

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday 7th December 2010 – 12.00PM – 2.00PM

Council Chambers

ATTENDANCE: Cr. May, Cr Cameron, Cr Walker
Lisa Kermode, Helen Paulsen, Dale Arvidsson
Frank Perna, Saskia von Fahland, Margaret Lane,
Joan Fitzsimmons, Bruce Milles

APOLOGIES: Stuart Holley, Cr. Steindl,

Councillor May introduced Cr. Ross Walker, our new Parks and Environment portfolio councillor, who takes over the role of meeting chair from Cr. May.

CONFIRMATION OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held 05/12/10 were accepted as a true and correct record (moved Cr. Cameron, seconded Margaret Lane).

1. **MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

1. **Potential purchase of land**

This item was carried over to the February meeting due to Cr. Steindl's absence.

Action: Cr. Steindl to report back to the committee on the progress with discussion regarding the first parcel of land, the asking price/valuation of the second parcel of land, and to make the planning section aware of the environmental value of the second parcel and the inappropriateness of rezoning.

Action: David McKendry to investigate whether 'Caring for our Country' funding will be available to assist with the purchase of Blacks Beach Spit, and provide a report for the February meeting.

Action: Additional investigations regarding potential property purchases including property in the Palm Tree Creek/Cattle Creek area be put on hold until the Natural Environment Plan is completed and priority areas are identified.

There are currently no funds identified within the Parks and Environment budget to purchase land that doesn't meet the land acquisition policy criteria.

2. Coastal project update

A detailed report on this item was received as per the agenda.

Action: Lisa to organise a site meeting with Cr. May and Cr. Walker to discuss recent vegetation clearing at Blacks Beach. Options for addressing this matter and other instances of vegetation clearing, particularly on the coast, to be brought to the next meeting, with the intention of developing a policy/standard procedure for consideration by council.

3. Land for Wildlife Program

An update was provided by Saskia on the progress with the Land for Wildlife program. Highlights from the report include:

- Handover of files and resources has occurred
- Existing participant files have been reviewed
- Draft survey has been prepared
- New property assessments will be undertaken shortly, with a trial assessment to be undertaken to ensure consistency of assessments
- Various brochures and documents have been updated
- Articles on the L4W program appeared in the October SLCMA and PCL newsletters

Action: MRC and catchment group staff to discuss database review including merging Sarina and Mackay records into a single database, and the potential costs and resources available to do this. Note: resources have not been allocated to this task in the current contracts with the catchment groups.

Action: Catchment group staff to investigate provision of the SEQ newsletter to Mackay Region L4W participants.

4. Sarina and Mirani Special Projects allocation

Reports were provided by both Catchment Groups for the period 1st September to 1st December 2010.

Action: PCL to consider providing future reports in the same format as the SLCMA report.

5. Project signage

Examples of the 'natural environment levy funded project' signage were provided to the committee.

6. Natural Environment Plan Review

A detailed report on this item and a project timeline map were received as per the agenda.

Action: Reef Catchments to present the first chapter to the February meeting

7. Possible funding of MRPMG weed projects

The Leucaena project was discussed. This project is currently on hold until the completion of the Pioneer River Environmental Walk section of the Blue Water Trail contract, and will be reviewed after the contract is completed.

The potential for a Pest Management Officer within the Natural Environment Section was raised. It could possibly be funded on a 3 year trial basis as per the Stormwater Officer positions. The intent would be to focus on strategic weed control in environmental areas. The committee will further consider this option at a later date.

8. Planning Scheme Review Update

Jaco Ackerman will present information on the review process at the February meeting.

9. Habitat Restoration Team

A presentation and report was provided by Stuart Fyfe – Natural Environment Officer.

It was noted that there is potential to expand the work done in the Pioneer Valley area as present worksites are focused on the Mackay area and in the coastal zone.

Concern was expressed that when the team is split across sites, staff are working without access to a council mobile phone or vehicle. The committee recommends that this doesn't occur unless appropriate safety measures are put in place to address concerns.

The priority rating system for sites was discussed. This will be reviewed pending completion of the Natural Environment Plan. This will allow a more comprehensive and strategic work plan to be developed for the team, based on a scientifically-based priority system, and will also facilitate the allocation of staff and resources to implement priority actions.

10. Staff Positions

A report was received on this item.

The committee discussed whether the wages allocation was enough for the position. The allocation is based on similar positions within the Local Laws section. The committee also discussed whether a car would be a more appropriate vehicle for the position than a motorbike. The legal costs associated with law enforcement undertakings were raised. It is anticipated that these costs could be covered through council's existing budget allocation for legal advice/costs, and/or offset through the potential income raised by fines.

The committee recommended that the Environmental Ranger position be implemented as soon as possible. The committee recommended that the Education officer position be considered for the 2011/12 financial year, and work progress to finalise a position description and other relevant documentation for this. The committee recommended that the labourer and ganger position be considered for the 2011/12 financial year, to coincide with the finalisation of the Natural Environment Plan.

Recommendation: That an Environmental Ranger position be ratified by Council and implemented as soon as possible (moved Margaret Lane, seconded Bruce Milles, all in favour).

2. STORMWATER PROJECTS UPDATE

A written report was received.

Action: Stuart Holley to organise for an update on the status of the Caledonia Drive Project.

Action: A final report will be presented to the committee on the stormwater program for the three year levy funding period, which is now drawing to a close. This will be provided at the June 2011 meeting.

3. FINANCIALS

The financial report was circulated in the meeting. Stephanie Griffith was available to answer questions and will be available at future meetings.

Action: Stephanie to provide the closing amount for both budget and reserve, to show how much under/over budget the levy is given current allocations and the closing amount of the reserve i.e. the amount currently in the reserve that is unallocated.

Cr. May advised that the Levy funds should not be totally allocated to enable future projects and financial continuity of existing allocated positions to continue.

Action: 10 year budget plan to be discussed at the February meeting

Action: Consider allocating an amount to priority sites/reserves rather than allocating individual amounts to specific reserves, unless a specific budget allocation is considered appropriate.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

1. New Paget Depot

It was confirmed that the Natural Environment Coordinator and Officer will be moving from Bedford Rd to the new Paget depot when it is completed. The habitat restoration team and mackay beach team will continue to be based at the Swayne St Depot in North Mackay.

2. Crs. May and Walker announced that Helen Paulsen – Manager Parks and Environment, has accepted a new position as Parks Manager with Gladstone Regional Council and will be leaving Mackay Regional Council as of 23rd December. The councillors, together with the committee, thanked Helen for her efforts and dedication and wished her well in her new position.

3. Cr. Walker, together with the committee, thanked Cr. May for her efforts with the committee and as the Parks and Natural Environment Portfolio councillor. Her commitment and dedication are appreciated.

4. Margaret Lane tabled an article on ‘Zero Emission Councils’ which Lisa will distribute to committee members.

Meeting closed 2.30 pm

Next meeting February 1st, 12-2pm Council Chambers.