

NATURAL LANE ECO-HAMLET INVESTIGATIONS

The process of detailed consultation and investigation of the potential for establishment of one of Byron Shire's first Eco-Hamlet Projects, in accordance with the Byron Rural Settlement Strategy 1998, has now commenced.

The Project Background

The Byron Rural Settlement Strategy 1988 (referred to in this web page as "the Strategy") was adopted by Council in October 1998 and approved by the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning in December 1998, after a lengthy and extensive process of investigation and community consultation. The Strategy represents a major part of Council's ongoing response to the United Nations charter Local Agenda 21, an outcome of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The Strategy embodies the principles of Sustainability, addresses the key ecological, social and economic considerations, and has a strong focus on catchment management planning and environmental repair and enhancement.

The site of this potential eco-hamlet is at Natural Lane, to the west of Broken Head and south of Suffolk Park, covering an area of around 200 hectares. The site is shown on Map 7 in the Rural Settlement Strategy 1998 Report, and is reproduced below.

INSERT MAP 7

The Investigation Process

The process of investigation of this particular project commenced in earnest in December 1999, when Council resolved to proceed with documentation for Rural Community Title Settlement (Town Catchment) for these and other lands. Since that time, extensive discussions have been held with the landowners and their consultants, and the project has received considerable local media publicity. The landowners have now requested Council to proceed with the investigation, with a view to preparing an amendment to Byron Local Environmental Plan 1988 to allow the eco-village to proceed, if the required detailed investigations confirm that is appropriate.

As a result, Council has now appointed a team of planning and environmental consultants to manage the planning and investigation process on Council's behalf. This will involve project coordination, community consultation and assessment of the results of the detailed social, environmental and economic investigations undertaken by the landowners' consultants.

The Council's consultancy team (known as the "process consultants") is led by Sustainable Futures of Yamba NSW, and is supported by Chris Power Environmental Planning of Byron Bay and Daryl Anderson Consulting, of Tweed Heads. All process consultancy team members are experienced professionals who have particular qualifications and expertise in community consultation, planning, sustainability and/or environmental investigation, design and assessment.

Community Involvement – the Community Reference Group

One of the first steps in the process has been to establish a "Community Reference Group" (the CRG), consisting of representatives of stakeholders and interest groups

involved in, or affected by, the project. The CRG will play a vital role in the process, as a key adviser to the Council, the community and the landowners. It is expected that tasks which the CRG will undertake will include matters such as:

- identify values, issues and challenges to be considered in the process;
- evaluate the findings of the site investigations;
- explore ideas and solutions for the potential eco-hamlet;
- review concept plan options and choose a preferred course of action; and
- disseminate information to, and provide ongoing feedback from, the community.

The final Terms of reference, procedures and protocols for the CRG will be determined by the group's members.

Organisations that have been invited to nominate for CRG membership include the Coopers Shoot Action Group, Suffolk Park Progress Association, Broken Head Protection Committee, BEACON, the Arakwal Aboriginal Corporation, prospective residents of the eco-hamlet, the landowners' consultants and relevant government departments, including the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, the Department of Land and Water Conservation and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The first meeting of the CRG is to be held at the Suffolk Park Community hall, from 4pm until 7pm on Wednesday 7 November 2001. The meeting will be facilitated by the process consultants, and will be open to all interested people as observers, however only members of the CRG will be entitled to vote on matters determined by the CRG.

Ongoing Information

Council is determined to ensure that the investigation, evaluation and planning process for the potential Natural Lane eco-hamlet project is comprehensive, transparent and equitable to all affected individuals and groups. Council will also ensure that the process and any resultant concept plan will be consistent with Sustainability Principles, the Rural Settlement Strategy 1998 and the Council's adopted "Greenprint for a sustainable Future".

As part of the community consultation and awareness program for this project, this Web Page will be kept up to date with regular Bulletins, explaining the current status of the project, as well as the minutes of the CRG meetings and other relevant information. It is also intended that a mail, telephone and email enquiry system will be established so that interested people can communicate directly with the process consultants.

Final details of these arrangements will be decided at the CRG meeting on 7 November, and will then be published on this Web Page.