

Planning Scheme Policy – Natural environment

1. Purpose of the planning scheme policy

- (1) The purpose of this planning scheme policy is to:
 - (a) Support the CairnsPlan 2016 planning scheme;
 - (b) Identify and provide guidance about information that may be required to support a development application within or proximate to an area identified on the Natural areas overlay maps contained in Schedule 2 or other environmental area;
 - (c) Provide guidance on preparing an ecological assessment report, vegetation audit report and waterway audit report.

2. Interpretation

- (1) Terms used within this planning scheme policy are defined within Schedule 1 of the CairnsPlan 2016 planning scheme. Where a term is not defined in Schedule 1, section 1.3 Interpretation of the CairnsPlan 2016 planning scheme applies.

3. Information Council may request

- (1) The planning scheme identifies areas of environmental significance on the Natural areas overlay map contained within Schedule 2 of the CairnsPlan 2016 planning scheme;
- (2) An ecological assessment may be required or requested in conjunction with the assessment of proposed development proximate to areas of ecological value or where development potentially impacts on the values of these areas to:
 - (a) Provide or expand on existing ecological information known about a site including but not necessarily limited to Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) and Matters of State Environmental Significance (MSES);
 - (b) Quantify the extent of adverse impacts on ecological values on-site and in upstream and downstream catchments, in some cases including potential effects on the Great Barrier Reef;
 - (c) Detail mitigation measures proposed to be undertaken to avoid in the first instance or where adverse impacts cannot be avoided minimise adverse impacts on ecological values.

It is recommended that the proponent should consult with Council prior to the preparation of an ecological assessment report in order to ensure that all issues are covered in the report.

- (3) The planning scheme seeks to avoid adverse impacts on ecological values. Where an adverse impact cannot be avoided, the impact must be mitigated and minimised. Where mitigation or minimisation cannot occur then development may be considered to be inappropriate for an area. However, where the impacted value or area impacted upon is limited, appropriate strategic rehabilitation for improved and increased habitat, waterway or wetland extent may be considered.

3.1. Ecological assessment report

- (1) The purpose of an ecological assessment report is to ensure that the impacts of development on ecological values are quantified and appropriately mitigated to ensure biodiversity values are protected and maintained.
- (2) The Ecological assessment report is to be prepared by a suitably qualified person.
- (3) As a general guide, the following format and description indicates the depth of detail required:
 - (a) Summary and conclusions:
 - (i) Site location – a brief description of the site and surrounding areas, including the location of associated infrastructure, development and figures/maps of all locations;

Note – a site assessment may assist in establishing the preliminary facts about the site. Planning scheme policy – Site assessments provides additional guidance about preparing a site assessment.

- (ii) Project description – summarise the objectives of the project and proposal for the construction and operation of the project and associated infrastructure developments;
 - (iii) Alternative siting and design for proposed development (for development within areas containing MNES or MSES, declared fish habitat areas, or within a wetland or MLES waterway corridor) – summarise the features of alternatives investigated and detail the reasons for choosing the preferred option;
 - (iv) Existing environment – summarise the features of the physical, biophysical and built environment relating to the proposed development and associated infrastructure;
 - (v) Principal potential environmental impacts - summarise the main potential impacts of the project (direct, indirect and cumulative), both beneficial and detrimental, and any alternatives, on the existing environment;
 - (vi) Environmental monitoring, protection and management procedures - summarise the safeguards, standards and management procedures proposed to protect the environment, including environmental monitoring and the methods proposed to ameliorate or alleviate the potential impacts;
 - (vii) Conclusions - summarise the key strategies and amendments to the proposal to address any adverse environmental impacts.
- (b) Background and scope of proposal:
- (i) Outline the purpose and objectives of the proposed development;
 - (ii) Discuss the following to illustrate the background of the proposal:
 - (A) the need for the proposed development or works;
 - (B) the history of the proposal formulation;
 - (C) any alternatives considered and reasons for choosing the preferred option;
 - (D) action already taken.
 - (iii) Description of the project:
 - (A) the precise nature and scale of works;
 - (B) the location and site requirements;
 - (C) the plant and/ or building layout, size and design and the development staging program;
 - (D) the range and quality of materials to be produced;
 - (E) the production process;
 - (F) possible waste discharges;
 - (G) on-site works and operations;
 - (H) off-site works and operations;
 - (I) transport systems;
 - (J) infrastructure requirements;
 - (K) the workforce;
 - (L) project life and time scale for completion;
 - (M) the possible future expansion of associated development / works.
 - (iv) Use of resources – detail the implications of the proposal for the use of natural resources, including the quantity and source of water, raw materials and energy to be used.
- (c) Existing environment:
- (i) site and locality;
 - (ii) landform, geology and geomorphology;
 - (iii) hydrology (surface water and groundwater);

- (iv) climate;
 - (v) air quality;
 - (vi) noise environment;
 - (vii) Coastal processes (if applicable);
 - (viii) Ecological status / significance including:
 - (A) Types, structures and location of vegetation associations on the site and surrounding areas, including measures of foliage cover, health and natural regeneration;
 - (B) Species of flora and fauna (aquatic and terrestrial, native and introduced), weed and pest species, including the location and abundance of each species, especially the presence of rare or endangered species or MNES or MSES;
 - (C) Biodiversity values and conservation significance – bioregional status, local and national status;
 - (D) Special ecological values of the site such as refuge habitat, a breeding habitat, a corridor for wildlife movement and use by migratory species.
 - (ix) Social, cultural and economic characteristics;
 - (x) Landscape character and visual amenity;
 - (xi) Infrastructure.
 - (xii) Transport;
 - (xiii) Water supply;
 - (xiv) Effluent treatment and disposal;
 - (xv) Solid waste;
 - (xvi) Power and communications.
- (d) Potential impacts of the development on the existing environment – identify and detail the nature of any potential impacts, including cumulative impacts of the development on the existing environment (adverse or beneficial, direct or indirect, short or long term or incremental) including potential impacts on:
- (i) Geology and geomorphology;
 - (ii) Hydrology (surface and groundwater);
 - (iii) Ecology status / significance;
 - (iv) Air quality;
 - (v) Noise levels;
 - (vi) Light emissions;
 - (vii) Coastal processes (if applicable);
 - (viii) Infrastructure;
 - (ix) Potential events;
 - (x) Safety program.
- (e) Impact monitoring, protection, rehabilitation, risk management and post development management procedures:
- (i) Provide an Environmental management plan.
- Note- Refer to Planning Scheme Policy – Environmental management plans.
- (f) Consultation:
- (i) The proponent should consult with relevant interest groups and parties likely to be affected by the proposal, and issues generated should be documented along with any proposed measures to address these issues.
- (g) References:
- (i) Listing other reference material and literature used;
 - (ii) List authorities consulted and contributors to the report;

Cross-reference the reference material in the text to allow easier access to information.

- (h) Appendices:
 - (i) Include detailed technical information collected through the investigation;
 - (ii) Include relevant documents or correspondence from government authorities.

3.2. Vegetation audit report

- (1) The purpose of a vegetation audit report is to detail the requirements for undertaking on-site vegetation and fauna audit.
- (2) The vegetation report is to be prepared by a suitably qualified person.
- (3) It is recommended that the proponent should consult with Council prior to the undertaking of a vegetation audit report in order to ensure that all issues are covered in the report. As a general guide a detailed vegetation survey and assessment of the existing vegetation is required to identify the impacts on existing vegetation as a result of any proposed development.

3.3. Waterway audit report

- (1) The purpose of a waterway audit report is to detail the existing condition and post development condition of works in or around waterways and waterway corridors.
- (2) The waterway audit report is to be prepared by a suitably qualified person.
- (3) It is recommended that the proponent should consult with Council prior to the undertaking of a waterway audit report in order to ensure that all issues are covered in the report. As a general guide the following format and contents description indicates the depth of detail required:
 - (a) Detail the existing condition of the waterway, addressing vegetation coverage and waterway quality and integrity and whether the waterway is utilised as a habitat corridor;
 - (b) Demonstrate the environmental management measures to mitigate the impacts of development;
 - (c) Demonstrate that in-stream habitat elements such as fallen logs, overhangs and rocks are to be left in situ, replaced or restored;
 - (d) Provide hydraulic calculations which allow for the presence or establishment of a vegetated (closed canopy) waterway area to improve bank stability and in-stream ecological values and to restrict weed growth;
 - (e) Demonstrate that the development does not damage the root zone of vegetation through compaction, excavation or filling;
 - (f) Detail any remediation and rehabilitation works necessary to ensure that waterway quality and integrity is maintained and enhanced.

4. Guidance on meeting planning scheme outcomes

4.1. Related materials

- (1) Other documents which provide guidance on meeting the purpose of the planning scheme outcomes, but are not subject to a development assessment processes under the planning scheme include:
 - (a) State Planning Policy – state interest guidance material – Biodiversity (including any guidance material to other supporting documents that are referenced within this guidance material);
 - (b) State Planning Policy – state interest guidance material – Water quality (including any guidance material to other supporting documents that are referenced within this guidance material);

- (c) State Planning Policy – state interest guidance material – Emissions and hazardous activities (including any guidance material to other supporting documents that are referenced within this guidance material);
- (d) State Planning Policy – state interest guidance material – Coastal environment (including any guidance material to other supporting documents that are referenced within this guidance material);
- (e) Queensland wetland buffer planning guideline;
- (f) Queensland wetlands program on wetland information;
- (g) *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation act 1999 (Cwlth)*;
- (h) Significant Impact Guidelines 1.1: Matters of national environmental significance (Cwlth);
- (i) *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*;
- (j) *Transport Operations (Marine Pollution) Act 1995*;
- (k) *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 (Cwlth)*;
- (l) *Marin Parks Act 2004*;
- (m) *Environmental Protection Act 1994*;
- (n) *Environmental Protection (Water and Wetland Biodiversity) Policy 2019*;
- (o) *Environmental Protection (Noise) Policy 2019*;
- (p) *Environmental Protection (Air) Policy 2019*;
- (q) *Water Act 2000*;
- (r) Queensland Urban Drainage Manual;
- (s) Queensland harmful algal bloom response plan and operational procedures;
- (t) ANZEC and ARMCANZ (2000) Australian and New Zealand guidelines for fresh and marine water quality;
- (u) Fisheries Act 1994;
- (v) Fish Habitat Management Operational Policy;
- (w) State Development Assessment Provisions.

5. Schedule of amendments

Table 5.a – Schedule of amendments

Amendment title	Version number	Description	Dates
CairnsPlan 2016 Amendment 1 of 2017 - Administrative	1.1	The amendment integrates the Cairns Local Government Infrastructure Plan and corrects formatting, numbering, outdated terms and factual matters incorrectly stated in the planning scheme.	Adopted 28 June 2017 Commenced 1 July 2017
Planning Scheme Policy – Natural environment Amendment 1 of 2017 - Administrative	1.2	The amendment corrects formatting and numbering to remove the Planning Scheme Policy from Schedule 6 of the CairnsPlan 2016 and includes a schedule of amendments.	Adopted 6 December 2017 Commenced 11 December 2017
Planning Scheme Policy – Natural environment Amendment 1 of 2021 - Minor	1.3	The amendment updates and corrects references in the planning scheme policy. This amendment introduces a cross-reference to the planning scheme definitions in Schedule 1 of CairnsPlan 2016.	Adopted 13 October 2021 Commenced 26 October 2021