

ORDINARY MEETING	18
21 DECEMBER 2023	

## **REEF GUARDIAN COUNCIL FUNDING APPLICATION – PART 2: CHARGING TOWARDS 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY (ELECTRIC VEHICLE FLEET PILOT) AND CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS**

61/7/2-01 | #7310561

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council retrospectively endorses the funding application for \$416,000 under the Reef Guardian Councils Program and; delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to negotiate and finalise any and all matters.

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### **INTERESTED PARTIES:**

- Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW)
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
- Department of Environment and Science (DES)

*Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.*

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This report provides an overview of Council's second, non-competitive grant application to the Reef Guardian Councils Program, proposing retrospective approval from Council to seek \$416,000 from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. This non-competitive funding requires no co-contribution from Council. The proposed projects are:

Project 1 - Charging Towards 100% Renewable Energy (Electric Vehicle Fleet Pilot): \$311,000 for a purchase of five battery electric passenger vehicles, upskilling of Council's staff in EV technology & servicing, installation of charging stations and delivery of a staff and community awareness campaign.

Project 2 – Conservation Partnerships:

\$105,000 to engage contractors to revegetate bushland and riparian corridors in support of water quality and habitat connectivity at Council owned sites within the Reef catchment.

These projects align with actions within Council's Reef Guardian Action Plan 2020-2024 and Climate Change Strategy 2030.

The funding application is in addition to Council's first, successful funding application for the Clean Creeks project. If successful, projects will be delivered up to March 2026.

## **BACKGROUND:**

In July 2023, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) opened the *Reef Guardian Councils Program – Activating Local Council's Reef Action Plans* grant stream. As a Reef Guardian Council, Council was invited to apply for non-competitive funding up to \$920,000 for project delivery until March 2026.

The objectives of the program are to:

- support Reef Guardian Councils to deliver shovel-ready projects and activities as identified in their respective existing Reef Action Plans and;
- support Reef protection and restoration activities contributing to the delivery of the Reef 2050 Plan to protect and manage the Reef and support its health and resilience.

A total of \$487,373 was applied for to implement Clean Creeks in August 2023, a collaboration with four Indigenous land and sea ranger groups to remove litter from Cairns' waterways and educate local communities on responsible litter disposal. It included funding for a 0.6FTE Project Officer, marketing and a small allocation for limited riparian restoration works in each of the areas. Council was recently advised that this application was successful and is now finalising the grant agreement with the Commonwealth.

On 7 November 2023, Council was invited to apply for the remnant allocated amount, up to \$432,627 before 29 November 2023 under the same funding stream. Due to the short timeframe, a retrospective approval of a grant application for \$416,000 is sought from Council. The proposed projects are:

Project 1 - Charging Towards 100% Renewable Energy (Electric Vehicle Fleet Pilot): \$311,000 for a purchase of five passenger battery electric vehicles (BEVs) over three years, including upskilling of Council's staff in EV technology & servicing, installation of charging stations and delivery of a staff and community awareness and education campaign.

The BEVs would be phased into operations from 24/25, with activation of Council's 100% renewable electricity agreement and the installation of fleet charging infrastructure at facilities covered by the agreement. The BEVs are proposed to substitute existing vehicle purchases of internal combustion engines in line with the fleet management strategy.

Project 2 - Conservation Partnerships is a multi-year initiative to revegetate bushland and riparian corridors in the Cairns region for water quality and habitat connectivity outcomes, helping to restore ecosystem services in collaboration with local conservation groups, land and sea ranger groups and natural resource management organisations. Key activities include native seedling propagation, revegetation, weed management and community engagement at planting events.

Council owned sites with benefits to the Reef environment have been shortlisted and would be finalised ahead of delivery by suitably qualified contractors in 24/25 and 25/26.

**COMMENT:**

88% of residents who completed the most recent Our Cairns survey stated they want Council to take action on climate change, and these proposed projects contribute to both climate mitigation, adaptation - supporting Reef resilience objectives in the Reef 2050 Plan.

After electricity, transport is the most emissions intense sector within Cairns, and the region is currently behind the national average in BEV uptake. With inclusion in the pool of fleet vehicles, the trial would effectively enable 'test drives' by Council staff, supporting consideration in personal vehicle choices, and would be showcased at the Cairns Ecofiesta as an educational tool. When retired as per the fleet asset management schedule, availability would be increased in the resale market, supporting affordability, and passing on emissions reductions to the community.

The Conservation Partnerships project builds on the Clean Creeks project, benefiting from the establishment of a Project Officer, funded by the grant program. It will work with partners to deliver:

- An increase in the area of native vegetation under active management
- Local skills development in strategic bushland and riparian revegetation
- Stronger collaboration between land managers and conservation partners

Both projects will include an independent audit, and evaluation of outcomes to verify benefits to the Reef environment.

**OPTIONS:****Option 1 (Recommended)**

That Council retrospectively endorses the non-competitive funding application for \$416,000 under the Reef Guardian Councils Program and; delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to negotiate and finalise any and all matters.

OR

**Option 2**

That Council does not retrospectively endorse the non-competitive funding application for \$416,000 under the Reef Guardian Councils Program.

**CONSIDERATIONS:****Risk Management:**

The proposed projects help to develop Council's capacity to manage environmental and climate risks, by practically preparing for the vehicle technology transition and by connecting and protecting the region's natural assets through revegetation. External funding, and a trial-only approach assists in managing financial impacts.

### Council Finance and the Local Economy:

This non-competitive funding requires no co-contribution from Council and project implementation has no notable on-going implications for Council's Capital Works Program or Operational Works Program.

The Charging Towards 100% Renewable Energy (EV Pilot) funding is sought in addition to existing capex, overcoming the upfront costs associated with some BEVs, whilst aligning with existing vehicle retirement schedules. Whole of life costs (including maintenance, tyre wear and electricity) will be evaluated as part of the pilot to inform options assessment of future fleet vehicles and a business case progressed, if favourable.

In terms of Conservation Partnerships, local service providers will be invited to apply for service delivery and projects contribute to Cairn's reputation as a nature-based destination and Smart Green Economy.

### Community and Cultural Heritage:

Community participation will be encouraged, with active tree planting events and community site signage on benefits to the Great Barrier Reef - renowned for its World-Heritage listed natural and cultural values.

### Natural Environment:

Riparian revegetation works would assist in reducing stream bank erosion, connecting habitat and weed control, which would be delivered in accordance with Council's Pest Management Strategy.

The EV Pilot would contribute to Council's scope 1 emissions management, avoiding consumption of non-renewable fuels and reduced tailpipe emissions compared to equivalent passenger vehicles.

### Corporate and Operational Plans:

The application is linked to the Corporate Plan Goal 2 – Natural Assets, particularly the KPIs - *Progression towards net zero emissions* and *Improved quality of our waterways*.

Per the 23/24 Operational Plan, learnings from the EV pilot will inform feasibility of low carbon fleet options, as part of the action to *Develop a Corporate Net Zero Emissions Implementation Plan*.

### Statutory:

There are no statutory considerations associated with the grant application.

### Policy:

The proposed projects align with the following actions within Councils' strategies:

Cairns Reef Guardian Action Plan 2020-2024:

- *100% Renewable Energy*
- *Cairns Climate Change Policy and Action Plan*
- *Conservation Partnerships*
- *Clean Creeks*

Cairns Climate Change Strategy 2030:

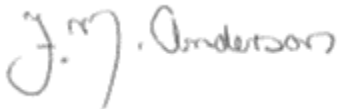
- *Lead by example to deliver low and zero emissions transport options for Council operations (Develop a Green Mobility Strategy for Council to deliver low/zero emissions vehicles and alternative mobility options).*
- *Deliver staff behaviour change initiatives and facilities to encourage use of active, public, shared and electric transport.*
- *Impacts of land-based activities are managed and the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef enhanced.*
- *Revegetate Council managed riparian areas, drains and waterways to filter runoff.*

**CONSULTATION:**

- Project 1 - Collaboration with Asset Services to co-design the pilot project.
- Project 2 - Consultation with Community Spaces to identify Council-owned sites for further investigation.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Nil



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