



Green group slams Great Keppel plans

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ROUND three in the battle between environmentalists and developers over Great Keppel Island has begun.

Sydney company Tower Holdings bought the island's resort, a short boat ride from the mainland near Yeppoon in central Queensland, for \$16.5 million in 2008, then shut it down, putting 110 people out of work.

The company's second "scaled-back" plan for the island was released last year and included a golf course, 1700 resort villas, 300 apartments, a 560-berth marina, extensions to the airstrip and redevelopment of the resort.

Former federal environment minister Peter Garrett rejected that proposal on environmental grounds and the company's third attempt at redevelopment is out for public consultation to determine the terms of reference for an environmental impact statement.

The latest \$650 million proposal includes a 250-room hotel, 750 villas, 300 apartments, a 250-berth marina, ferry terminal, yacht club, shops and an 18-hole golf course.

Capricorn Conservation Council co-ordinator Michael McCabe said the group supported "appropriate redevelopment" of the existing resort area. "But we are opposed to dredging and marina construction in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, public leasehold land being handed over for large real estate villas and the destruction of bushland for a golf course."

Dr Alison Jones, a researcher at Central Queensland University's environmental management centre at Rockhampton, said the pro-



Contentious ... Alison Jones says the latest plan for Great Keppel Island is an improvement but it could still affect the environment. Photo: Michelle Smith

posal had a smaller footprint but the marina, golf course and villas could have serious impacts on the environment.

Brisbane lawyer Jo Bragg, of the Environmental Defender's Offices, held a workshop in Rockhampton yesterday to teach people how to oppose what the conservation council considered to be "unsustainable" elements of the proposal.

Tower Holdings has released the *Great Keppel Island Sustainability Statement* in which it claims the development aims to transform the "run-down resort" into the "jewel of the Great Barrier Reef".

Terry Agnew, the company's chairman and chief executive, states in the brochure: "Our vision is not only to work with the community to develop Australia's most sustainable island resort, but to lead by example in presenting and preserving the world's most

important reef ecosystem." The 14-page brochure makes only one mention of the proposed marina, saying its size had been reduced by 55 per cent.

The state government returned 170 hectares of land on the island to the Woppaburra traditional owners in 2007. Woppaburra Land trustee Christine Barney said the group opposed the marina plan because it would affect access to the beach and the survival of turtles and other marine life.

Mary Carroll, chief executive of Capricorn Tourism and Economic Development, said the group supported the application. "It would be absolutely devastating for this region if the redevelopment didn't go ahead."

The environmental impact statement could take more than a year to finish.

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