

Media release

Council Budget losses for conservation.

Gecko Environment Council representative , Lois levy, attended Council yesterday to hear the adoption of this year's Budget, which was touted by both the Mayor and the CEO as a "Way Ahead" in a slick video presentation.

The Budget was a very disappointing one for conservationists and residents interested in greening the city and sustainability in planning.

Open Space acquisition: Once again what used to be the Open Space Preservation levy Acquisition fund has been designated for maintenance and enhancement, with no provision for increasing the extent of badly needed land of high conservation value to protect our amazing biodiversity. Biodiversity is in serious decline worldwide and Gold Coast is no exception.

Wildlife at risk: The City's population continues to grow, especially in the north, where no effort has been made by this Council, supposedly dedicated to "Enhancing green space" to protect vital koala and other wildlife habitat in this area. The wildlife in this area are simply expected to move to the next patch of bushland, often already occupied by other wildlife, or die wandering the roads of the new moon-scaped subdivisions. The Budget fails to deliver any relief to this deplorable situation.

Lois levy, Campaign Coordinator of Gecko Environment Council asks "How will Council meet its stated aim of "Connecting people with nature" unless they catch up with conservation purchases after 8 years of failure to acquire even one piece of essential habitat? "

Much less money for conservation: She goes on to ask why the figures provided in the *Overview for Capital Works Program* document show that the amount of money to be spent on Conservation and Environment will steeply decline in the next 12 months. Funding for this area of Council responsibility drops from \$16,023,100m in 2018-2019 to \$4,476,684 in 2019- 2020 with no ready explanation. This does not make sense if Council wants to encourage people to "connect with nature" and can lead to the degradation of conservation areas being used for hard impact recreation.

More funds for cruise terminal: In addition to this parlous situation Gecko notes that \$1.25m has been allocated for further investigation into the cruise terminal on Philip Park, The Spit. The Mayor, has reneged on his promise that he wouldn't spend a cent of ratepayer's money on the cruise terminal. This million dollar grab is despite clear demonstration by the thousands consulted in the Spit Master Plan process that they did not support the loss of Philip Park for a cruise terminal. This outrage is being mirrored in strong public opposition to the potential loss of even more parkland for the Global Tourism Hub.

No climate change strategy or sustainability measures: Gecko also notes that there is no mention of a climate change strategy for the city or commitment to sustainability in all aspects of Council oversight such as planning and transport. City of Gold Coast is one of the most vulnerable to sea level rise and extreme weather and heat stress, but this is all ignored in the budget and the climate change strategy which guided the city till 2014 has never been renewed.

Lois said "In a time when biodiversity is in serious decline and climate change continues to threaten our very livelihood this Budget is a great disappointment and demonstrates a lack of responsibility to present and future generations of residents."

Contact : Lois Levy, 0412 724 222 advocate@gecko.org.au