

# Centre of Excellence in Tropical Design

(Sustainability & Innovation)

## Vision Statement Launch

### **Sustainability – a Regional Context**

**DEPUTY MAYOR, Cr. Ann Bunnell**

Thursday 2 December, South Bank Convention Centre

It is very pleasing to see so many people here today, and many familiar faces. It is great to be part of this exciting and visionary initiative launching a vision for a “Centre of Excellence in Tropical Design – Sustainability & Innovation”.

As has been previously stated this project has been initiated in the *Year of the Built Environment*, via a partnership between the Department of Public Works; Townsville City Council; City of Thuringowa; and the James Cook University (JCU) - Centre for Regional and Urban Planning.

I would like to especially acknowledge the following people this afternoon:

Member for Thuringowa, Craig Wallace  
Mayor (Cr. Les Tyrell) City of Thuringowa, and  
Councillor David Mather from TCC

Wayne Petrie (Queensland Chairman Year of the Built Environment), and  
Terry Kelly from Department of Public Works.

### **Fellow panellists, speakers, and significant contributors –**

Dr **Peter Ellyard**; **Carey Ramm** from AEC; **Ian Wronski** from JCU Medical School; **John Newbould** from Housing Industry Association (HIA); **David King** (James Cook University); **Keith Whenmouth** from Dept Public Works; and **Andrew McEwen** from Thuringowa Council.

Director Department of Public Works; and Directors and Managers from Councils of Townsville, Thuringowa and state agencies.

Importantly there are many business; industry and community representatives and leaders here this afternoon demonstrating to me the significance of this event

In celebration of today’s launch of the *Vision Statement* for a “Centre of Excellence in Tropical Design – Sustainability & Innovation” I would like to share with you some thoughts I have regarding a *regional context for Sustainability* and the applicability of a centre such as this one.

I hope that this will assist you in connecting with the “idea” of a Centre of Excellence and the role of sustainability & innovation in our Cities future. I trust that these insights will build upon and compliment previous presentations and the ones to come later this afternoon.

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The working group has developed a vision statement which Terry Kelly will be sharing with you shortly, and Andrew McEwen from Thuringowa will be discussing integrated learning networks and opportunities in more detail.

Townsville City Council supports the idea of a network cluster approach to a "Centre of Excellence in Tropical Design (Sustainability & Innovation)", an approach based on collaboration, neutrality and partnership.

As I understand it, the centre seeks to identify; promote and champion what people already do - in excellence, or aspire to do, rather than be focused on what is not being done. This for me is one of its key strengths (and just one) as an idea and provides a significant defining perspective. It is also being developed (step by step) in a manner that it can expand incrementally and become inclusive overtime.

The World Development Report, 2003 (World Bank) states in part that "*urban areas will need to perform (some) key functions to support sustainable development*". This includes facilitating "*social and institutional change, by improving access to ideas, knowledge, and technology and by creating both the impetus and opportunity for innovation*".

The World Development Report, 2003 (World Bank)

For me this is the core to the "idea" that this Centre seeks to do.

The key partnership working group has developed the "**Vision Statement**" as a means of communicating the emerging "idea" of a Centre.

It is recognised that to be successful and operate within existing capacity and resources it must operate differently, efficiently, and not be seen as a threat to any particular organisation in terms of resource allocation or policy.

We already have many groups, organisations, networks and alliances. The objective is not to take the place of any of these, but be complimentary and develop an agenda, via an innovative set (or grouping), of well recognised values to provide a broad regional opportunity for a higher, even visionary level of collaboration and learning, possibly across northern Australia – connecting with Cairns and Darwin in the future.

The idea of this Centre of Excellence as a tool to promote, connect and integrate community, business, industry, research/education institutions, local government and state authorities throughout our region is supported by the United Nations (UN) announcing that 2005-2015 is to be the *Decade of Education in Sustainable Development*.

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As another key to this Centre “idea” is shared learning, and networking for innovation – it is consistent with the establishment of a virtual learning community as promoted by CSIRO Sustainability Network.

From a regional perspective – the idea of this Centre of Excellence seeks to bring together “leading (local) thinkers from business, economics, technology, innovation and the environment to tackle the major challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – sustainability”

(Quote by Dr Steve Morton, CSIRO and Group Chair of Environment & Natural Resources).

Critically, it aims to do this collaboratively in a non-judgemental environment, and to leave judgement to either the “art of demonstrated leadership” or other community-business pressure groups and forums.

This approach is supported by the new book – “*Natural Advantage of Nations*” (2004), which suggests we can improve well being of society and drive innovation in an increasingly competitive world, most especially via networks and collaborative approaches – perhaps the *Competitive Advantage of Townsville*, coined from Michael Porters 1998 book and ideas which support the “idea” of this Centre – “The Competitive Advantage of Nations”.

Thus we can,

**“Craft the kind of future that we would like to be part of”**

(The Natural Advantage)

Or perhaps, the “**Preferred Future**” that Dr Peter Ellyard refers to.

**The World Bank argues** that in order to obtain the best out of our cities we need to be:

“Building knowledge and mobilizing dispersed interests as key to creating constituents that act together and even anticipate problems”

(World Development Report 2003, World Bank).

Clearly these are important steps which are being demonstrated in this legacy project of the *Year of the Built Environment* – A Vision Statement for a Centre.

The idea of the Centre in a regional context is also supported by many leading international collaborations and projects currently underway such as the London Sustainability Intensive which included collaboration between AtKisson; Natural Capitalism; and the supporting Natural Edge Project.

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Clearly we have the opportunity in Townsville to be in sync with these initiatives and even provide demonstrated on-ground leadership.

This approach is entirely consistent with initiatives being demonstrated locally such as by the sub-regional networking approach of our own, innovative community natural resources forum for Townsville-Thuringowa - **NaREF (Natural Resources & Environmental Forum)** – a network which is using and experimenting with both virtual networking and a variety of forums to share information from pubs to function halls.

This approach is mirrored even at a national level with Australia's **CSIRO's Sustainability Network** seeking to operate as a Virtual Learning Community and networks for innovation itself.

Townsville and Thuringowa have been evolving practice and methodology in what is sustainability for years, and in Townsville Council we have been doing it as demonstrated by a range of projects.

History and credentials are important and few may know that TCC appointed its first environment project officer in 1988 – one of the first in Queensland.

This was followed by the development of one of the first Environmental Conservation Strategies in Local Government in Australia – “**Living Today, for Tomorrow**” (1993).

This environmental Strategy built upon key community workshops which investigated our built and natural environments and their interconnectivity – the **RIKES report** (1990) – and demonstrate early and effective collaboration.

Subsequently Council has been involved in many sustainability and innovation projects with regional application and which support the development of a Centre of Excellence, including:

- Redevelopment of the award winning **Strand Foreshore**,
- Producing the new dynamic **Citiplan**,
- Developing a holistic **Townsville Healthy Cities Plan** and community steering group

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- Evolved an innovative **Sustainable Townsville** programme, including associated energy management; Townsville Eco-efficiency Network; **Greening Townsville**, and **Strand Wind Turbine** education and renewable energy promotion and icon
- **“Total Water Cycle Management” in TCC** – including initiatives of Carbon Neutral Water Recycling at Cleveland Bay; Magnetic Island Water Recycling; Lakes & Louisa Creek urban stormwater quality management; Ross River; and Haughton River Catchment
- Developing our **“Sustain – Youth Environment Network”** a curriculum based education program which includes the development of a suite of environmental learning sites (from Mt Stuart to Rowes Bay, Strand and Magnetic Island),

All of these initiatives have now been supported by the internationally accredited AtKisson **Accelerated Sustainability** (AtKisson) training and planning for our executives and senior staff and community-business-government partners held in May this year.

Current and preparation of a draft **Sustainable Townsville Plan**; and establishment of Council’s own integrated - **Sustainable Development Committee**.

Importantly in a regional context there are many other sustainability initiatives already underway which will provide important baseline functioning networks and form the network cluster for Townsville and Thuringowa.

These including the networking and collaborative work between:

1. **Community environmentalist/NRM groups** – including:
  - o Burdekin Dry Tropics Board (BDTB), NaREF (Natural Resources & Environment Forum), DTBG (Dry Tropics Biodiversity Group), WPSQ (Wildlife Preservation Society Queensland) and NQCC (North Queensland Conservation Council) to name a few;
2. **Business-industry** – via Townsville Enterprise (TEL) working across the region;
3. **Development industry** – with AGDF (Australian Green Development Forum) developer and subdivision sustainability focused network; HIA (Housing Industry Association); UDIA (Urban Development Industry Association)

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4. **Port-industry** – the leadership work of Townsville Port Authority (TPA) involving industry in environment & sustainability via the Cleveland Bay Consortium (CBC); and
5. **Local Government itself**, via the environmental leadership work of North Queensland's Health & Environment Regional Organisation of Councils (HESROC-NQ) and LAWMAC.

At another important and even critical level, there are many achievements and ongoing sustainability projects of the organisations, groups and individuals involved in environmental excellence, sustainability, and urban design – many of whom are architects.

An excellent example of this is found in the partnership between TCC itself and James Cook University (Dr Ross Coventry); revegetation-landscape business – (Revegetation Contractors Ltd – Des Bolton – both of whom are here today); and other IECA Australian soil erosion leaders in developing one of only three accredited “**5 Day Soil Erosion Planning Courses**” in Australia.

This collaborative course was specifically designed for the tropical environment (soils and rainfall) of Northern Australia, has been running for 5 years now and given intensive and effective training to government-development industry and community people from Brisbane to Darwin.

Other significant regional and local sustainability work being completed and promoted include and are not limited to:

- The **innovative building and design work** of Department of Public Works – Project Services across North Queensland;
- Thuringowa City Council are developing their **Riverway Project with Sustainability** as core driver and are leading today with the Zing process;
- **Gough Plastics** with their hybrid toilet and Hot Harry innovative solar hot water heating system;
- **TCC and Cyberfactory** with the innovative web based Townsville State of Environment Report & promotion of Council's open spaces and parks via the trademarked Cyberama);
- **Hanson** – Building Better Blocks with their new initiatives in promoting sustainability in their local business practice and across Australia
- **Digital Dimensions** (international profile in environmental excellence in media and film);
- **Northern Tree Specialists** in their quest to promote leadership and beyond environmental best practice in arboreal tree cutting;

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- The **myriad of local research institutions** and both their individual work and collaborations (CRC Reef; AIMS; JCU) and even the export of marine park management expertise – i.e. GBRMPA;
- **Urban developers** across the city building communities including Riverside Gardens; Fairfield Waters; Crestbrook and communities of Thuringowa; and
- **Defence forces** and their conventional and environmental contract collaborations with business such as **Spotless**.

There are also many individuals who are running their own businesses with an eye on environmental performance, innovation and Excellence across our community – too many to mention.

The Centre also builds on other environmental collaborations between Townsville, Thuringowa and State-business including both the landmark “**Creek to Coral**” healthy waterway project; and the Powerlink-Council partnership “Community Environment Fund”.

The **Creek to Coral** project itself is a **perfect example of excellence in design** of both the program; its network and the partnership, and has been championed this year at a global United Nations conference Hilltops2Oceans in Cairns.

More recently the Mayor of Townsville, Cr. Tony Mooney has visited South China not only investigating economic opportunities but looking at the potential export of water quality management, especially wastewater treatment expertise and systems to China working with Local Government.

Recently the South China trade commissioner – Mr Simon Lee, who is based in Hong Kong visited Townsville – and stated that many “total water quality management” (TWCM) and sustainability opportunities exist in South East Asia and Southern China.

Therefore demonstrably, Townsville and Thuringowa as a community are actively “doing”, producing, promoting, and exporting innovative sustainability across Australia and internationally.

In the future we need to see people friendly buildings, places and integrated landscapes both providing the live-work-play characteristics clearly identified as essential in design not only from an environmental point of view but as social connectivity.

Recreating and finding our village like environments which all the evidence seems to suggest is how we really like to live.

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(Note: These findings are corroborated by recent consultations with Women in Townsville on issues of concern, and were asking for more village life considerations in urban planning – this also came through the Sustainable Cities 2025 Commonwealth Inquiry).

We are doing this in our CBD Urban Renewal in the city and Thuringowa in their planning at Riverway.

We have the perfect local and regional base to build a cluster network centre and provide the integrated learning environments and business opportunities which Dr Peter Ellyard and Andrew McEwen are talking about.

**Other Cities are already doing this around the world** and seeking that market edge which will support business and industry and potentially draw people to Townsville to live, work and enjoy our lifestyle, environment and recreational opportunities.

In **Sustainable New Orleans** they are developing their own “New Orleans style.

**Orlando** has sustainability “**Disney style**”, and

**Pittsburgh** – from no where to go but up – to has a “**smoky renaissance style**”.

Every community is different - **Swatham, UK** where the community have twin wind turbines powering 20,000 homes (note: they didn't want them at first now they have embraced them and have thriving tourism industry).

**Goa in India** is developing its own sustainability planning and thinking to completely redesign its self-image and future (AtKisson).

What they all have in common is seeking a market edge in the competitive world.

This all hints to me at the development of our own “style”, building on our successful past achievements, and a design possibility for Townsville, Thuringowa and North Queensland.



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### Visioning the future

The choice seems clear, we can vision our own future and develop alternative models to support this process such as the proposed Centre of Excellence in Tropical Design, or we can wait for the future to meet us. Clearly this is not the demonstrated way we do business in Townsville, therefore I invite everyone to engage in the vision for a “Centre of Excellence” and to become involved in the development of a neutral, non-competitive place for discussion, networking and dialogue where we can consider moving into the future not just via compromise and through the conflict of contradicting visions (“Our Probable Future”) but via integrated networks and collaborative learning partnerships to the potential offered by Dr Ellyard’s “Preferred Future”. We can then have a greater potential to be Future Makers instead of Future Takers (Doug Cocks CSIRO).

Therefore the “idea” of this centre is to provide inspiration across our region using the innovative **cluster network approach** (i.e. one that acknowledges, supports and integrates) the networks which already exist) across our region from the non-sectoral (collaborative and neutral) perspective and provide inspiration, information exchange, research collaboration, and championing of what is being done and provide leadership for the combined-integrated perspective of environmental; engineering; planning; architecture and social planning design.

### In closing

Today we are demonstrating innovative thinking, utilising innovative technology, in an innovative forum.

The idea of a Centre is seen as a great opportunity to develop and market Townsville as a Centre of sustainability especially in design and innovation. It appears more and more evident that Townsville as a developing northern City

Cr. Ann Bunnell

Deputy Mayor, & Chair of Sustainable Development Committee

Townsville City Council, 2 December 2004

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and administration/research and business centre has a lot to offer in this regard.

We look forward to observing the development of the cluster network partnership initiated by this vision statement and underpinned by a key partnership between Dept Public Works, TCC, Thuringowa and James Cook University and the opportunity for other clusters to be involved.