

 <p>Mackay REGIONAL COUNCIL</p>	COUNCIL POLICY	
	Acquisition of Land for Environmental Purposes funded by the Natural Environment Levy	
	POLICY NO	064
	DEPARTMENT	Development Services
	PROGRAM	Parks, Environment & Sustainability
ENDORSED BY COUNCIL	8 July 2020	ORD-2020-169

1.0 Scope

To provide guidelines and identify criteria for the acquisition of land utilising funds from the Natural Environment Levy.

2.0 Purpose

The strategic goals of the land acquisition fund are to purchase significant land to;

- Maintain and enhance Mackay’s natural areas;
- Protect and restore Mackay’s biodiversity and ecological processes;
- Secure a world class natural area reserve system;
- Reduce the loss of significant native vegetation and habitat areas;
- Provide appropriate opportunities for nature-based recreation, education and learning.

3.0 Reference

- Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2017-2022
- *Vegetation Management Act 1999, 22LA and 22LB*
- *Acquisition of Land Act 1967*

4.0 Definitions

To assist in interpretation the following definitions shall apply:

Council shall mean the Mayor and Councillors of Mackay Regional Council.

DES shall mean *Department of Environment and Science*

MRC shall mean Mackay Regional Council.

5.0 Background

The Natural Environment Levy is collected via rates and is used to fund environmental projects across the region. Since the Levy's introduction, 20% of Levy funds have been set aside each year for the acquisition of environmentally significant land. In the 2016/17 financial year, Council reduced the Levy by 20% and did not allocate funding to the Land Acquisition Fund. Future allocations to the Land Acquisition Fund will be reviewed each year as part of the budget process.

The Acquisition of Land for Environmental Purposes Policy provides guidelines and criteria that must be met when considering purchasing land utilising funding from the Natural Environment Levy.

6.0 Policy Statement

6.1 Criteria

The nature conservation significance of nominated lands will be assessed against the criteria detailed below. The assessment criteria consists of Principal and Supplementary Criteria. Land purchased **must** meet at least one of the Principal Criteria and one or more of the Supplementary Criteria.

6.1.1 *Principal Criteria*

Nature Conservation Significance

- The land supports native vegetation and other ecological features identified as being of State, Regional or Local significance through Council's application of an approach based on the Common Nature Conservation Classification System (CNCCS). The approach, developed by Chenoweth EPLA and modified by DES, has been adopted by DES for use in Queensland and is also known as the Biodiversity Assessment and Mapping Methodology (BAMM).
- The land supports a threatened regional ecosystem and its acquisition would contribute to the protection of "Endangered" or "Of Concern" regional ecosystems as defined by the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.
- The land provides the opportunity to consolidate or link existing elements of the region's natural area reserve system and enhance the long-term viability and resilience of the biodiversity, which these lands conserve.
- The land provides habitat for one or more significant floral or faunal species (including aquatic species) within the Mackay region.

6.1.2 *Supplementary Criteria*

Ecosystem Services

Important ecological processes are protected, including:

- Natural flow regimes of waterways and wetlands – biodiversity protection, water quality maintenance, reduced weed invasion, etc.
- Natural movement of energy and nutrients through the Region's ecosystems – natural succession of vegetation communities, maintenance of wildlife habitat, etc.
- Stabilisation of land surfaces and maintenance of natural erosion and soil formation processes.

Level of Threat

- The identified biodiversity conservation values are likely to be irrevocably lost or diminished in the foreseeable future and are best managed for their long term viability and integrity as part of the region's world-class natural area reserve system.
- No alternative prudent or feasible mechanism is at MRC's disposal to secure the identified nature conservation values and/or functions.

Financial Considerations

- The acquisition of the subject land represents a cost-effective solution to the protection of the identified nature conservation values and/or functions.
- On-going management obligations and associated costs can be readily accommodated into MRC's existing natural area reserve management programs.
- Supporting grants are available from other funding bodies or organisations (i.e. State or Federal Government).

Education and Learning

- The land provides opportunities for the community to experience, enjoy, explore and better understand Mackay's unique diversity of wildlife, ecosystems and natural processes in a manner that conserves the land's identified nature conservation values and/or functions.
- The land provides opportunities for MRC and the whole community to undertake practical and relevant research and learning activities that assist Council to better understand and manage Mackay's biodiversity.

Landscape Amenity

- Land exhibits significant topographic, landscape and natural aesthetic values and plays an important role in defining the natural landscape character of the region.

- The land is identified in local or regional planning documents as a significant natural heritage site.

Ecotourism and Nature-based Recreation

- Land provides opportunities for nature-based recreational pursuits that do not compromise the land's biodiversity conservation values and which cannot be adequately provided for elsewhere in the region.

6.2 Landowner Negotiation and Acquisition

Preference is to purchase lands at fair market value through negotiation with the landowner. However, MRC may use compulsory acquisition powers of the *Acquisition of Land Act 1967*, to acquire these significant lands.

6.3 Management Plan

A management plan will be prepared for all land acquired for environmental purposes, which protects and/or restores the land's identified biodiversity and other values and identifies management activities required. Funds from the Natural Environment Levy may be allocated to undertake essential management activities within the subject land.

7.0 Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed when any of the following occur:

1. The related documents are amended or replaced.
2. Other circumstances as determined from time to time by a resolution of Council.

Notwithstanding the above, this policy is to be reviewed at intervals of no more than three (3) years.

Version Control:

Version	Reason / Trigger	Change	Endorsed / Reviewed	Date
2	Review of Policy	Minor Amendments	Endorsed by Council	22/02/2017
3	Review of Policy	Amendments	Endorsed by Council	08/07/2020