

Growing 130,000 plants in one year

The ever-expanding efforts of the Mackay Natural Environment Centre are helping to green our region

THE growing Mackay Natural Environment Centre (MNEC) is driving a herculean revegetation movement that is greening our region.

More than 130,000 plants were grown last financial year alone at the council-operated Swayne Street facility.

And 100,000 of those are earmarked for the massive Ferris Gulley landscaping project, to be undertaken by local contractor Seaforth Civil Pty Ltd, at Bakers Creek.

Economic Development and Planning Committee chair Cr Amanda Camm said having these specialised wetland plants grown in a council-run nursery helped cut costs.

"Without the Mackay Natural Environment Centre we would have been forced to buy those plants from outside our local area, which would have cost a great deal more," Cr Camm said.

"As an added bonus, having plants sourced, grown and hardened-off locally means

we have a much higher survival rate compared with plants sourced from down south," she said.

The MNEC is constantly working to minimise its impact on the environment while pumping out native vegetation for revegetation projects, event giveaways and water quality improvement.

This means reusing and recycling almost everything.

"Surplus water that goes



Mackay Natural Environment Centre nursery hand Erin Standen and volunteer Ken Greeves.

onto the plants runs down into collection bays and is pumped back into tanks," Cr Camm said.

"The whole process is powered by solar power and even the used potting mix and organic waste goes into a compost bin and on-site vegetable garden that

is utilised and tended by the many volunteers who frequent the centre," she said.

"As part of our sustainability strategy, the centre has also just converted to using completely biodegradable pots. This means that hundreds of thousands of pots don't need to be

disinfected and cleaned or thrown out.

"Plants can now simply be planted, pot and all, at the sites, which also leads to far greater survivability, as the plants don't suffer transplant shock from having their roots disturbed."

>> For more information on council's Mackay Natural Environment Centre (MNEC), check out an educational video series online at <http://bit.ly/1RyFpzV>

Letting off steam and killing weeds

MACKAY Regional Council's Natural Environment team members are blowing off some steam while on a (weed) killing spree.

In fact, it's the steam that's doing the killing, reducing the team's reliance on chemical weedkillers.

Using a newly-acquired Steam Weeder, which looks like an oversized vacuum cleaner, council officers can simply sweep the broom-like nozzle over the weeds to kill them.

The steam destroys the

weeds on contact within minutes.

This occurs via a process known as "plasmolysis" where the steam rapidly raises the temperature of water in plant cells, which in turn causes them to expand and destroys the structure of the cell wall and soft tissue.

The targeted weeds will wilt and in a few days they decompose, enriching the soil.

Economic Development and Planning Committee chair Cr Amanda Camm said the

new equipment was just one of many ways council was moving towards becoming more sustainable and environmentally-friendly.

"It's great to be able to use a chemical-free alternative in sensitive areas near important ecosystems, like the banks of the Gooseponds in North Mackay or the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens lagoons," Cr Camm said.

"It also means we can conduct weed control in windy conditions that would be unsuitable for chemical spraying."



Nursery supervisor Sue McCormack uses the new Steam Weeder.



The new operations centre and nursery under construction at the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens.

Operations centre and nursery blooms

A NEW \$1.6 million operations centre and nursery is taking shape at the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens.

The facility is being built by WHF Group within the Meadowlands section south of Cowleys Road.

It will be an important feature for the ongoing development of the Botanic Gardens.

Economic Development and Planning deputy chair Cr Karen May said the

project would provide a much-needed permanent operations centre and nursery space within the Botanic Gardens.

"The facility was designed in conjunction with stakeholder groups as part of a 2016 detailed design project for the future expansion of the facility," Cr May said.

"It will provide an operations centre and base for horticulture staff at the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens," she said.

"It will also be a future hub for community groups and other volunteers, as well as providing a nursery space for the ongoing curation and propagation for future Meadowlands collections.

"Specific space will be allocated for seed storage and herbarium activities."

Construction of stage one is due to be complete by early September. Stage 1A is out for tender and expected to be complete by the end of this year.

>> The State Government has provided a \$750,000 grant to assist with this project

Strategy has five-year plan

COUNCIL has finalised the Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2017-22.

The strategy is set to be endorsed by an ordinary meeting of council today.

A draft strategy was formulated with input from council staff, councillors and key stakeholders, with community feedback also sought.

The strategy focuses on nine strategic outcomes for environmental sustainability and includes a refreshed action plan to protect our environment and enhance liveability in our region.

Infrastructure and Services Committee chair Cr Karen May said the strategy outlined council's plan over the next five years in regards to environment and sustainability.

"The plan endeavours to imbed into the organisation good environmental and sustainability practices throughout our council operations, Cr May said. "We look forward to working with the community to implement our strategy over the next five years," she said.

Be sustainable around home

COUNCIL is supporting next month's Sustainable House Day.

With electricity prices rising and the impact of global warming becoming more apparent, Cr Karen May said being more sustainable around the home was generating more interest in the community than ever before.

"There are cheap and simple things everyone can do around the house to become more sustainable," she said.

"Examples include installing energy efficient lights, using water-saving tap fittings and shower heads, washing laundry in cold water and limiting showers to four minutes."

Sarina couple Tom and Lyn Janke will open their house to the public on Sunday, September 17, from 10am to 4pm as part of Sustainable House Day.

Mackay couple Margaret and Phillip Lane will also open their home for public tours on the day.



Ready for next month's Great Northern Clean Up are (from left) Cr Fran Mann, Cr Laurence Bonaventura and Cr Ross Walker.

Lend a hand to help clean up

MACKAY councillors are encouraging residents to don a pair of gloves and join them in the biggest clean-up effort next month.

The Great Northern Clean Up is on Saturday, September 2, and Sunday, September 3.

Last year, close to 150 volunteers took part in the clean-up in the Mackay

>> The locations are listed on council's website mackay.qld.gov.au/cleanup



THE next time you're thirsty opt for tap water.

Mackay Regional Council has joined the national Choose Tap campaign to raise awareness about the benefits of drinking tap water as opposed to bottled water.

Some of the benefits include:

Health > Tap water is far better quality than bottled water, which can be as much as six months old before you consume it.

Environment > About 50 per cent of plastic water bottles end up in landfill or as litter

Cost > Tap water is far cheaper than bottled water — less than one cent per litre compared to up to \$4 per litre for bottled water.



It's an extravaganza!

NEXT month's Mackay Orchid Extravaganza is set to bloom like never before.

Held at the Ken Burgess display house at Queens Park, the event will have hundreds of orchids on display while offering tips and insights from local orchid growing experts.

The theme this year is "Pretty as a Picture" and it will be held Saturday, September 16, and Sunday, September 17, from 9am to 4pm.

Economic Development and Planning committee member Cr Justin Englert said the Orchid Extravaganza was

always popular, with people often travelling from outside of the Mackay region to attend.

"Preparations are well under way for this year's event and festivities will include orchid workshops and lectures, orchid auctions, fun activities for the kids and light refreshments for the family."

ABC Tropical North, Mackay District Orchid Society and the Pioneer Orchid and Plant Association are sponsoring the event again. Entry is by gold coin donation, with donations going toward restocking Orchid House for future generations to enjoy.

>> More details online at mackay.qld.gov.au/orchids

20 key projects last year funded by the Natural Environment Levy

1500 hectares of natural area land actively managed by council

320km of mainland coastline

17 fishways

130,000 native plants grown by the Mackay Natural Environment Centre (MNEC) in 2016-17

135,000 plants provided to projects and the community by the MNEC in last three years:

60,000 trees and shrubs

15,000 giveaways to community groups and native plant giveaways

60,000 grasses, sedges and rushes

57 bio-retention systems, 3 constructed wetlands and 1 naturalised waterway