

## 1. Issue Name

Environmental Management: Incorporating Environmental Planning, Environmental Protection, Urban Parklands and Natural Area Management

## 2. Contributors

Gary Photinos, Peter Briggs, Dan Carter, Rosalie Eustace, Warren Mortlock, Angela Wright, Dan Garcia, Mark Bastin and Deluna Lawerance.

Workshop consultation and issues mapping exercise with Timothy Donovan, Neil Kesur, Gary Soutar, Eleanor Bray, Bradley Taylor

## 3. Issue Definition and Scope

Redland Shire to become a leader in local sustainability, environmental protection, open space planning and stewards of our waters.

## 4. Executive Summary

Redlands residents through various surveys have shown protecting the environment and our open space represents one of their top concerns.

However, despite our strong values and extraordinary natural assets, Council sometimes struggles to explain its environmental credentials.

We need to be more sustainable if we are to maximise our economic growth, maintain our quality of life and protect our unique natural resources and lifestyle. Council will need to take a strong role in leading the community. If we want the next generation of Redlands residents to have the same opportunities that we have enjoyed, we have to start changing now.

To close this gap, the corporate plan needs to develop and implement an ambitious new environmental, economic, and social agenda considering the following key issues:

- Achieving sustainability within a generation
- Dealing with the overconsumption of resources
- Raising environmental community consciousness
- Recognising Moreton Bay and the Marine Park
- Recognising sea level rise
- Having a broader vision for biodiversity
- Acknowledging people in our environment
- Making recreation and sport legitimate land uses
- Using continuous improvement language
- Recognising our urban form and the islands
- Moving towards the critical challenges

## 5. Regional Cooperation

Sustainability within our generation will require regional and international cooperation.

## 6. Background/ Discussion

### **Sustainability within a Generation**

Sustainability means living within our limits. In a sustainable future, no resident would think twice about going outside for a walk or drinking a glass of tap water.

Food would be free from pesticide residues, antibiotics, and growth hormones. Air, water, and soil would be uncontaminated by toxic substances. In a sustainable future, it would be safe to swim in all recreational waters; safe to eat fish wherever they were caught.

Clean, renewable energy would be produced by harnessing the sun, the wind, water, and heat of the Earth.

A sustainable future would mean a global climate undisturbed by human impacts. Residents would no longer fear sunburn or cancer caused by damage to the ozone layer.

No-one would worry about nature's extraordinary diversity decreasing at human hands.

Endangered ecosystems and species would recover and thrive. Our community would be confident that future generations would enjoy the same spectacular natural heritage and quality of life that we enjoy today.

One of the threats to the sustainability of the natural environment in Redland Shire is the impact residents and visitors have as a consequence of their actions. An identified need is for residents and visitors to the shire to value natural areas and associated wildlife and to understand the impact of their actions on sustainability of the natural environment.

### **Over-consumption is the main reason for our environmental woes**

Our "prevailing emphasis on consumption – with high levels of waste, energy use, and greenhouse gas emissions – risks the ability of natural resources and systems to support future generations".<sup>1</sup> Consumption refers to the energy and resources consumed not only by individuals, but by the entire community

Reducing our consumption of resources does not mean reducing our quality of life.

For example, switching to a car that uses half as much fuel or a refrigerator that uses one-tenth of the electricity, protects the environment, saves money, and provides the same service and satisfaction.

Reducing consumption of resources does not mean the end of economic growth either, since we can exchange more dollars while using less resource.

### **Raising the Environmental Community Consciousness**

Council recognises the need to protect and enhance the natural environment but needs in addition to acknowledge the impact of residents and visitors by identifying environmental education as a key goal.

The importance of education is acknowledged by the extent of councils environmental education programs but is not matched by recognition at the corporate planning level.

---

<sup>1</sup> The International Energy Agency has found that Australia's energy efficiency has improved at less than half the rate of other countries. (IEA, 2001)

The actions of humans is a great threat to the environment and the choices we make have daily impact. Understanding this is essential for the viability of our protected areas and as such it is essential that equal weight is given to both protection and enhancement as well as education.

The importance of education is also seen in extending the understanding of environmental values.

As such it enables the ongoing use of Redlands natural resources for tourism and general enjoyment of residents, providing a resource that brings economic return and lifestyle enhancement.

Redland Shire Council has had environmental education programs in place for some time. These programs include:

- Community Bushcare 1995,
- The Redlands Indigiscapes Centre opened in 2000,
- Community planting program started in 2003,
- Redlands Afterhours Wildlife Ambulance, coordinated by RSC since 1999,
- The Redlands Wildlife Care Network commenced in 2003,
- Land for Wildlife, Voluntary Conservation Agreements 2004 ,
- Your Backyard Gardening Program 2004,
- IndigiScapes School and Vacation Program 2001 and
- A program of events, talks, displays, brochures, workshops, training, advisory and information service associated with the Redlands IndigiScapes Centre

EcoBiz was also introduced in 2005 as an extension program for businesses to improve their efficiencies and ultimately improve their prospects for economic growth.

There are no current explicit corporate commitments to raising the community's environmental consciousness through environmental education programs.<sup>2</sup>

### **Recognition of Moreton Bay and the Marine Park**

Redlands can become a leader in water stewardship by recognising the Moreton Bay and the Marine Park at the highest level. Our marketing campaigns provide greater recognition of Moreton Bay than our corporate plan.

Protecting and restoring the quantity and quality of fresh water in Redland's ecosystem has been undertaken under broader environmental protection goals.

Redland Shire has made a significant investment in the upgrading of its sewerage treatment plants and will achieve tertiary treatment at its Victoria Point treatment facility in the near future. Redland Water and Waste are achieving better than world's best practice for nitrogen and phosphorous removal at Thorneside and Cleveland, the Mt Cotton plant is recycling almost all its effluent and investigations are underway to improve recycling opportunities at Capalaba.

Council has made many achievements and we need to continue this work and provide a foundation or legacy for future generations now.

We are still facing serious threats to the both the quantity of water and quality of water in our shire.

---

<sup>2</sup> Environmental Education was a stated program under the Natural Environment Strategic Priority in the 2002-2006 Corporate Plan. However this program was deleted in the 2003 review of the Corporate Plan. Environmental Education is now broadly covered by the Koala and Native Animals program which simply states that Council will coordinate the planning and design, delivery and regulation of activities that are likely to affect koala and native animals.

We need to be looking at the total water cycle and encouraging the replacement of portable water with recycled water where it is appropriate. Gold Coast City Council has developed a WaterFutures Program and has actively encouraged dual reticulation systems in all new developments in the Pimpama-Comera Region.

Restoring our catchments requires high level commitment both in funding and community attitudes to ensure that we can achieve the status of leaders in the stewardship of our bay and marine park.

### **Recognition of and action on sea level rise**

Council must address the issue of rising sea levels as a consequence of climate change.

As a coastal Shire with more foreshore than most in Queensland, Redlands must be a leader in this issue. Sea level rise is now a fact of life – not a prediction yet to be realised.

Island communities throughout the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions are currently dealing with the impacts of rising sea levels and the necessity of human retreat, such as: loss of infrastructure, relocation of services, loss of homes and livelihood.

Redland Shire's proximity to a very large shallow bay and the extent of land below 2.5 metres AHD makes sea level rise a very prominent and urgent sustainability issue for Council to act upon. As a minimum, a strategic perspective on sea level rise is required in this corporate plan – not a future one.

### **A broad vision for biodiversity**

Council does not have a broad vision for how biodiversity is to be identified, protected and managed in the Shire.

Our approach to biodiversity is currently piecemeal and focussed on the Koala and a couple of prominent species and locations. The various policies and activities of Council's public land management, private land planning and management, and community programs are not well co-ordinated and do not have comprehensive overarching objectives in common to aim for.

An approach to biodiversity in keeping with that of the times, of other leading SEQ local governments, and local community expectations is much more than simply 'ensuring the enhancement of koala and wildlife habitat.....' as our corporate plan currently states.

A biodiversity framework would set the strategic priorities that the corporate plan adopts for Council.

Such strategic priorities should tie together the currently disparate activities of Council that 'protect maintain and enhance' biodiversity - for example through the use of Conservation and Environment Protection Zones and the Bushland Habitat Overlay within the Redland Planning Scheme, co-ordinated:

- with Councils management planning for conservation reserves,
- the use of the Environment Charge for land acquisitions,
- the koala hits program and the location of koala road crossings,
- with community based programs such as landcare groups, voluntary conservation agreements, and land for wildlife programs.

There will be impacts throughout the other sections of the Plan - for example on physical character, economic growth and essential services.

A significant challenge facing the protection of our biodiversity is to minimise the impact of those pest plants and pest animals that pose a threat to the shire's ecosystems and impose high annual costs on the community. Costs to the community include lost primary production and pest control, damage to environmentally significant areas, degraded land and water quality, compromised biodiversity, and interference with human health and recreation.

### **People in our Environment: Active Use of Open Spaces**

Physical activity impacts on four major functional areas that define our community social, physical, environmental and economic.

Physical and mental benefits such as prevention of chronic disease, stress and depression management, improved quality of life, improved concentration enhancing memory and learning and development of motor skills.

Social Benefits such as increased social integration and cooperation, promotion of collective identity and increased cohesion, strengthened families, prolonged independent living for older adults, enhanced self-esteem and confidence, reduced isolation and loneliness and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

Economic benefits including investment opportunities, reduced health costs, employment, economic development, increased productivity with a fit and healthy workforce and community, tourism, and reduced crime vandalism and delinquency.

Environmental benefits including protection of natural environments and their diversity, reduced traffic, air and noise pollution and the creation of safe places.

For Council this will mean a commitment to providing a comprehensive footpath network for walking, cycling and jogging. It will be safe parks with all the infrastructure that encourages active use of the open space and waterway. It will also mean an ongoing commitment to providing programs, activities and club support.

### **Recreation and Sport as legitimate land uses**

Like agriculture, mining, conserving nature, forestry, water catchment management, maintenance of indigenous cultures or urban development, outdoor recreation is a legitimate use of land.

This does not mean that outdoor recreation in general is more important than any other land use, just that it does deserve serious consideration in land use decision making.

There is a need to ensure sufficient quality, quantity and diversity of places in which people can participate in recreation and sport - this requires planning and protection of those places.

The issue is important because there are significant competing interests for future land acquisition with environment interests and recreation and sport interests often both wishing to acquire diminishing land resources. The implication of not planning for recreation and sport are:

- the land will not be available having been subsumed by other land uses,
- there will be growing conflict between recreation and sport and other urban land uses,
- it will be much harder and cost prohibitive to address recreation and sports needs in terms of land retrospectively,
- the growing population will not be able to recreate to their desired level, which may lead to increased health problems for the Shire's residents

Planning and managing for outdoor recreation and sport is no easier than planning and managing land for other purposes. It isn't a light weight or unnecessary or simple addition to other "serious" land use decisions. This is especially so given the magnitude and diversity of demand for outdoor recreation opportunities.

As such outdoor recreation requires a substantive understanding of and consideration to all the fact that there is a finite amount of land available for for development, it is a nonrenewable resource, it is a shrinking resource, there is a growing expectation that a diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities will be available in the landscape and that if these aren't provided for and managed for then people will use land that is not meant for these purposes and this land will degrade (eg conservation areas).

An ideal network of outdoor recreation settings would include some linear corridors connected to larger blocks across the entire range of landscape types (urban to rural).

### **Continuous Improvement**

Continuous improvement is a visioning action that inspires innovation and invokes the critical analysis of what is happening now and can we do it better in the future. It leads us to look ahead for the betterment of continually striving for excellence and best practice and acts to discourage learned errors and ultimately system failures.

By building principles of continuous improvement into the Corporate Plan it can communicate to others that Council is responsive to community and technological changes as well as being future driven and dynamic in its direction.

To achieve a sustainable and prosperous business in the ever changing world requires working in partnerships to achieve continuous improvement and innovation. All sustainable systems of life are based on individuals and collections of individuals adapting, improving and innovating. So in many ways, achieving continuous improvement and innovation is a necessity for survival.

It is important to recognise that in local government it involves the management of numerous systems trying to work and talk to each other to gain the optimum goal. However, some businesses never seem to evolve because they fail to continually interrogate and evaluate their own processes and systems.

The objectives within the corporate plan need to guide and excite the organisation into achieving best practice and empowering others to seek and lead the way in their respective fields. Further to this, Council can be seen as fostering new improvements and growth in an area that has typically been entrenched in 'red tape' and purely process oriented.

### **Recognition of our Urban Form, our Maturity: What is our Image?**

Council should consider making a high level commitment to our identity and image. Should we be considering city status or is this concept incongruous with the recognition of the many islands that currently form our shire? The shire has long met the statutory criteria to be declared a city.

There is some thinking that we should move on from the notion that it is a rural shire covered in farms and open space. This Shire has the urban density to be criteria to be recognised as a city.

This would enable the shire to have a more sophisticated and realistic vision for itself in terms of its urban form.

However, this may be done at the expense of recognising the island communities.

## **Moving Towards the Critical Challenges**

To move towards a prosperous, just and sustainable future, Redlands must concentrate its efforts on critical challenges:

### **IMPROVING EFFICIENCY**

Increasing the efficiency of energy and resource use by a factor of four to 10 times

### **SHIFTING TO CLEAN ENERGY**

Replacing fossil fuels with clean, low-impact renewable sources of energy

### **REDUCING WASTE AND POLLUTION**

Moving from a linear “throw-away” economy to a cyclical “reduce, re-use, and recycle” economy

### **PROTECTING AND CONSERVING WATER**

Recognizing and respecting the value of water in the bay and the marine park in our laws, policies, and actions.

### **CONSERVING, PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT**

Taking effective steps to stop the decline of biodiversity and revive the health of ecosystems

### **BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

Avoiding urban sprawl to protect agricultural land and habitat, and improve our quality of life. Recognising recreation and sport as legitimate land uses.

### **RAISING THE COMMUNITY'S AWARENESS**

The importance of education is also seen in extending the understanding of environmental values. As such it enables the ongoing use of Redlands natural resources for tourism and general enjoyment of residents, providing a resource that brings economic return and lifestyle enhancement.

### **ENCOURAGE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND USE OF OPEN SPACE**

At the community and individual level, participation in recreation sport and physical activity enhances the development of a range of life skills and provides an entry point into the life of the community.

### **RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL RIGHTS**

Aboriginal people have a long history of respectful stewardship of the land. Recognition of the lawful rights of aboriginal people, once determined by the Courts, will require a change to the way that some decisions are made about the environment.

## **Solutions for a Sustainable Future**

Addressing challenges needs several innovative policy initiatives that cut across jurisdictions and departmental mandates. This will require greater acknowledgement of cross departmental working relationships at the corporate level.

**Making a corporate commitment to increasing our investment in the environment** by ensuring our budgets are devoted to environmental protection. Our commitment to sustainability can be measured by the amount of money budgeted for environmental protection.

**Council should make informed and corporately responsible decisions.** Currently financial considerations are emphasised whereby social, environmental and economic implications should also be considered.<sup>3</sup>

Council can spur sustainability through its own purchasing and procurement policies. Local Governments are one of the largest spenders in the local economy.

**Council can make a renewed commitment to use Acts, Regulations and Local Laws to protect the public interest.** The current corporate plan does not make any commitment compliance issues and the ability for Council to respond with its own local law making capabilities. In recent years there has been a perception of a decline in government's willingness to pass, implement, and enforce environmental regulations.

**To recognise the rights of aboriginal people when making environmental and natural resource decisions are made.** Although it would appear that we a long way from obtaining resolution on native title, the corporate plan can be proactive in this area.

**Redlands should strive to be the most environmentally friendly shire,** making waste, pollution, and ecosystem destruction remnants of the past.

Corporate commitments to environmental education, community behavioural change programs, incentive schemes, sustainability demonstration projects will encourage residents and business to live and work more sustainably overall. Changes in community behaviour would include many topics currently being discussed by Council on litter, fauna welfare, water usage etc.

**A biodiversity strategy or framework will need to be developed by Council to adequately guide the approach of the Corporate Plan** or alternatively, the development of same over the coming years may be a major initiative of the corporate plan. It is important that council's corporate plan recognise the need to implement coordinated and proactive pest and fire management.

**Becoming a leader in water stewardship by recognising Moreton Bay and the Marine Park** and committing to the protection and restoring quantity and quality of fresh water in our ecosystems. A strategic perspective on sea level rise is also required in this corporate plan – not a future one.

**We should aspire to working proactively to promote active and healthy lifestyles for all its residents.** Council should aspire to helping reduce childhood obesity and assist the growing number of retirees who settle in the Shire to being able to confidently go out into the community and be physically active.

**The general direction and language used within the corporate plan** could be improved by using principles and language centered around the concept of evoking continuous improvement.

**The Redland Shire Council should consider making a high level commitment to our identity and image.** Consideration should be given to our, villages, hinterland, dense urban communities and the Islands.

**The corporate plan should have as a goal to provide land for recreation and sporting activities including outdoor recreation.** This will provide the widest possible recreation diversity through the provision of the greatest possible range of recreation settings.

---

<sup>3</sup> The 2002-2006 corporate plan states in the introduction only references that development must be sustainable, or managed in a way that achieves environmental, social and economic sustainability.