

5.5. ENVIRONMENTAL (COUNCIL OPERATIONS) GENERAL POLICY

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Environmental (Council Operations) General Policy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Environmental (Council Operations) General Policy, included as **Attachment A**, commits Council to preparing a series of Council team environmental plans to further embed environmental considerations into day-to-day operations.

BACKGROUND

The Douglas Shire has a unique natural environment, it is the only place in the world with two adjoining World Heritage listed areas: the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics. It is therefore imperative that Council considers and actively minimises the impact of Council operations on the natural environment.

The Policy is an action included within the adopted Corporate Sustainability Strategy 2017-2020.

COMMENT

The intent of the Policy is to avoid waste and pollutants generated by Council operations at the source. The Policy builds on three (3) of the Environmental Sustainable Principles outlined in Council's Corporate Sustainability General Policy, which are:

1. Preserve and restore the natural environment.
2. Utilise resources efficiently.
3. Protect and enhance biodiversity.

PROPOSAL

That Council adopts the Environmental (Council Operations) General Policy.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The development of Council operations environmental plans will be prepared in subsequent financial years using existing resources. Any additional activities identified in the subsequent environmental plans will be resourced appropriately within the relevant Operational Plan.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: Council will commit to utilising resources efficiently which over time should be of economic benefit to Council. Financial implications remain a part of Council's decision making considerations and operations, however the environmental sustainability implications must be taken into account in line with the Policy.

Environmental: The adoption of the Policy will commit Council to preparing team environmental plans to further protect and preserve the natural environment.

Social: Council will commit to display strong environmental leadership to the Douglas Communities, with an overall aim of improving the total quality of life, both now and in the future.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2014-2019 Initiatives:

Theme 3 - Improve Environmental Performance

3.1.6 - Pursue best practice management outcomes for waste management facilities.

3.2.1 - Identify and invest in energy reduction initiatives in Council-owned facilities and in the delivery of services.

3.2.3 - Investigate process improvements at Council's wastewater treatment plants to improve wastewater quality, save energy and identify markets for end products.

3.2.4 - Investigate opportunities to reduce and/or eliminate the use of harmful pesticides, herbicides and chemicals in Council operations and implement environmentally responsible alternatives.

Operational Plan 2017-2018 Actions:

3.1.5 - Develop an Environmental Management Policy

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: Consultation has taken place with the Leaders and Delegates across Council.

External: Nil

ATTACHMENTS

1. Environmental (Council Operations) Policy **[5.5.1]**



ENVIRONMENTAL (COUNCIL OPERATIONS) GENERAL POLICY

Intent This policy recognises Council's commitment to the iconic and biodiversity rich environment that it operates within. It aligns with the principles of Cleaner Production and relevant environmental legislation.

The intent of this policy is to avoid waste and pollutants generated by Council operations at the source. Where waste and pollutants cannot be avoided they are to be reduced, reused, recycled, recovered, treated or disposed of in line with the Waste Hierarchy and in compliance with relevant legislation.

The policy builds on three (3) of the Environmental Sustainable Principles outlined in Council's **Corporate Sustainability General Policy**, which are: 1. Preserve and restore the natural environment; 2. Utilise resources efficiently; 3. Protect and enhance biodiversity.

Scope This policy is applicable to all of Council, its employees and contractors in all decisions and activities.

REFERENCE

Relevant Council Policies:

- Corporate Sustainability General Policy
- Climate Change (Council Operations) General Policy
- Workplace Health and Safety General Policy

Relevant Legislation:

- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003
- Biosecurity Act 2014
- Environmental Protection Act 1994
- Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011
- Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993
- National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development – adopted by all levels of the Australian Government in 1992.

Definitions:

- Cleaner Production (*or Pollution Prevention*) – The United Nations Environment Program defines cleaner production as,

'the continuous application of an integrated, preventive environmental strategy applied to processes, products and services to increase overall efficiency and reduce risk to humans and the environment.'
- Environment – Under the Environmental Protection Act 1994,

- a. *Ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; and*
- b. *All natural and physical resources; and*
- c. *The qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas, however large or small, that contribute to their biological diversity and integrity, intrinsic or attributed scientific value or interest, amenity, harmony and sense of community; and*
- d. *The social, economic, aesthetic and cultural conditions that affect, or are affected by, things mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (c).'*

- Pollution – The Department of Forestry defines pollution as,

'an activity of man, which directly or indirectly results in the addition to water, air or soil, of matter or energy which has a deleterious effect on living organisms or structures it is desirable to preserve, or which reduces the quality of water, air or soil for any subsequent use'.

- Waste – Under the Environmental Protection Act 1994,
 1. *'Waste includes any thing, other than an end of waste resource, that is –*
 - a. *Left over, or an unwanted by-product, from an industrial, commercial, domestic or other activity; or*
 - b. *Surplus to the industrial, commercial, domestic or other activity generating the waste.*
 2. *Waste can be a gas, liquid, solid or energy, or a combination of any of them.*
 3. *A thing can be waste whether or not it is of value.'*

Other Principles:

- Intergenerational Equity – The present generation has a guardian duty to protect the natural environment for future generations, as each generation has the right to inherit the same resources enjoyed by previous generations.
- Life Cycle Cost Analysis – The financial, environmental and social costs associated with an asset or resource throughout the entirety of its life. This includes the costs associated with raw materials, production, transport, operating costs and disposal.
- Polluter Pays Principle – The costs associated with environmental pollution, including containment, abatement and avoidance, should be borne by the party who caused the pollution.
- The Precautionary Principle – When an activity may lead to morally unacceptable harm, for example the destruction of the natural environment, action should be taken to avoid or diminish that harm even when the scientific evidence has a degree of uncertainty.
- Waste Hierarchy – A guide for prioritising waste management practices with the objective of achieving optimal environmental outcomes. The most preferable option is to avoid producing the waste, this is followed by reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, treat and disposal.

PROVISIONS

Council commits to identifying and implementing management measures to prevent or minimise the environmental impacts associated with Council operations, while delivering efficient and cost-effective services to the community.

Council will embed the Cleaner Production principles into Council operations by developing a series of Council team specific Environmental Plans. The objectives of the Environmental Plans are to:

1. Provide an overview of the team's operations.
2. Identify all relevant environmental legislative requirements and Council policies and strategies.
3. Identify actual or potential adverse environmental impacts.
4. Identify environmental safeguards to minimise environmental impacts which align with environmental best management practices and ecological sustainable development principles.
5. Provide a clear structure for monitoring and reporting environmental impacts and complaints.

This Policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council

Manager Responsible for Review:

Manager Sustainable Communities

**ORIGINALLY ADOPTED:
DUE FOR REVISION: 2021
REVOKED/SUPERSEDED:**