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1. Statement

Council is committed to conserve, protect, enhance and restore the health of the City's natural environment values both on public and private lands for the benefit, use and lifestyle of current and future generations.

That protecting the natural environment for its own intrinsic value is an important objective for all the community and for Council.

Council acknowledges a healthy natural environment is fundamental to cultural, social, physical and economic wellbeing of the community.

By continuing to operate a proactive and evidence-based approach, we will strive to ensure improvement to the natural environment.

Council recognises the important contribution a healthy natural environment makes in transitioning to a Sustainable City.

2. Purpose and Principles

The purpose of the policy is to strengthen council's commitment to conserve, protect, enhance and restore the natural environment and its values, through the following seven focus areas and associated principles:

1. Biodiversity & Threatened Species Recovery

- Identify, protect, maintain & rehabilitate priority natural environment values of the city.
- Protect and improve habitat value within large areas of intact threatened species and priority wildlife habitat, including koalas.
- Enhance and protect key habitat corridors to maintain or increase regional and local connectivity for threatened species and priority wildlife.
- Understand, identify and reduce the impact of threats to threatened species and priority wildlife, including koalas.
- Gather data, prioritise, plan and support other government initiatives for threatened species and priority wildlife, including locally significant wildlife.
- Further incorporate natural value importance into council's planning activities and general business operations.

- Implement sustainable land-use planning practices that concentrates urban development within the urban footprint in a compact development form as a desirable outcome, relative to meeting the need for housing, employment and other facilities and services for the city's growing community.
- Develop and implement regulatory (e.g. local laws) and non-regulatory (e.g. incentives) tools that supports natural environment outcomes on public and private land.
- Seek an approach whereby negative impacts are first avoided, minimised or mitigated before any remaining impacts are offset.

2. Wetlands & Waterways Improvement

- Protect, rehabilitate and maintain wetlands and waterways, including their associated corridors, for the benefit of aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, community liveability and continuation of traditional cultural practices.
- Invest in waterway recovery projects at priority sites targeting improved in-stream habitat condition, aquatic connectivity and riparian weed management and revegetation.
- Monitor aquatic communities and connectivity of the region's waterways to quantify threats, as well as measure the outcomes of remediation activities.
- Identify and address key sources of sediment which impact aquatic communities through poor water quality and degraded stream morphology.
- Improve streambank stabilisation at strategic locations supporting habitat conditions for priority wildlife, including platypus.
- Increase community education and awareness of key issues impacting aquatic biodiversity to encourage behavioural change and stewardship of the city's waterways and wetlands.

3. Urban Biodiversity Enhancement

- Catalogue, conserve and enhance urban biodiversity values and the ecological systems that support them.
- Create and enhance corridors in urban areas to provide connectivity and refuge for wildlife and ecosystem services functions.

4. Natural Area Restoration & Protection

- Invest in strategic restoration activities to re-establish corridor linkages through the landscape, including using offsets or partnerships programs.
- Implement sound environmental management principles on Council owned or managed land, focusing on long term protection, practical actions with foreseeable outcomes.

- Manage protected natural areas and partner with private landholders in core habitat areas to provide refuge for native plants and animals from the impacts of changing climate.

5. Experiencing Nature

- Support Traditional owners with maintaining connection to cultural lands and sites.
- Encourage community to connect with nature to foster a conservation ethic and develop environmental stewards.
- Promote and provide for sustainable outdoor/nature-based recreational activities, environmental education and eco-tourism opportunities within natural areas, recognising the significant community benefit these areas provide.
- Invest in infrastructure and management activities that supports sustainable provision of nature experiences.
- Provide, plan, develop, manage, maintain and activate high quality sustainable outdoor/nature-based recreation opportunities in natural areas.
- Assess the need for the provision of outdoor/nature-based recreation activities based on demand and the identification of suitable sites to ensure a sustainable fit between natural values and outdoor/nature-based recreation activities.
- Provide, manage and maintain outdoor/nature-based recreation activities, facilities and settings that are complementary to and protect the natural values of the settings within which they are positioned.

6. Community Awareness & Support

- Embrace opportunities to partner with Indigenous Land Management Businesses, government agencies, universities, research organisations, regional bodies and other local governments on collaborative projects.
- Work closely with the community through collaboration, partnerships and support programs that empower and build capacity as environmental stewards.
- Support community contribution of information through citizen science programs.
- Increase recognition within the community and council of natural environment ecosystem services as well as Cultural Heritage and Cultural Landscape values.

7. Governance, Measuring & Reporting

- Implement outcome based, priority driven and adaptive investment of council funds, including Ipswich Enviroplan Levy, general revenue and external grants.
- Comply with relevant statutory responsibilities, legislation, policy & plans, while pursuing new approaches, continual improvement, environmental excellence and demonstrating leadership in operations and activities.

- Identify, collect, monitor, review and report about natural values, environmental performance and visitation.
- Operate programs and undertake priorities driven by best available knowledge and data, cross-referenced with community interest and capability to ensure confidence in achieving outcomes.

3. Strategic Plan Links

The policy supports the Natural and Sustainable theme within council's iFuture Corporate Plan (commencing the 1st July 2021).

This policy also contributes to achieving the themes within council's Advance Ipswich community plan including:

- Caring for the Environment
- Caring for the Community
- Listening, Leading and Financial Management
- Managing growth and delivering key infrastructure
- Strengthening our local economy and building prosperity

The policy shares links with the following key corporate documents:

- Employee Code of Conduct
- Ipswich Enviroplan Program & Levy Policy (and Procedure)
- Ipswich Planning Scheme
- Nature Conservation Strategy
- Open Space & Recreation Strategy
- Sustainability Policy
- Waterway Health Strategy

4. Regulatory Authority

Implementation, application and governance of the policy will give consideration to the following regulatory instruments:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984
- Environmental Protection Act 1994
- Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- Fisheries Act 1994
- Local Government Act 2009
- Native Title Act 1993
- Nature Conservation Act 1992
- Planning Act 2016
- The Biosecurity Act 2014
- Vegetation Management Act 1999
- Water Act 2000

5. Scope

The policy relates to council's natural environment management activities including delivery of services, strategic planning, regulation, facilitation, advocacy, education and facilities.

The policy guides decision making and the development of all future council policy, strategy and plans in relation to the natural environment.

The policy applies to all councillors, council staff, contractors, and others that act on Council's behalf to ensure they work in accordance with the policy principles and in accordance with the relevant legislation.

These policy principles are also aspirational for Ipswich's community whereby, through the commitment and actions of Council, they will be realised.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Chief Executive Officer and General Managers	The CEO and General Managers' are responsible for advocating, promoting and supporting the principles of the Natural Environment Policy as a business as usual practice.
Environment & Sustainability Branch	<p><u>Branch/ Natural Environment & Land Management Section Manager</u></p> <p>Responsible for overall development, implementation and monitoring of the Natural Environment Policy.</p> <p><u>Natural Environment & Land Management Section</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for the development, drafting and implementation and review of the policy and its related strategies, plans and programs. Provision of technical support and expertise to assist in the implementation of this policy. Provision of regular reporting and analytics. Liaison and education with key internal and external stakeholders.
All Ipswich City Council Employees	Responsible for understanding the principles outlined in the policy and applying these principles in planning, decision making, delivery activities and reporting.

7. Key Stakeholders

The policy applies broadly across all Council departments. Key stakeholders sit within each department and branch. However, stakeholders of note are those in the following teams:

- Infrastructure & Environment Department – City Maintenance, Infrastructure Strategy & Planning, Emergency Management & Sustainability and Natural Environment & Land Section.
- Planning & Regulatory Services Department – Strategic Planning, Local Laws & Regulated Parking and Environment Assessment.
- Coordination & Performance Department – Integrated Planning & Reporting.
- Community, Cultural & Economic Development Branch – Sport & Recreation and Destination Development.

8. Monitoring and Evaluation

The following measures will determine the success and effectiveness of the policy:

- Access to the natural environment
- Progress implementing strategies
- Increased connected corridors
- Extent of protected area
- Increased nature-based recreation opportunities and activation
- Improvement in waterway condition
- Extent of protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage and cultural landscape features
- Preservation of traditional cultural practices
- Improvement of natural environment health
- Amount of area under active restoration
- Extent of canopy cover
- Level of staff awareness of the importance of natural environment

An annual update about the policies implementation and council's performance will be published on council's web, and the community made aware of its availability.

9. Definitions

Conserve/conservation (nature): terms generally used to describe an approach to protect natural resources and their values and seeks for the proper, sustainable and renewable use of nature – ensuring its continued availability.

Manager: includes persons appointed to positions with the title Supervisor, Principal, Section Manager, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer.

Natural Environment: With reference to this policy, the natural environment is a collective term used to describe the diverse terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems that make up the city's habitat network.

Natural Values: With reference to this policy, natural values are special qualities such as uniqueness, rarity, typicality, representivity, scientific or education importance, have useful features or recreation value. Includes:

- habitat for iconic, significant and threatened species;
- core habitat areas as home for a diverse range of wildlife;

- nodes of remnant vegetation in urban areas providing wildlife refuge;
- strategic remnants vegetation patches as stepping stones for wildlife movement;
- corridors providing connectivity for wildlife, recreation and active transport;
- increasing vegetation condition and animal abundance within core habitat areas;
- biological diversity, natural capital and ecosystem services;
- waterways, wetlands, riparian and aquatic ecosystems and floodplains;
- improving health of waterways;
- Aboriginal cultural heritage and cultural landscape features; and
- scenic amenity.

Sound Environmental Management Principles: With reference to this policy, sound environmental management principles includes:

- Natural values should be protected, managed and enhanced to conserve their natural condition;
- Best practice pest plant, animal and fire management should be implemented;
- Maintaining and enhancing natural values and cultural landscapes for inspirational, educational, cultural and nature-based recreation; and
- Scientific and educational enquiry should be provided and promoted at ecologically sustainable levels.

Urban Biodiversity: Refers to the variety and variability among living organisms found in the city's highly developed areas and the ecological systems in which they are found.

10. Policy Owner

The General Manager (Infrastructure & Environment) is the policy owner and the Environment & Sustainability Manager is responsible for authoring and reviewing this policy.