

Proposed Dark Sky Reserve - Frequently Asked Questions

What is a dark sky?

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

What is the International Dark Sky Places Program?

The [International Dark Sky Places Program](#) 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 five designation types.

What are the different types of dark sky place designations?

There are [five designation types](#) offered under the International Dark Sky Places Program. These include:

1. Dark Sky Sanctuaries
2. Dark Sky Reserves
3. Dark Sky Parks
4. Dark Sky Communities
5. Urban Night Sky Places

As of October 2023, there are more than 200 places designated as Dark Sky Places across the world.

Does Australia have any Dark Sky Places?

Australia is home to four accredited Dark Sky Places. These are:

- 1) [Jump Up - Queensland](#)
- 2) [River Murray Dark Sky Reserve - South Australia](#)
- 3) [Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, Flinders Ranges - South Australia](#)
- 4) [Warrumbungle Dark Sky Park - New South Wales](#)

The River Murray Dark Sky Reserve is currently the only reserve in Australia.

What is a Dark Sky Reserve designation?

A Dark Sky Reserve designation is across public and/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 km².

What would a Dark Sky Reserve in the region look like?

The proposed area is made up of the Mary River catchment and adjoining State Protected Areas located within the Sunshine Coast local government area.

The 'core' area of the proposed Reserve is the Council owned and managed Kirbys Road Environment Reserve and is close to 3km².

The 'buffer' area surrounds Kirbys Road Environment Reserve which includes townships such as Maleny, Mapleton, Montville, Witta, Flaxton and Conondale.

The area includes two existing observatories.

- Mapleton Observatory
- Maleny Observatory.

Why designate an area 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 reserve area through protection of its dark sky environment.
- Attracting visitors to the area and bringing economic benefits to surrounding communities associated with astrotourism.
- Supporting the health and wellbeing of Sunshine Coast residents and visitors.
- Promoting wildlife friendly environments.
- Recognising community efforts being made 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.

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
- Evidence of commitment and action to protecting the night sky and engaging with the community at least one year before submitting an application.
- Evidence of community support confirming long-term engagement and commitment towards the creation of the Dark Sky Place.

Council and key stakeholders would need to actively work with the International Dark Sky Association as part of the application development.

The application is then submitted to the Dark Sky Places Committee for review, who following assessment would submit recommendations to the International Dark Sky Association Board for consideration and approval.

How long will it take to obtain a designation?

Designation can take approximately three years to complete from application preparation phase.

What does this mean for residents living within the proposed area?

We recognise close to 15,000 members of our community call this area home including those in Maleny, Mapleton, Montville, Witta, Flaxton and Conondale.

There are eligibility and minimum lighting requirements for a Dark Sky Reserve outlined in the program [guidelines](#).

The guidelines state a lighting management plan is to be developed and supported by a sufficient number of communities within a proposed Dark Sky Reserve area, which would guide the use/type of lighting within the area.

A designation does not require all lights to be switched off or immediately converted to dark sky compliant lighting. The application requires projects within the proposed reserve demonstrating commitment to dark skies for private and public lighting.

What does this mean for residents/communities living outside the proposed area in the region?

To achieve our vision to be Australia's most sustainable region: Healthy. Smart. Creative, Council is continually encouraging everyone to make simple changes towards sustainable living no matter where they reside.

Sustainable living applies, 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 from light pollution we can do simple things such as:

- Switching lights off and only using lighting when needed
- Shielding lights and directing light downwards
- Using environmentally friendly warm coloured light bulbs.

Will lighting in public spaces be affected within a proposed Dark Sky Reserve

If a Dark Sky Reserve is pursued, projects demonstrating commitment to dark skies on public land are required as part of the application process. This could include public lighting upgrades. Any upgrades to lighting in public spaces to meet dark sky compliant lighting requirements will ensure it also meets other public lighting standards.

Who are the key stakeholders in considering this proposal?

Key stakeholders include:

- Residents, landowners and businesses within the proposed reserve area and broader Sunshine Coast community.
- First Nations people – engagement and participation from our First Nations people is an important and critical part of the process.
- Energy Queensland – Energex: Energy Queensland manage and own many of the region's streetlights.
- Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and other government agencies who are land managers within the proposed area.

How does it align with the Biosphere designation?

Our Biosphere is a special place where responsible development and people live sustainably and sit alongside active conservation.

A Biosphere is about:

- Creating a legacy for our children's future
- Caring for our beautiful landscapes and stunning beach
- 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 is to live more sustainably.

How does this proposal 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 in 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".

When can I have my say on the proposal?

Council intends to seek feedback from the community on the proposal in mid-2024.

How can I stay updated on the project?

Keep an eye out on the Council project page for updates – www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/environment/sustainability-and-climate-change/establishing-a-proposed-sunshine-coast-dark-sky-reserve or contact the Environment and Sustainability Policy Team at els@sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au.

Updated November 2023.