

6. Rural Activities

6.1 Explanation

“Rural Activities” refers to the growing of sugar cane and horticultural crops, livestock production and other agricultural endeavours as well as the use of balance areas of non-urban land for a range of activities best suited to locations removed from the urban fabric.

6.2 Key Issues

The key issues dictating the planning strategy in the Shire’s Rural areas include:

- the fact that primary production is an essential component of Maroochy Shire’s economy;
- the need to preserve a sufficient stock of agricultural and other productive land to support each rural sector;
- the State Government Planning Policy regarding development and conservation of good quality agricultural land, where possible, including where that potential is not currently being realised;
- the realisation that an area of less than 24% of the Shire has been identified as good quality agricultural land for horticulture and sugar cane which is being decreased by the pressure of an expanding population and the impact of non-rural development;
- the acceptance that some good quality agricultural land will be lost to urban activities because of the impracticality in many cases of urban areas skirting around contiguous productive land;
- the need to identify potential urban areas and to limit development and lot fragmentation in the shorter term;
- the critical need for appropriate land management, for example, on land within water supply catchments, where stream bank protection or a high standard of water quality is essential and where the potential for soil erosion and landslip is high;
- the contribution of the broad-acre rural character of much of Maroochy Shire to its tourist image and the recognition that some areas may never be used for more intensive rural activity nor are likely to be suitable for closer settlement, yet such areas make a considerable contribution to the visual amenity of an area as low intensity grazing land;
- the need for rural areas to accommodate a range of non-farming activities demanded by urban and rural communities which cannot be reasonably located in urban areas and the need to manage their location and operation to minimise the costs and impacts to the community in terms of infrastructure, image, rural character and extraneous traffic; and

- need to address the effects of the State-controlled road network upon rural residents and rural uses, including visual impacts on traffic noise, dust and vehicle emissions.

6.3 Rural Strategy

The planning strategy comprises the following elements to be employed in the Shire’s rural areas.

6.3.1 Central to the principal strategy is the protection of all good quality agricultural and other productive rural land where it is not required for, or committed to, urban development. The Strategic Plan nominates Agricultural Protection areas to preserve important agricultural land for that purpose. Nominated land is good quality agricultural land in terms of the State Government Planning Policy apart from land determined to be required for other purposes and land which contains vegetation worthy of preservation.

6.3.2 Also of importance is the reasonable protection of land suitable for less intensive agriculture and pastoral pursuits. Such land is appropriate under the ‘Rural or Valued Habitat’ designation and it is accepted that, unlike land in the previous category, interests competing for the use of some of this land may be more important to the Shire than its farming role and provision is made for uses of that type. However, any proposed development should have to demonstrate its suitability to the location and that it will not cause detrimental effects on the environment, the amenity of the locality, the rural landscape or the productivity of a viable farming unit.

6.3.3 It is important that consideration be given to the effect that proposals may have on the character of the Shire’s rural areas. This is an issue which should be taken into account with all applications.

6.3.4 Relevant Planning Area, Precinct and code provisions (in Volumes 3 and 4 of the Planning Scheme) reflect these elements of Council’s rural lands strategy.

6.4 Preferred Dominant Land Uses

6.4.1 Agricultural Protection

Agricultural Protection areas identify good quality agricultural land apart from land determined to be required for other purposes and land which contains vegetation worthy of preservation and significant vegetation as determined by the Turnbull & Olsen Report (1992) or subsequent studies. The principal intention of this identification is to retain the land for agricultural purposes and consequently protect the future viability of agriculture in the Shire. To this end, intensive agricultural activities will be allowed within these designated areas, while uses which contradict

this intention or threaten the agricultural capability will not be supported. The boundaries of the Rural Agricultural Protection areas are based on defining good quality agricultural land and consequently the location may vary to that shown in line with more detailed assessments undertaken in accordance with the State Government Planning Policy guidelines for the Identification of Good Quality Agricultural Land.

6.4.2 Rural or Valued Habitat

The Preferred Dominant Land Use of Rural or Valued Habitat is described at Section 10.0. of this Strategic Plan.

6.4.3 State Forest

The State Forest areas shown on the Strategic Plan Map include land which is reserved for State Forest purposes. The objective of the relevant State Government Department is the sustainable production of forest products within a balanced conservation programme which provides for co-ordinated development and preservation of environmental integrity.

6.5 Objectives and Implementation Measures

6.5.1 To Protect Areas of Good Quality Agricultural Land and Balance Areas for the Production of Sugar Cane, a Wide Range of Horticultural Purposes, Grazing and other Agricultural Purposes in a Manner which Encourages and Maintains the Suitability of those Areas for Land Based Primary Production

The future of the Shire's agricultural production relies on the continued availability of viable units of good quality agricultural land and on the potential to make use of such land which may be currently underutilised. Planning decisions must preserve as much important agricultural land as reasonably possible, even though it may not currently be productive. The Strategic Plan's Agricultural Protection area identifies that land on the basis of Department of Natural Resources land resource information and recommendations. It is recognised that this information may not be sufficiently detailed to adequately determine the effect of an application on a particular parcel of land and therefore the Council may require more detailed information in some instances.

Implementation

(1) On land in nominated Agricultural Protection areas, Council will not support applications for any purposes other than agriculture and rural activities, which may compromise the potential of the land to be used for agriculture, or purposes necessarily ancillary to these uses. It will not support lot reconfiguration

applications which may compromise the efficient operation of these areas for primary production.¹

(2) On land within Rural or Valued Habitat areas, Council will not support applications for development other than agriculture, other productive rural or ancillary uses unless:

- it can be demonstrated that the proposed use is appropriate to the site and would not be likely to undermine the existing use of any adjoining land for productive rural purposes. Council will consider the land resource significance of the site and to that end, may require the applicant to carry out detailed land suitability/capability studies. The above would not apply to land containing valued habitat where the significant vegetation is essentially being retained; and
- the land is within the Permissible Area for Rural Residential and the development proposed is Rural Residential and is justified under Objective 3.8, and in accordance with the desired character statements for the relevant Planning Area and Precinct.

(3) Any agricultural appraisal required by Council will be prepared by an appropriately qualified and experienced professional. If after assessing the information and seeking the advice of the Department of Natural Resources, Council is not satisfied that appropriate protection is being afforded to the rural sector, it may not support the application.

(4) Council encourages the adoption by farmers of land management techniques which prevent any degradation of soil resources or water quality of rivers, streams and water supply reservoirs. Rehabilitation of degraded areas is also encouraged.

6.5.2 To Allow a Range of Activities Suitable for Establishing in Rural Areas

While it is essential that areas of good quality agricultural land be preserved for agriculture, it is recognised that the rural areas which are not agriculturally significant may support a range of non-farming uses which contribute to the Shire's economy, provide essential services to rural areas and satisfy the demands of urban

¹Subdivision of land within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area and Investigation Area must comply with Division 3 of the Regulatory Provisions of the SEQ Regional Plan 2005-2026.

communities for facilities which cannot be satisfactorily accommodated in urban areas. Uses in this category may include cemeteries, kennels, plant nurseries, service stations, tourist facilities and perhaps some forms of commerce or industry.

Management of the location, site planning, scale, traffic generating capability, land management techniques and appearance of these activities is required to minimise the consequent costs to the community of providing and maintaining infrastructure and to minimise the impact of the proposal on amenity, rural character, traffic conditions, the environment and the Shire's image.

Implementation²

- (1) Council will not support any applications for non-agricultural activities on land in nominated Agricultural Protection areas unless it can be demonstrated that there is an overriding need for the proposal in terms of community benefit that outweighs the need to preserve the land for purely agricultural purposes.
- (2) In deciding applications for non-farming uses on land in Rural or Valued Habitat areas, Council will take into account:
 - the intent and desired character of the relevant Planning Area and Precinct;
 - the land resource significance of the site in terms of its outright quality or its contribution to the productivity of adjoining good quality rural land and advice from the Department of Natural Resources in this regard;
 - the proximity of the land to the urban services and infrastructure on which the use may rely or which may be relied upon by its potential patrons; Council is unlikely to support an application where the cost of providing, upgrading or maintaining services or infrastructure, now or in the future, is considered likely to be unreasonably required, having regard to the proposal's community benefit;
 - the need for the proposal to establish in a rural rather than an urban area;
 - the ecological values of the site and the potential impact of the proposed use on those values;
 - the impact of the proposal on the amenity and character of the locality having regard to its character, the proposed site planning, the scale and appearance of buildings and structures,

² The level of assessment for a material change of use may be affected by Division 2 of the Regulatory Provisions of the SEQ Regional Plan. In addition, subdivision of land must comply with Division 3 of the Regulatory Provisions of the SEQ Regional Plan 2005-2026.

landscaping, the vegetation to be retained, its traffic generating capability, land management techniques and its appearance;

- the likely impact of the proposal, or of any development, on the locality's character and on the Shire's image having regard to its visibility from important arterial routes, tourist drives or tourist attractions and the importance of the site and its locality in projecting that character or image;
 - the effect of the proposal on land stability, erosion and impacts on water quality;
 - the effect the proposal may have on the potential productivity or operation efficiency of neighbouring rural pursuits;
 - the potential for the proposal to be compromised by neighbouring rural uses; and
 - any benefits proposed in respect of the revegetation and restoration of degraded land.
- (3) Applications for development which adjoin or are within the near vicinity of land used or likely to be used for agriculture or other commercial rural production shall have regard to the State Government's planning guidelines on separating agricultural and urban land uses'.

6.5.3 To Encourage Development and Land Management Practices which are Environmentally Responsible and Which Contribute to the Rural Amenity of the Area

Poor land management practices or inappropriate land clearing, may cause erosion, be detrimental to the integrity of botanically significant areas, scar visually significant landscapes, compromise agricultural potential or result in unacceptable impacts on downstream land or surface and groundwater.

Implementation

- (1) Council may not support applications for development on land which is slip-prone, steep, ecologically significant, in a highly visible location or in the catchment of significant surface or groundwater aquifers unless it is satisfied that proposed land management practices can address all environmental, visual and downstream concerns.
- (2) In assessing relevant development and reconfiguration of a lot applications, Council will require, where appropriate, that sound land management practices are carried out when development involves clearing, constructing buildings, roads or hard paved areas, using land, carrying out drainage and earthworks.

6.5.4 To Maintain and Preserve the Amenity and Character of Rural Areas

The retention of many of the agricultural activities, including the growing of sugar cane and horticultural crops, grazing as well as the retention of bushland, make a significant and positive contribution to the amenity of the Shire. Such components should be maintained for their contribution to the character, ecological well-being and the tourist industry of the Sunshine Coast region.

Implementation

- (1) In considering applications for development on land in designated Rural or Valued Habitat areas, the Council will have regard to:
 - the implementation criteria of Section 6.0 of this Strategic Plan;
 - the potential for preserving, in their natural state, tracts of land which are significant visual elements of the rural landscape based on the natural vegetation considered significant under the Turnbull & Olsen Report (1992) and subsequent studies;
 - the benefit of dedicating buffers between the proposed development site and roads, rail networks, parks, lookouts, urban areas and other areas frequented by residents, tourists or travellers; and
 - the ecological significance, habitat protection values, identification of endangered and rare species of fauna and flora on the land.
- (2) With respect to applications on land in areas fringing rural towns or between neighbouring rural towns, Council will consider the implications for a primary objective of maintaining the status of each town as a distinctive entity, in community and visual terms.
- (3) Development of new premises along the State controlled road and/or rail networks, and in particular, on sites abutting the Bruce Highway and the Sunshine Motorway, is to recognise the potential impacts and provide means for attenuation of traffic noise emissions and dust, and use building and site design and landscaping to improve visual amenity and minimise those impacts.