

25 June 2015**Shaping our future by protecting our environment**

Protecting our greatest assets, including our beaches, foreshores and bushland and moving to a clean energy future, have been given a \$74 million boost in today's Sunshine Coast Council budget.

Mayor Mark Jamieson said the region's environment was central to our way of life and the investment would protect and enhance our natural assets for future generations to enjoy.

"Our Sunshine Coast environment will receive a \$7.7 million investment through the Environment Levy program alone," Mayor Jamieson said.

"The levy is a primary funding source that allows council to deliver on its long-term strategic approach to environmental management.

"The levy remains at \$60 per rateable property.

"The budget provides \$2.3 million to buy, protect and enhance environmentally significant land, which will add to the more than 400 hectares this council has purchased since 2012.

"We'll invest \$620,000 into coastal rehabilitation activities and more than \$845,000 towards community partnership and grant programs including Landholder Environment Grants.

"Another \$470,000 will be allocated to environmental operations such as pest management.

"The Maroochy River Rehabilitation Project will receive \$300,000, and there will be \$450,000 for monitoring and research project."

Environment Portfolio Councillor Jenny McKay said council also funded environment projects outside of levy funding, and would invest \$1.8 million in our rivers, streams, estuaries and water bodies and \$15 million in bushland conservation and habitat.

"This includes biodiversity and waterways, climate change and environment initiatives, community catchment partnerships, healthy places and natural areas management," Cr McKay said.

"With more than 5,800 hectares of natural area reserves, Council has various programs to support management of the biodiversity.

"These include plant and animal surveys to assist in managing the network; a fire management program which provides for both asset protection and ecological outcomes; and environmental weed management programs which help maintain the unique natural diversity that is found in our region.

"The biodiversity program also places an emphasis on maintaining and enhancing the Council's three environmental visitor sites - the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary, Maroochy Regional Bushland Botanic Garden and Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve.

"Protecting and enhancing the Sunshine Coast environment is central to council's goal of becoming Australia's most sustainable region – vibrant, green, diverse.

"We live in one of the most beautiful places on earth and this budget includes so many projects which allow us to enjoy our wonderful natural assets, while still protecting them.

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“Projects such as \$100,000 to renew the Mount Ninderry walking trail; \$75,000 to renew Whipbird Garden at our fabulous Maroochy Regional Bushland Botanic Garden; and \$41,000 to renew tracks at the increasingly popular Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve are just some examples of getting that balance right.

“Maroochy Wetlands will also receive \$346,000 for the boardwalk and interpretive centre.

“But we can’t do this alone and that’s why we are encouraging the community to come along on the journey with us.

“We have the State’s largest Land for Wildlife program and are fortunate to have a passionate community, happy to get in and get their hands dirty - whether that’s planting native species or caring for our lakes and waterways.

“And it goes further than that.

“We are investing in the next generation, our environmental champions of the future, through programs such as Kids in Action.

“By combining our efforts, our community is working alongside council and shaping a future which protects and enhances our environment.”

Council will also invest in the Sunshine Coast Solar Farm – the first local government-owned utility scale solar farm in Australia. The project is currently in the tender stage with a decision on progressing expected in the first quarter of the 2015/16 financial year.

Environment Program Highlights

- Natural areas and waterways management
- Coastal management
- Conservation partnerships
- Environment Levy program
- Community nature conservation programs and partnerships
- Sustainability initiatives
- Visitor education facilities

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