

Sunshine Coast International Dark Sky Reserve

Frequently Asked Questions

May 2026

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1. What is a dark sky?

A dark sky is the natural night sky that is free from human-caused light pollution.

2. What is light pollution?

Light pollution describes changes in light levels due to human-made sources of light in the outdoor environment.

Components of light pollution include:

- glare – excessive brightness that causes visual discomfort
- sky glow – brightening of the night sky over inhabited areas
- light trespass – light falling where it is not intended or needed.

3. How can we reduce light pollution?

There are many ways to manage the over-lighting of the night, such as:

- changing light fixtures outside your home or business
- using timers and motion sensors
- upgrading street lights
- regulation of better outdoor lighting standards
- community conversations about light trespass
- designating dark sky places.

4. What is the International Dark Sky Places Program?

DarkSky International coordinates the [International Dark Sky Places Program](#), which seeks to preserve and protect dark sites through responsible lighting policies and public education.

Dark Sky Place locations include communities, private lands, parks and protected areas around the world under six designation types.

5. What are the different types of dark sky place designations?

There are [six designation types](#) offered under the International Dark Sky Places Program:

1. International Dark Sky Sanctuaries
2. International Dark Sky Reserves
3. International Dark Sky Parks
4. International Dark Sky Communities
5. Urban Night Sky Places
6. DarkSky Approved Lodging.

6. Where are the designated Dark Sky Places in Australia?

As at May 2026, Australia is home to nine certified Dark Sky Places. Two of these places are Reserves.

Dark Sky Places in Australia are:

Queensland

- [Sunshine Coast Dark Sky Reserve](#)
- [The Jump-Up](#)
- [Winton Dark Sky Community](#)

New South Wales

- [Kestrel Nest EcoHut](#)
- [Palm Beach Headland](#)
- [Warrumbungle Dark Sky Park](#)

South Australia

- [Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, Flinders Ranges](#)
- [Carrickalinga](#)
- [River Murray Dark Sky Reserve.](#)

7. What is a Dark Sky Reserve designation?

A Dark Sky Reserve designation is across public or private land with an exceptional or distinguished quality of starry nights and nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, or educational value, its cultural heritage, and/or public enjoyment.

Reserves consist of a 'core' area meeting minimum criteria for sky quality and natural darkness, and a 'buffer' area that supports dark sky preservation in the core.

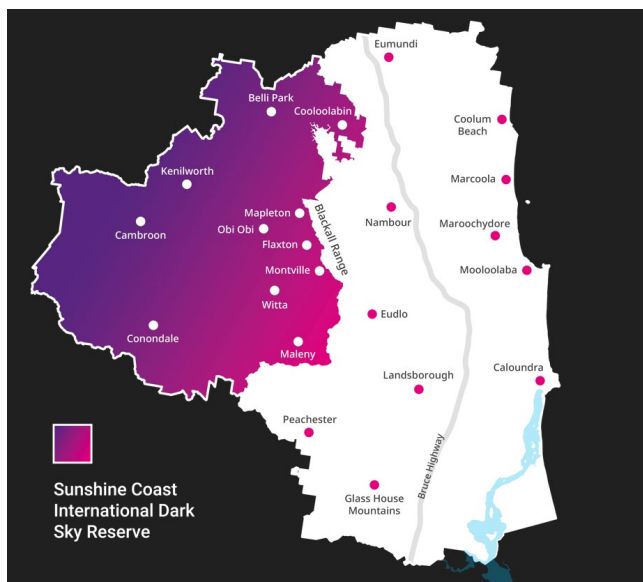
Reserves are formed through a partnership of multiple land managers who have recognised the value of the natural night-time environment through regulations and long-term planning. The minimum area of a Dark Sky Reserve is 700 square kilometres.

8. Where is the Sunshine Coast International Dark Sky Reserve?

The Sunshine Coast International Dark Sky Reserve (the Reserve) extends across more than 870 square kilometres in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. It is made up of the Mary River catchment and adjoining State protected areas within the Sunshine Coast local government area.

The core zone of the Reserve is the Kirbys Road Environment Reserve, and Maleny National Park (Lot 728 NPW787).

The peripheral zone surrounds the core zone. This peripheral zone includes townships such as Maleny, Mapleton, Montville, Witta, Flaxton, Kenilworth and Conondale.



Sunshine Coast International Dark Sky Reserve map.

9. Why designate an area as a Dark Sky Reserve on the Sunshine Coast?

A Dark Sky Reserve could have many benefits and opportunities for the Sunshine Coast including:

- supporting our overall aspirations for a sustainable Sunshine Coast and enhancing our national and international recognition
- helping to preserve the hinterland landscape and character of the designated area by protecting its dark sky environment

- attracting visitors to the area and bringing economic benefits to surrounding communities through astrotourism
- supporting the health and wellbeing of Sunshine Coast residents and visitors
- promoting wildlife sensitive environments
- recognising efforts our community is making to protect the night skies of the designated area
- enhancing both local and regional public education on the importance of dark sky environments and how community can contribute.

10. Why is this the Sunshine Coast hinterland worthy of designation?

Dark Sky Reserves need to be 700 square kilometres or larger to be eligible for designation under the program. The Sunshine Coast International Dark Sky Reserve area (incorporating the Mary River catchment and adjoining State protected areas within the Sunshine Coast Council local government areas) is over 870 square kilometres.

The core zone of the Reserve comprises Kirbys Road Environment Reserve and the adjoining Maleny National Park area, both protected conservation areas. This fulfills the requirement for a Dark Sky Reserve to include a core zone that is protected for scientific, nature, educational, cultural, heritage and/or public enjoyment.

Night sky quality is exceptional in the Reserve area exceeding the Dark Sky Reserve designation requirement of 21.2 magnitude per square arcsecond. This night sky quality means that in ideal conditions in dark areas of the Reserve, you can see up to 2000 stars.

The location and topography of the Reserve is well suited, with the Blackall Range acting as a natural shield protecting the area from much of the skyglow from coastal urban areas and surrounding cities and towns.

There are townships within the area providing opportunities for communities to implement dark sky friendly initiatives.

11. How is night sky quality measured?

Night sky quality has been measured across 2023–2025, capturing night sky quality data each season in the Reserve area. Two permanent night sky quality meters were also installed and capture data daily. Results showed the core zone had an average night sky quality reading of 21.5 magnitude per square arcsecond.

A summary of data results is available on the project webpage [here](#).

12. How do I find out what dark sky friendly lighting is?

- Dark Sky friendly lighting is designed to direct light to where it is needed, not into the sky where it contributes to light pollution.
- [DarkSky International](#) and the [Australasian Dark Sky Alliance](#) have listed lighting products that are dark sky friendly.
- Generally dark sky friendly lighting:
 - restricts the amount of upward-directed light
 - avoids glare
 - avoids over-lighting
 - utilises dimming and other appropriate lighting controls
 - minimises short-wavelength (blueish) light in the nighttime environment.



Source: darksky.org.au

13. What is the process of applying for a Dark Sky Reserve designation?

There is a formal written application process for applying for a Dark Sky Reserve designation under the International Dark Sky Places Program.

A comprehensive application includes:

- a lighting management plan and inventory

- a night sky quality measurement program
- evidence of commitment and action to protecting the night sky
- community engagement including education and outreach.

The application is submitted to the Dark Sky Places Committee for review, who following assessment advise of the outcome.

More information on the process can be found [here](#).

14. What is a lighting inventory?

Under the International Dark Sky Places Program, a lighting inventory is a formal audit of outdoor lighting. It is used to determine rates of compliance with the lighting management plan within a Dark Sky Reserve core zone and to identify lighting in need of replacement or retrofitting.

A lighting inventory of public lighting for the peripheral zone is also helpful and required to understand approximately how many lights are within the Reserve and if they are dark sky friendly.

15. What is a lighting management plan?

A lighting management plan is defined by DarkSky International as a management plan to shape the selection, placement, installation and operation of all new and replacement/retrofitted lighting. It is to be adopted by a sufficient number of communities within the Dark Sky Reserve area. Minimum standards of the plan are outlined in the DarkSky International (DSI) Reserve [Guidelines](#).

The Sunshine Coast Dark Sky Reserve Lighting Management Plan:

- Provides direction for new or upgraded Council-controlled outdoor lighting installations in public open spaces and other public lighting where appropriate within the Dark Sky Reserve.
- Establishes a common set of principles to guide lighting provided by other key stakeholders within the Dark Sky Reserve including Energex, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships, Department of Transport and Main Roads and the community.

- Provides direction on lighting principles to inform the Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme regarding outdoor lighting for new developments in the Dark Sky Reserve.
- Raises community awareness of the Dark Sky Reserve and educates how the community can support dark sky aspirations through good practice lighting principles.

A copy of the Lighting Management Plan is available [here](#).

16. What does a Dark Sky Reserve mean for residents living within the area?

We recognise approximately 13,500 members of our community call the area home including those in Maleny, Mapleton, Montville, Witta, Flaxton, Kenilworth and Conondale.

A designation does not require all lights to be switched off, but to support preservation of dark skies in the area, we do ask residents and visitors to understand the impacts of light pollution and do their best to reduce it by following considerate lighting practices. Wherever possible, outdoor lights should meet the following five principles:

1. **useful** – use light only if it is needed
2. **targeted** – direct lighting so it falls only where it is needed
3. **low level** – light should be no brighter than necessary.
4. **controlled** – use light only when it is needed.
5. **warmer coloured** – use warmer coloured lights where possible.

A Lighting Management Plan is a requirement for a Dark Sky Reserve designation and is developed to help to balance the need for artificial lighting with preserving our nights skies, the environment, our health and well-being and energy and resources.

The Sunshine Coast Dark Sky Reserve Lighting Management Plan has two levels of application of how it will be used:

1. Mandatory.
2. Encouraged.

Mandatory application refers to Council owned and operated lighting in the Reserve. This means any new or

upgraded outdoor lighting within the Reserve owned and operated by Council must follow the Lighting Management Plan. For example, street and roadway lighting, lighting in parks and gardens spaces, Council controlled sports lighting and lighting associated with Council buildings and facilities.

Encouraged application applies to all other stakeholders responsible for outdoor lighting within the Reserve such as existing private developments and State Government assets etc.

A copy of the Lighting Management Plan is available [here](#).

17. What does a Dark Sky Reserve mean for residents/communities living outside the area?

To achieve our vision of Australia's most sustainable region: Connected. Liveable. Thriving, Council encourages everyone to make simple changes towards sustainable living.

Sustainable living applies to individuals, households, communities, businesses and industry. A key focus is energy consumption.

To maintain and improve our enviable lifestyle and healthy environment it is important that we all play our part to live, learn, work and play sustainably.

To maintain and protect our dark skies in the Reserve area from light pollution and sky glow, residents and communities outside the Reserve area are encouraged to also follow the identified considered lighting practices (refer to Question 16).

18. What lighting upgrades were delivered to achieve the designation?

Over 170 lights were brought into compliance as part of the project within the Reserve area. Council undertook demonstration lighting projects at:

1. Isaac Moore Park amenities block, Kenilworth
2. Maleny Community Precinct entry driveway and carpark adjoining Pattemore House and Maleny Golf Club.

The LED Street Light Replacement Project also replaced 4000 Energex-owned streetlights with LED lights across the Sunshine Coast region including over 160 streetlights within the Dark Sky Reserve area. This project was delivered through funding received from the Australian Government's Local Road and Community Infrastructure Program.

Any upgrades to lighting in public spaces to meet dark sky compliant lighting requirements must also meet other public lighting standards, including any safety requirements. Smart lighting that directs light where it is needed creates a balance between safety and starlight.

Public lighting upgrades within the Reserve are required to demonstrate ongoing commitment to preserving dark skies. Upgrades are subject to annual budget and operational planning and approval processes.

19. How does the Dark Sky Reserve align with our Sunshine Coast Biosphere?

Our Sunshine Coast [Biosphere](#) is a special place where responsible development and people live sustainably, alongside active conservation.

A biosphere is about:

- creating a legacy for our children's future
- caring for our beautiful landscapes and stunning beaches
- leveraging economic opportunities.

Light pollution can affect our health and wellbeing and can also have a negative effect on many species of plants and animals, including migratory species, both in protected areas and in urban and rural areas.

These aspirations are all complementary to protecting and celebrating our night sky environments and our overall goal to live more sustainably.

20. How does the Dark Sky Reserve support Council's strategic directions?

Council's [Environment and Liveability Strategy](#) provides long-term strategic directions to deliver a healthy environment and liveable Sunshine Coast to 2041.

This project is responding to the Strategy's [policy position](#) to "recognise, protect and celebrate dark skies" and a [Transformational Action](#) to "investigate opportunities to recognise, protect and celebrate the Sunshine Coast dark sky, in partnership with the community".

21. What community consultation was undertaken?

Community consultation on the proposal to establish a Dark Sky Reserve occurred in 2024 and 2025. Community consultation summaries can be found [here](#).

22. What can I do to help to reduce light pollution and support the Dark Sky Reserve?

- Implement the [five key principles](#) for outdoor lighting (refer to Question 16).
- Undertake the [DarkSky's Home Outdoor Lighting Assessment](#) developed by DarkSky International to help reduce light pollution around your home.
- Participate in the [Globe at Night Program](#) and by taking measurements of light pollution in the night sky using your mobile device.
- Collaborate with your neighbours to implement the five principles (see Question 16) and encourage a dark sky friendly neighbourhood.

23. Where can I stargaze in the Dark Sky Reserve?

The Reserve is large area with a number of places to enjoy the night sky. There are two observatories that offer public viewing nights:

- [Maleny Observatory](#)
- [Mapleton Observatory](#).

There are parks and lookouts in the hinterland that can offer great stargazing experiences. Find out more on [Council's stargazing in the hinterland webpage](#) including tips to prepare for a great night under the stars.

Visit Sunshine Coast also has a [dedicated page](#) for night sky experiences in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

24. How can I stay updated on the project?

Keep an eye out on the dedicated [project page](#).