cost of the project. It explicitly excludes road and bridge upgrades, land acquisition, EIS preparation (\$8–15M), escalation since 2020 (35–45%), GST, marketing, and environmental offsets.

\$170M

2020 construction estimate only

\$380M+

Realistic proponent cost (2026 dollars)

\$615M+

Combined project exposure

The road and bridge problem

Every proposed route requires upgraded road access through the Tallebudgera or Currumbin valleys. Tallebudgera Creek Road – the likely access route – is a narrow, flood-prone road with single-lane timber bridges rated for light vehicles only. A realistic upgrade to accommodate 500,000–800,000 annual visitor movements is estimated at \$50–150 million – excluded entirely from the 2020 estimate.

“No private proponent can be expected to invest \$300 million or more in a project generating uncertain returns while managing continuous regulatory risk in a World Heritage Area on a finite government-issued tenure.”

— RSM Coalition Cableway Cost Analysis, June 2026

Ten Questions Council Cannot Answer



These ancient forests are what is at stake — not a tourism product to be monetised.

The Respect Springbrook Mountain Coalition asks councillors to put the following questions directly to officers before any further funds are committed.

1

Has any updated cost estimate been prepared that accounts for construction cost escalation since 2020? If not, why not?

2

What is the total projected Council cost — including road and bridge upgrades — before a proponent is even selected?

3

Who is the intended proponent? What conflicts of interest, if any, should be declared?

4

Has any route-specific road and bridge infrastructure cost assessment been undertaken?

5

What mechanism will ensure ratepayers are not left to meet road, bridge and access costs for a private commercial venture?

6

Has a full cost-benefit analysis – including environmental, social and cultural costs – been prepared for any of the ten routes assessed?

7

What is the ratepayer exposure if the project proceeds to EIS and the EIS results in a refused or conditioned approval?

8

Why has genuine community consultation not occurred before committing \$1.49 million in ratepayer funds?

9

What consultation has occurred with Traditional Owners, and does it meet the standard of Free, Prior and Informed Consent?

10

Has Council compared the cost and return of the Gondwana Discovery Centre against the cableway? If not, why not?

Take action:

Write to your divisional councillor. Ask for written responses to these questions. Share the answers with your community.

A Better Vision – Earth’s Story: A Journey Through Gondwana

The Respect Springbrook Mountain Coalition does not simply oppose the cableway. We advocate for a genuinely transformative alternative.



Concept: The Gondwana Discovery Centre — a world-class heritage experience at the gateway to Springbrook

A world-class, immersive World Heritage Education and Tourism Centre, strategically located near the Pacific Motorway at Mudgeeraba – on an undevelopable floodplain, outside the World Heritage Area, and accessible to the full South East Queensland visitor catchment.

“Rather than taking development into World Heritage rainforest, a Discovery Centre would bring the story of Gondwana to the world – protecting Springbrook while creating a tourism experience of genuine global significance.”

— RSM Coalition Vision Statement

Global precedents for transformative cultural destinations



Guggenheim Bilbao
– 1.3M visitors/yr.



Dubai Museum of the Future
– 4M visitors.



Museum of Tomorrow, Rio
– 4.3M visitors.

What the Centre would deliver

- Celebrating Queensland's five World Heritage properties – accessible to all
- Indigenous cultural storytelling, led by Traditional Owners
- Immersive, interactive technology experiences
- Scientific research partnerships with universities
- A rotating monthly exhibit from World Heritage Areas around the world
- A gateway to genuine, low-impact hinterland experiences
- Protection of Springbrook by keeping mass visitation at the gateway
- Employment and economic benefit distributed across the hinterland community.

South East Queensland's opportunity:

A population catchment of 5 million people, plus millions of domestic and international tourists, makes the Gold Coast one of the most commercially viable locations in Australia for a landmark cultural and heritage attraction.

What You Can Do



Springbrook's Purlingbrook Falls — worth protecting for future generations.

Every voice matters. Here is how you can help protect Springbrook and advocate for a better vision.

Write to your councillor

Contact your Gold Coast City Councillor. Ask them the ten questions on the previous pages. Ask for written responses. Share the answers with your community.

Write to your State and Federal representatives

Contact your Queensland State Member of Parliament and your Federal Member. Ask them to ensure that any cableway proposal is subject to full environmental assessment – including EPBC Act referral – before any further commitments are made.

Support the positive alternative

Advocate for the Gondwana Discovery Centre concept. Write to Council, the State Government and the Federal Government asking them to commission a business case for this alternative before any decision is made on the cableway.

Stay informed and spread the word

Follow the Respect Springbrook Mountain Coalition on social media. Share information with your networks. Attend community meetings. Bring a friend. An informed community is the strongest protection Springbrook has.

Springbrook is not simply a place on a map.

Its value lies not in what can be built within it, but in what can be protected for future generations.

Respect Springbrook Mountain Coalition

Protecting World Heritage. Building a Better Vision.

Sources and further reading

This booklet draws on:

- Urbis / Rider Levett Bucknall, Springbrook Cableway Pre-Feasibility Assessment, November 2020
- Queensland Coordinator-General, NatureLink Cableway Assessment Report, 2000
- IUCN World Heritage Outlook Assessment, Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, 2020
- *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth); *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Qld); *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth)
- *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003* (Qld); *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld)
- RSM Coalition Route Assessments — Hypotheticals 1, 2 and 3, 2026
- RSM Coalition Cableway Cost Package, June 2026

Our coalition



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