

<b>ORDINARY MEETING</b>  <b>22 NOVEMBER 2017</b>	<b>3</b>
--	----------

## CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL - SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

Dan Walton | 8/24/18-01 | #5565896

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Council notes the update on Cairns Regional Council's sustainability initiatives.**

---

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This report provides an update on sustainability initiatives being delivered by the Cairns Regional Council including:

- 1 megawatt of solar power installations
- Battery recycling
- Great Northern Clean Up
- Cairns ECOfiesta
- Workplace Giving
- Nature-based Learning Grant

### **BACKGROUND:**

In the context of local government, sustainability refers to triple-bottom-line decision making. This is where the environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of all options are fully considered to ensure the best possible outcome for long-term community prosperity.

Sustainability begins with an understanding that it's the environment that ultimately supports the economy and society, for without a healthy environment, food and water supply is jeopardised, quality of life declines, tourism and associated businesses suffer and the regions appeal as a place where people want to live, work and visit is reduced.

The Cairns community understands this, ranking environment, liveability and sustainability as the three most important things to ensure our region meets the needs of the community now and into the future in the Our Cairns survey of 2016.

**Figure:** extract of Our Cairns Survey 2016



Council also recognises the need to invest in sustainability and has an ongoing sustainability program.

Council's Sustainability Program has two overarching objectives:

- To embed triple bottom line decision making into Council operations
- To support a prosperous community that values and protects the environment

Initiatives delivered under the program are summarised below and complement the infrastructure and service delivery of the balance of the organisation including waste and recycling services, natural areas management, urban water cycle management, active travel and wastewater treatment.

### **COMMENT:**

A summary of sustainability initiatives being delivered by Council is provided below:

#### **1 Megawatt of Solar Power**

With a large portfolio of community facilities and built infrastructure, Council has a lot of opportunity to reduce operational electricity costs and associated greenhouse gas emissions through rooftop solar photovoltaic systems. Between 2016 and 2018 Council increased its solar power infrastructure from 100 kilowatts to 1,000 kilowatts (1 megawatt) of rooftop solar. This ten-fold increase in solar capacity is mitigating 1,500 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually and saving over \$350,000 a year in reduced electricity costs.

#### **Battery Recycling**

Australians use thousands of tonnes of batteries each year with the majority ending up in landfill due to the lack of convenient recycling options. But recycling batteries in Tropical North Queensland has been made easy with the introduction of battery drop-off points at Cairns libraries. Nearly one tonne of common household batteries have been received at the libraries since February 2017. Batteries are currently sent to overseas recycling facilities but as more councils and retailers provide battery recycling services, national collection volumes will increase and drive investment in Australian battery recycling facilities.

## **Cairns ECOfiesta**

The annual Cairns ECOfiesta kicked off in 2015 and has quickly become a standout on the local festival calendar. The event is a celebration of sustainable living solutions and our World Heritage listed reef and rainforest. It features environmentally focussed live music, performance, workshops, local food and a huge sustainability trade show. The ECOfiesta attracts a crowd of around 10,000 people each year and in 2018 will be held on Sunday 3 June at the Cairns Cruise Liner Terminal.

## **50% Emissions Reduction Target**

Council has a target to reduce its 2008 greenhouse gas emissions levels by 50% by 2020. Initiatives across the organisation including, Landfill gas flaring, rooftop solar, energy management and fuel efficiency have put Council on-track to achieve this ambitious target, with the added benefit of also delivering significant financial savings to the organisation.

## **Energy Solutions for Local Business**

In 2016 Council delivered the first ECOenergy forum in partnership with Ergon Energy and Vector Energy. The forum provided local business owners with free access to energy management specialists and practical advice on business ready solutions including account optimisation, energy efficiency and solar power.

## **Nature-based Learning Grant**

Cairns has two World Heritage-listed areas right on its doorstep. Unfortunately, costs limit the ability of many schools to take their students to the Rainforest or Reef and benefit from these unique educational experiences. In September 2016, Council launched its Nature-based Learning Grant to help schools meet the cost of outdoor excursions directly linked to sustainability outcomes in the National Curriculum. Schools can apply for up to \$2,000 from an annual grant pool of \$20,000.

## **Community Sustainability Grant**

Bring your sustainability project to life! That's the message behind Council's Community Sustainability grant program, which provides up to \$5,000 for community led projects that deliver biodiversity conservation, energy and water efficiency, waste management, low carbon travel initiatives and education. In 2017 the \$25,000 funding pool has supported solar installations at community facilities, a campaign to reduce single use plastics, a citizen science program for mangroves, community gardens, an environmental education after school program and sustainability workshop.

## **Reef Guardian Program**

Council joined the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority reef stewardship program in 2008. Since then it has taken an active role in protecting the Great Barrier Reef through investment in wastewater treatment plant upgrades, water conservation programs, regional catchment management partnerships, land use planning and urban stormwater management. The Reef Guardian Program provides a framework for Councils to align their education, catchment management and urban water cycle activities with State and Federal Government Reef 2050 Plan.

## **Great Northern Clean Up**

The Great Northern Clean Up (GNCU) is when communities across Northern Australia clean up beaches, bushland and waterways before the wet-season flushes everything out to sea. In 2017 Cairns communities organised 23 clean-up events and were supported by Council with litter collection kits, site promotion to increase participation numbers, volunteer prizes and the collection of litter bags from clean-up sites. The aim is to grow community participation and litter collection volumes each year until the month long clean-up is as popular as Clean Up Australia Day in southern states.

## **State of Environment Report**

Each year Council produces a State of Environment Report to collate the environmental management initiatives it undertakes in the areas of land-use planning, water supply and catchment health, low carbon travel, waste and recycling, climate action, natural resource management and community engagement. The report enables Council to evaluate its environmental outcomes, prioritise future actions and engage with the community on the state of the local environment.

## **Coastal Hazards Adaptation Strategy**

Council commenced the initial stages of a Coastal Hazards Adaptation Strategy (CHAS) with funding from the QLD Government. This involves mapping coastal hazards and assessing the risks and vulnerability to community, infrastructure and natural environment to develop a strong evidence base for a strategic and sequenced adaptation response in consultation with the community.

## **Electric Vehicle Charge Station**

Electric vehicle (EV) owners can now recharge on the Cairns Esplanade thanks to a collaborative project between Council, Ergon Energy and the Queensland Government. The EV charge station is the first in a series being installed between Cairns and Brisbane as the part of the Queensland Government Electric Super Highway initiative.

## **Tropical Urbanism**

Cairns is often referred to as the city in the rainforest and the protection of this unique character has been strengthened by the inclusion of 'tropical urbanism' provisions into the Council's Planning Scheme, CairnsPlan 2016. The provisions claimed the title of Australia's Best Planning Idea – Small Project this year at the Planning Institute of Australia Planning Excellence Awards. The tropical urbanism provisions were developed as part of the Cairns City Image Study which focused on height, density and design of tall buildings within the Cairns city centre. A key outcome of the study was the introduction of vertical landscaping requirements and retention of sight lines to the surrounding mountain ranges and ocean. Tropical urbanism requirements will ensure that in the coming decades Cairns protects its unique character while enabling appropriate development to prosper.

## **Cool Homes Guide**

Getting house design right is essential in our tropical climate. Otherwise you run the risk of a hot home that requires a lot of electricity, and associated greenhouse gas emissions to keep cool over the long hot summer. [Cool Homes - Smart Design for the Tropics](#), is a practical guide for builders, designers and prospective home owners to reduce building running costs and carbon footprint by keeping out the heat and inviting in the breeze.

## **Sustainability in the Workplace**

Sustainability is a cross-council priority and all staff have a responsibility to apply triple-bottom-line decision making in the delivery of their duties. Staff are guided by the Corporate Sustainability Policy and supported with sustainability inductions for new employees, energy efficient operating practices for offices and depots, waste and recycling systems in the workplace, sustainable product purchasing, technical support for specific projects and an annual recognition of excellence in sustainability through the environmental category in the staff awards program.

## **CONSIDERATIONS:**

### Council Finance and the Local Economy:

Through the ongoing delivery of sustainability initiatives such as energy management and solar installs, Council is improving its operational efficiency and running costs. Due to the triple-bottom-line delivery of these initiatives, benefits also flow into the local economy.

Community and Cultural Heritage:

Through the ongoing delivery of sustainability initiatives such as battery recycling and the nature-based learning grant, Council is responding to community priorities and increasing access to sustainable living tools and resources.

Natural Environment:

Through the ongoing delivery of sustainability initiatives such as Cairns ECOfiesta, Council is increasing knowledge and awareness of the natural environment and the role we all share in its conservation and restoration.

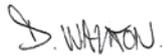
Corporate and Operational Plans:

Sustainability initiatives contribute the following strategic goals:

- 1 – Economy
- 2 – Natural Assets
- 3 – Liveability
- 4 – Community and Culture
- 5 – Serving the Community

Policy:

Corporate Sustainability Policy  
Energy and Emissions Management Policy



Dan Walton  
Sustainability Officer



Kelly Reaston  
General Manager Planning and Environment