

23 Environmental Education and Community Involvement

Council recognizes that community awareness of the environment and the issues affecting it, and involvement of the community in resolving these issues, is integral to realizing ecologically sustainable development.

The Issues:

Environmental education aims to develop an awareness of the environmental components, which includes human society, ecological processes, physical and biological resources, and their interrelationships. Properly organized, it can provide knowledge, skills and motivation for people to work individually or collectively to look for solutions to local environmental problems, and to do their bit towards redressing more global problems. It empowers people to develop more environmentally responsible lifestyles and to become involved in public policy formulation and decision-making.

Community involvement in the policy formulation and decision making processes of local government is part of the wider question of who should be involved in this area other than the elected members and public servants. There is an increasing trend at all levels of government to increase the amount of public participation, particularly in those areas, which directly affect the lifestyle of the whole community. A more aware, involved community is likely to yield fresh ideas on problems and their solutions.

The benefits of community involvement in local government include:

Mediation is more likely to occur, reducing the cost and delays involved in protracted conflict.

An involved community is more likely to feel responsible for ongoing environmental protection and care.

Traditionally, there has been a lack of properly co-ordinated interpretation and environmental education programs available in Townsville. Council, through the Dept of Environmental Services, is attempting to redress this problem by employing an Environmental Planning Officer to do just that, amongst other duties. In addition to running its own environmental awareness programs, Council has contributed to others such as Sea-Week and the Museum's holiday programs. Community involvement is facilitated through a range of initiatives such as by providing the Planning Officer's position as a contact point, establishing an Environmental Consultative Committee, inviting student and academic input to environmental management matters and liaising with other interested groups as appropriate. In specific instances, financial assistance may be provided for environmental projects.



The whole community can be involved in the management and appreciation of our natural environment.

The objectives for promoting environmental education and community involvement in environmental issues in Townsville are to:

Increase environmental education opportunities for the community;

Promote and strengthen inter-disciplinary environmental education programs in schools and tertiary institutions;

Promote a conservation ethic within Council and the community, and encourage the adoption of environmentally responsible attitudes and lifestyles; and,

Ensure adequate opportunities for community involvement in environmental and resource management decision-making.

Areas for Council Action:

To encourage community involvement and environmental awareness, Council should consider the following actions:

Encourage the appreciation of natural and built heritage in the city by facilitating interpretative walks and talks and other activities suitable for family and multi-cultural participation. (ENV:CS:OA)

Encourage community involvement in environmental issues by:

Liaising with schools (talks, activities) to encourage their input into environmental projects (e.g.: composting, bush regeneration). (ENV)

Supporting local initiatives by offering annual awards for the best conservation performance by an individual, a company and a service group. (ENV:CS)

Encouraging the interest of service groups and retired professionals in various environmental projects. (ENV:CS)

Providing some assistance to community groups to ensure their input into community projects and public participation processes. (ENV:CS)

Negotiating with James Cook University and other research agencies to conduct research and advise Council on particular issues (e.g.: coastal processes, habitat inventories). (ENV)

Encouraging community stewardship by facilitating adoption of neighborhood areas for long-term care (e.g.: Louisa Ck). (ENV)

Encourage awareness programs relating to environmental quality and options by:

Promoting individual and group solutions for environmental problems at the home level (e.g.: safe cleaning products, energy conservation). (ENV:OA)

Assisting community and special interest groups to apply for funding from private, state and federal grant schemes to address environmental issues. (ENV)

Publishing a co-coordinated series of natural history and environmental awareness leaflets relating to the Townsville region. (ENV:OA)

Encourage the use of local natural areas and facilities for school and public environmental education by:

Providing a range of public areas available for natural history education. (ENV:OA)

Maintaining a collection of library and reference material on the local environment in public libraries. (ENV:COR:OA)

Reserving sites of conservation significance within the municipality (e.g.: south bank of the Ross River, Ross Creek and Ross River riparian zones).

Liaising with environmental studies teachers from local schools to encourage a co-coordinated approach to environmental teaching and projects in the Townsville region. (ENV:CS)

Sponsoring or co-coordinating a Local Government Conference on Environmental Initiatives in north Queensland in the near future. (ENV:CS:PD)

Areas for Community Action:

Take up opportunities to increase levels of environmental knowledge and awareness by attending walks and talks, and reading relevant literature and articles.

Maintain an awareness of and involvement in environmental issues.

Areas for Research:

Development of effective, attractive environmental education and interpretation programs.

Investigate the feasibility of establishing a 'one stop' interpretation center covering, in an introductory manner, all of the environmental features, characteristics and attractions of the area.

24 Implementation

For this Strategy to be implemented, it needs to be widely accepted as a guiding document within Council and throughout the community, including the academic, commercial, industrial, public, and scientific sectors. In order to achieve this degree of acceptance, which will not be achieved instantly, it must be widely distributed, examined in detail, discussed amongst stakeholders, and modified accordingly. It is, therefore, an "organic" document, amenable to change as facts, situations and circumstances require.

An Implementation Working Group, comprising representatives from each of the Departments within Council, is proposed to:

- Review the contents of the Strategy in light of current developments within Council to ensure accuracy, relevance and applicability of the Strategy.
- Priorities Areas for Council Action Research, identify any obstacles that may exist, and prepare appropriate directions to enable designated Actions to be realized.
- Review the internal workings of Council and prepare recommendations, which will help facilitate the Strategy's implementation.
- Monitor the performance of the Strategy, as determined by the number and range of Actions implemented, or obstacles overcome.
- Prepare Strategy Implementation Reports for Council.

An Administration - Enterprise Liaison Group, comprising nominated representatives of the Implementation Working Group, Aldermen, Chamber of Commerce, Dept. of Environment and Heritage, and Dept. of Planning, Local Government and Housing, with the ability to co-opt as appropriate, is proposed to:

- Identify Actions that is largely dependent upon the involvement and/or co-operation of Other Authorities.
- Identify and liaise with key individuals within the relevant Authorities to determine the feasibility of implementing relevant Actions.
- Provide appropriate feedback to the Implementation Working Group as necessary.

The existing Environmental Consultative Committee, comprising Aldermen, relevant Council personnel, and people drawn from and nominated by the Townsville community, is proposed to:

- Represent the community's concerns and interests to the Implementation Working Group.
- Assist with delivery of the Strategy's objectives to the general community.

It is proposed to prepare and disseminate a series of Discussion Papers covering Global Issues, Natural Resources, Pollution & Waste Management, and Local Area Management to stimulate public discussion and awareness of the issues, and receive critical comment which will assist in reviewing and fine-tuning the Strategy to accurately reflect the community's needs and aspirations for implementing an Environmental Conservation Strategy in Townsville.

In light of the above, the Conservation Strategy will be reviewed annually. An annual Conservation Strategy Progress Report will be prepared which will document achievements, setbacks, institutional obstacles identified, feedback received and provide a summary review of the Strategy's performance and recommendations concerning the general direction and implementation of the Strategy.

Whilst there is much that can be done within Council to develop an environmentally responsible Townsville, its fundamental charter is to develop and implement policies and programs representative of the community's wishes. To this end, the Strategy needs to reflect the community's interpretation of environmentally responsible living. There may well be areas or aspects of this document with which you don't agree, but even if you can adopt one of the suggested actions, it is a step towards greater environmental responsibility (and therefore a less polluted, resource-rich world for our children). Few, if any, sensible people in Townsville could say that there is nothing in this document that they can accept. Most, if not all, can proudly say that they are already putting into practice some or many of the suggested actions in their own lives. Why not make a deal with yourself, family, friends, neighbors, employers, employees, teachers, students (i.e. anyone!!) to "adopt-an-action" today.