

5.10. HEALTHY REEF PARTNERSHIP

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolves to:

1. **Join the Healthy Reef Partnership for a 3-year term with financial terms as specified in the closed session report; and**
2. **Consider adoption of the National Carbon Offset Standard; and**
3. **Commit to carbon mitigation projects which will reduce Council's carbon footprint; and**
4. **Investigate carbon offset projects located within the Douglas Shire; and**
5. **Delegate authority under Section 257 of the *Local Government Act 2009* to the Chief Executive Officer to finalise any and all matters associated with the contract.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Council has the opportunity to participate in a carbon offsetting partnership with Qantas Future Planet, GreenCollar and Tourism Port Douglas Daintree (TPDD). The partnership enables Council to become carbon neutral by purchasing premium carbon offsets located in Rawbelle, Queensland. Once this is achieved the partnership will encourage local businesses, particularly tourism operators, to join the partnership and offset their carbon footprint through the scheme. This is a carbon offset and marketing opportunity aimed at promoting the Douglas Shire as a sustainable tourism destination.

For Council to credibly claim it is carbon neutral, it will need to bring its footprint up to a standard in line with the National Carbon Offset Standard (NCOS). This process will increase Council's existing carbon footprint due to the addition of components such as paper use and employee commute. The NCOS standard also stipulates that the carbon footprint should be reduced as much as possible, which involves investing in carbon mitigation projects, e.g. solar projects.

BACKGROUND

The concept of the Reef Friendly Tourism Partnership was initiated in September 2017.

Qantas Airways launched Qantas Future Planet in 2007, the initiative acts as a corporate social responsibility program focusing on offsetting projects. Under the proposed partnership Qantas Future Planet acts as a broker, purchasing carbon offsets in bulk from GreenCollar and on selling to smaller businesses and organisations.

GreenCollar is a carbon credit market trader based in Sydney. They specialise in developing National Carbon Offset Standard (NCOS) accredited carbon offsets located within Australia.

Definitions:

- Carbon Footprint – The amount of greenhouse gasses released into the atmosphere as a result of activities of a particular individual, organisation or community. Typically measured in carbon dioxide equivalents (tCO₂-e).
- Mitigation – Actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the source in order to minimise their effects on global climate change. E.g. using renewable energy instead of fossil fuel.
- Carbon Sink (or Carbon Store) - Ecosystems, rainforests, mangroves and oceans which remove greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere by absorbing and storing it.
- Carbon Neutral (or Zero Net Emissions) - Having a net zero carbon footprint by balancing a measured amount of carbon released with an equivalent amount sequestered or by purchasing carbon credits or offsets.
- Carbon Credit/ Offset – represents one carbon dioxide equivalent unit. The terms credits and offsets are often used interchangeably, however credits are more regulated. Another key difference is that credits are claimed upfront (e.g. the amount of carbon a tree will sequester over a 100 year period); whilst offsets are claimed on an annual basis (e.g. the amount of carbon a tree sequesters each year).
- Reef Credit – represents one carbon dioxide equivalent unit which also has Great Barrier Reef water quality benefits due to its location within the Reef catchment area.
- National Carbon Offset Standard (NCOS) - A voluntary Australian Government standard to manage greenhouse gas emissions, providing best-practice guidance on how to measure, reduce, offset, report and audit emissions. NCOS accredited organisations typically use ACCUs to achieve carbon neutrality.
- Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) - Represents one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent stored or avoided by a project regulated by the Clean Energy Regulator and registered on the Australian National Registry of Emissions Units.
- Colodan Reef Credits – NCOS accredited ACCUs sourced from the Colodan Reef Project located 8.5km north-west of Rawbelle, Queensland. The credits use the Full CAM accounting method for human induced regeneration. This means that the project encourages the natural regrowth of vegetation to occur (as opposed to tree planting), actions include weed and pest management.

COMMENT

The partnership will provide Council with:

1. Accredited NCOS ACCUs with reef benefits up to 6,400 tonnes of CO₂-e. Preliminary estimates suggest that this is sufficient to cover Council's carbon footprint, however a full audit will be required to verify this. The offsets will be sourced from the Colodan Reef Credits site 8.5km from Rawbelle, Queensland.
2. A copy and briefing of the annual Qantas Future Planet Insights Report.

3. Qantas and GreenCollar marketing material promoting the partnership to be hosted on a website funded and maintained by TPDD.
4. Invitations to Qantas Future Planet events.
5. The opportunity for Douglas Shire businesses to purchase Colodan Reef Credits through the scheme without incurring an annual membership fee. Note that a small number of Douglas Shire businesses already offset using land located within the Douglas Shire.

The Partnership Framework is set out in **Attachment One**.

Location

The Colodan Reef Credits are located in the Burnett Mary catchment area, at the southern end of the GBR. The Burnett Catchment flows directly through Bundaberg before joining the Coral Sea. Given that water quality benefits are localised, the credits will not improve the condition of the GBR off the coast of Douglas Shire.

Council Strategies for Carbon Footprint Reduction

The NCOS approach stipulates that best practice involves an organisation mitigating (reducing) their carbon footprint as much as possible before offsetting the remainder emissions through carbon offset projects. While this project will immediately bring Council to a carbon neutral position, Council's proposed Corporate Plan for 2019-2024 articulates a number of strategies in relation to protecting the Shire's environment and reducing Council's carbon footprint. These include such things as renewable energy options for Council operations, waste management strategies that reduce the amount of waste to landfill, operational efficiencies, and numerous strategies to protect the reef including plastic and sediment reduction. It is anticipated that over time, as the Council's footprint is reduced, fewer offsets will be required.

PROPOSAL

That Council resolves to:

- Join the Healthy Reef Partnership for a 3-year term; and
- Bring Council's carbon footprint up to a standard in line with the National Carbon Offset Standard (NCOS); and
- Commit to carbon mitigation projects which will reduce Council's carbon footprint; and
- Investigate carbon offset projects located within the Douglas Shire.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Council's interests in the partnership will be led by the Sustainability Team, within Council's Environment and Planning Team. The financial implications are detailed in the confidential closed report as they are commercial in confidence.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Council's carbon footprint fluctuates due to energy consumption, vehicle use, wastewater treatment loads and waste to landfill. If Council's annual carbon footprint exceeds 6,400 tonnes of CO₂-e in any given year under the partnership term, there will be an additional charge. Council's current carbon footprint is likely to increase as the footprint is brought in line with NCOS standards, an allowance of 400 tCO₂-e has been made for this.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- Economic:** The partnership will be the first of its kind in Australia and will provide marketing and branding opportunities for our tourism industry.
- Environmental:** The Colodan Reef carbon offsets will encourage natural regrowth, habitat regeneration, sequester carbon emissions and improve the water quality in the Burnett catchment area.
- Social:** The partnership opportunity has the potential to increase the Douglas Shire's sustainable tourism credentials and build positive relationships with local businesses and tourism operators.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2014-2019 Initiatives:

Theme 1 - Celebrating Our Communities

1.2.4 - Network, advocate and partner with stakeholders to achieve positive outcomes.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

Fully-Responsible Funding the full cost of a program or activity

CONSULTATION

- Internal:** Three Councillor Workshops (22 January 2019; 20 November 2018; 23 January 2018).
- External:** A dedicated Sustainability workshop was run on 10 May 2019, where the model was presented to local businesses, not-for-profits and government agencies. A preliminary Reef Friendly concept was shared with 13 Douglas Shire tourism operators during 3-11 October 2018. Meetings were led by Mayor Julia Leu and aimed to gauge interest in carbon neutrality and the wider partnership objectives.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Healthy Reef Partnership Model **[5.10.1 - 1 page]**

Healthy Reef Model

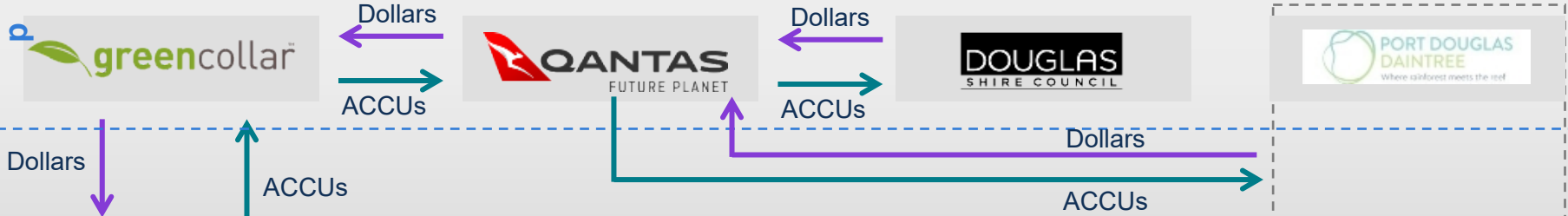
Partnership

- Management
- Stewardship
- Audit

- Broker/dealer
- Platform administrator
- Marketing / brand

- Council objectives
- Overall project owner

- Amalgamator
- Represent industry



Colodan, Rawbelle QLD



ACCU = Australian Carbon Credit Unit

Ordinary Council Meeting - 18 June 2019