

DRAFT ORGANISATIONAL GUIDELINE

TITLE: Environment Levy

Category:	Ecological sustainability
Responsible Manager:	Manager, Environment Policy, Regional Strategy and Planning.
Approved by the CEO:	(signature) (date)

CORPORATE GUIDELINE PURPOSE

The purpose of this guideline is to provide further direction for the effective, open and transparent implementation of the Sunshine Coast Environment Levy Policy and Program by outlining administrative, financial, management and governance processes.

This guideline applies to all programs, projects, partnerships, grants and incentives that are directly or indirectly funded or supported, wholly or partly, by the Environment Levy.

The guideline is structured into the following five areas:

1. General program management and reporting;
2. Acquisition of environmentally significant land;
3. Major projects;
4. Community engagement and support; and
5. Historical operational expenses.

1. GENERAL PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Program development

The 4-year Environment Levy Program provides long term strategic environmental outcomes and is reviewed annually during budget preparations. This timing aligns with the 4-year election process providing a newly elected council with the opportunity to understand the intent of the existing policy and program in its final year. It also provides an opportunity for the council to inform policy revisions and the development of a new revised program to align with their strategic direction, which is implemented over the remaining 3-year period of their term.

The development of the draft annual program, including annual revisions that consider emerging environmental management priorities is prepared by the Environment Policy Branch and Environmental Operations Branch, with input and signoff from the Integrated

Environment Team. The draft annual program is presented to Council for consideration and endorsement during budget preparation meetings annually.

Quarterly reporting

Quarterly reporting of projects on the endorsed program is undertaken using the appropriate reporting tools.

Annual progress reports

An Environment Levy annual progress report for the previous financial year is prepared and presented to council in the first half of each financial year (September/October). The report summarises the achievements made under each of the funding themes and is published on Council's website for the community to access. The report is prepared by the Environment Policy Branch, Environmental Operations Branch and the Integrated Environment Team.

Revenue and expenditure management

To ensure the Environment Levy Program implementation is transparent, effective and in line with the policy, the following shall occur:

- Monthly review of financial report for all Environment Levy projects to be undertaken by the Management Accountant supporting the Environment Levy and Environment Levy Project Officer;
- Quarterly financial profiling for each Environment Levy Project to accurately reflect expected expenditure over the course of the year; to be undertaken by Environment Levy Project Managers with support from the Management Accountant;
- Detailed quarterly review of all commitments and expenditure raised against all Environment Levy projects will be undertaken by the Environment Levy Project Officer responsible for the project in conjunction with the management accountant.
- End of year review and validation that expenses have been correctly charged to the Environment Levy projects; undertaken by Environment levy project managers assisted by Management Accountant supporting Regional Strategy and Planning.

The Environment Levy revenue can be used for costs directly associated with the delivery of the endorsed Environment Levy Program, including:

- Professionals and contractors engaged to provide specialist advice, services, conduct training or present at workshops, information sessions etc. directly associated with the delivery of the project
- Acquisition of equipment essential to deliver EL projects, where the costs have not been identified in Council's budget
- Printing, stationary, signage, publications and other office costs required to deliver/promote project information to partners, community members and stakeholders
- Vehicle/equipment hire costs as required throughout the approved project
- Venue hire and catering costs associated with any workshops, information sessions, training etc. directly associated with the delivery of the project.
- Catering costs may only be charged to the levy funded operations when a meeting involves external stakeholders

Acceptable wages / salary funding scenarios

- Internal contracted services e.g. GIS specialist work
- External contracted services e.g. consultant or contracted person
- Internal secondments where the substantive position is maintained and backfilled, i.e. not creating a savings for a branch
- To establish a temporary position (secondments or contracted services) if the project is not a core deliverable for the branch or team.

The Environment Levy revenue cannot be used to fund, in part or fully, substantive employees/positions (aside from current 10-year transitional buy out arrangements).

Unacceptable wages / salary funding Scenarios

- Internal secondments where the substantive position is not backfilled, i.e. creating a savings for the Branch/organisation
- If the project is a core deliverable of the team or branch
- Percentage charge for a person in an established permanent position which has the capacity to deliver the project – whether or not it is a core deliverable (but is approved by manager and director), i.e. creating a part savings for the branch/organisation.

Raising Additional Revenue

Where approved by the Manager, Environment Policy or Council as appropriate, revenue may be raised through the following business activities of the Environment Levy:

- Other investment funds set up for direct benefit and management of EL monies including borrowings and possibly carry-over funds (where approved by Council);
- Charging public and private individuals and organisations for goods and services rendered through programs and activities conducted under the EL.
- Offering opportunities for rate payers and other interested entities to donate additional funds into an EL trust for future investment in protection of the region's environmental values.

Environment Levy Reserves

Any unspent funds in a given year are returned to the respective funding theme's Environment Levy reserves. Environment Levy Reserves can be used to fund both land acquisition and new projects.

Acquiring environmentally significant land

Environment Levy Reserves can be used to fund the acquisitions of land on the endorsed forward program when allocated funds for this theme have been expended.

The Integrated Environment Team

The Integrated Environment Team (IET), which includes representatives from Environment Operations, Environment Policy and Development Services, is responsible for providing input into the development of the annual Environment Levy Program which includes the assessment of project proposals, and the preparation of the annual progress report.

The IET includes the Manager of Environmental Operations, Manager of Environment Policy, the Manager of Engineering and Environmental Assessment and chairs of each of the environmental working groups including environmental education, biodiversity and waterways, coastal, and pest management

2. ACQUISITION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT LAND

Acquisition of environmentally significant lands identified on Council endorsed regional Environment Levy forward Land Acquisition Program to assist in the future protection and enhancement of the region's biodiversity values and ecological processes. Land acquisition is a key tool identified in the Sunshine Coast Biodiversity Strategy.

Spending acquisition funding

Revenue allocated to this theme can be spent on, land acquisition, planning and legal costs and the establishment of the acquired land. This may include:

- the purchase costs and any associated consultancy, valuation fees, legal fees, transfer fees and background assessments required to progress and finalise an acquisition of a property on the endorsed forward program;
- engaging third parties to act on Council's behalf in the negotiation and acquisition of priority properties; and
- the costs associated with the establishment of the acquired land includes but is not limited to management and planning, fencing, weed management and fire management. Establishment costs will be allocated as a percentage of the annual capital acquisition budget and will be delivered in line with an initial site assessment and property management plans for each property. The property management plans will identify the estimated time required to establish the land, which in some cases

may be over a number of years depending on the level of land degradation and management activities required.

Recurrent land management funding requirements for established properties will be assessed and referred to the annual operational budget process as appropriate.

Acquisition Steering Committee

The Environment Levy Land Acquisition Steering Committee, which includes representation from Environment Policy, Environmental Operations, Development Assessment and Property and Business, is responsible for the review of nominated properties and the preparation of a Regional Environment Levy Forward Land Acquisition Program for Council consideration and endorsement.

The acquisition of properties on the endorsed list can be progressed at any time, whereas any additional nominated properties which are worthy of acquisition need to be separately taken to council for consideration and endorsement.

Nominating a property for acquisition

Anyone can nominate a property to be considered for acquisition under the Environment Levy Program by completing and submitting a nomination form available from the Environment Policy Branch, to the Manager of Environment Policy.

A preliminary assessment of the nominated property's environmental values is undertaken. The assessment includes a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis, examining aerial photographs, relevant maps and other available ecological and strategic planning information.

Property assessment results and recommendations are considered by the Acquisition Steering Committee which determines the nominated properties that should be progressed for acquisition.

Nominated properties identified for acquisition are incorporated into a revised Regional Environment Levy Forward Land Acquisition Program for Council consideration and endorsement.

Due to the number of nominations received and the limited budget available, not all nominations can be progressed despite a property having evident biodiversity values.

Property assessment

Only land that exhibits significant environmental values and is in a highly strategic location will be further considered for acquisition.

The assessment of nominated properties for acquisition is guided by the principles of Council's Biodiversity Strategy and considers all other available information including biodiversity values, management considerations, level of risk and threat and existing and future opportunities.

Biodiversity values

- The type, composition, extent and condition of the site's vegetation (remnant and non-remnant).
- Known records of threatened flora and fauna that occur on the site or nearby.
- Habitat functionality (habitat to support specific species) and ecological connectivity and its position in the core and connecting habitat areas network.

Management and planning considerations

- How the property aligns with the strategic directions of the Sunshine Coast Biodiversity Strategy 2010-2020.
- The property's potential to consolidate existing council reserves and expand the Sunshine Coast's protected areas network.

- The level of disturbance and the likely investment required to enhance the biodiversity values of the site and deliver effective property management outcomes in the short and long term.
- Consider the potential opportunities of the property to provide community and visitor access.

Level of risk and threat

- Property identified as being under threat of development or inappropriate land use.

Existing and future opportunities

- Consider the possible property development initiatives of the site.
- Consider how a property's biodiversity values may assist in securing funding from the Commonwealth and State governments to assist in the acquisition.

Prior to acquiring a property, a joint inspection is carried out with representatives from the acquisition steering committee to confirm the identified environmental values and management implications. Representatives are determined based on the level of knowledge of the site and surrounding area.

Property development initiatives

Property development initiatives that maintain the conservation values of the acquired land may be undertaken to recoup some of the costs associated with the acquisition, to raise additional revenue or improve the environmental values of the site. These initiatives include but are not limited to:

- the protection of a property's environmental values in perpetuity via a vegetation protection covenant that is registered on the land title (in accordance with the *Land Title Act 1994*) or via a nature refuge (in accordance with the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*) and on-selling;
- The agistment, hiring, leasing, or renting of portion of land or product derived from a conservation area including any built structures and any agricultural or natural resources generated within, on or under the property, provided that these activities do not conflict with the environmental protection and management of the property. Any lease agreement cannot be for a term greater than 5 years;
- The use of cleared areas of acquired land for third party offset and rehabilitation initiatives; and
- Boundary realignments where council is the adjoining landowner.

Property acquisitions

The acquisition of properties on the endorsed Land Acquisition Program can be progressed by either:

- negotiating to purchase land that has been nominated by a landowner or is on the open market;
- council making an expression of interest to purchase a property that has been nominated by someone other than the landowner; or
- compulsory acquiring the property pursuant to the Acquisition of Land Act 1967 to secure the property, which requires a specific council resolution to undertake.

Two independent valuations should be undertaken for properties being progressed to determine market value and inform negotiations.

The acquisition process, including all negotiations is led by representatives from the Property and Business Branch.

3. MAJOR PROJECTS

Implementation of major on ground rehabilitation projects and regional planning, management and research projects which inform the implementation of council's environmental strategies.

Suitable major projects

Those projects which deliver on ground environmental outcomes and planning, research, and management information to assist with the implementation of council's endorsed environmental strategies to provide viable and resilient ecosystems that maintain biodiversity values and healthy waterways and foreshores. Major projects should not fund environmental management activities which are the core responsibility of council.

Nominating a project

New projects can be proposed annually and are assessed in preparation of the annual budget. A project management plan template is to be completed.

Completed proposals are reviewed by the Integrated Environment Team during preparation of the annual Environment Levy Program for council consideration and endorsement. Generally occurring from December – February, this process gives consideration to annual priorities, emerging needs and the available budget.

If projects are not successful or if funding does not allow the implementation of the proposed project in the given financial year, projects are to be resubmitted the following year and incorporate any new or updated information.

Assessing a project

The assessment of proposed projects is guided by the principles of council's environmental strategies / plans. In assessing the projects, consideration is given to governance, social, environmental, economic and financial criteria that are developed and agreed to by the Integrated Environment Team. Once projects are shortlisted, an independent review is undertaken to confirm the assessment process and recommendations.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Building strong and effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders involved in the protection and enhancement of the Sunshine Coast environment. Funding is distributed to support the ongoing delivery of environmental partnership, grant, incentive and engagement programs.

The Environment Levy's grants and partnership funding is distributed through the organisation's Community Partnerships Funding and Community Grants Programs and associated policies and guidelines

It supports projects that protect and enhance the natural assets and biodiversity of the Sunshine Coast region, and promote ecologically sustainable management of our environmental values

Partnerships

Environmental partnership funding is offered to incorporated community organisations for sustainable approaches to the protection of local landscape, waterways and biodiversity.

Grants

This program supports incorporated community groups and private landowners who propose to undertake a range of environmental projects. Applicants are required to discuss their project with a council Environmental Officer prior to submitting their application. Priority will be given to projects that:

- Strengthen vegetation and riparian corridors and linkages;
- Prevent erosion and sediment runoff into waterways;
- Promote waterways and catchment health;
- Contribute to landscape scale protection, monitoring and rehabilitation of biodiversity;

- Building community capacity, engagement and participation; and
- Address major ecological threatening processes e.g. pests

If environmental grant applications do not meet the above priorities, then the Environment Levy funding is not used.

Projects proposed for the Community Engagement and Support Theme, other than those associated with partnership and grant funding, are nominated and assessed using the approach outlined for major projects.

Conservation Partnership Projects

These projects engage with and support private landowners to achieve sustainable management and protection of private properties with significant biodiversity values. This is delivered via the Voluntary Conservation Agreement program and the Land For Wildlife incentive program.

The Voluntary Conservation Agreement program works with private landowners who wish to protect their property's environmental values in perpetuity via a conservation covenant that is registered on the land title (in accordance with the *Land Title Act 1994*) or via a Nature Refuge (in accordance with the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*).

The Land for Wildlife program offers annual incentives to Land for Wildlife members including free native plants or the installation of nesting boxes on their property.

5. HISTORICAL OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

Current salary and recurrent operational program expenditure historically funded by the Environment Levy is being transitioned out of the levy program over a 10-year period and increasing the available revenue for the three primary funding themes.

Background

- In accordance with Council Resolution SM09/023 on 21 April 2009 current salary and recurrent program expenditure (\$3.77 Million annually) is intended to be transitioned out of the levy within 5 years.
- Incremental expenditure amounts of \$757,442 are proposed to be migrated to general revenue on an annual basis over a 5 year period, or earlier if financially possible, commencing 1 July 2009.
- Post an annual review of all Council levies the above transition arrangements will be extended out to 10 years. Incremental expenditure amounts of \$336,641 will be migrated to general revenue on an annual basis over a 10 year period or earlier if financially possible commencing 1 July 2010.

RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

- *Local Government Act 2009*;
- *Environment Levy Policy 2009*: Reference:23;
- Council's Corporate Plan 2009 - 2014 and any future amendments.
- Any other Council Policy or report that provides guidance to the EL Policy and Programs.

Version Control:

Version	Reason/ Trigger	Change (Y/N)	Endorsed/ Reviewed by	Date
0	Review Regional EL Policy and Program	Y		