



ETHERIDGE SHIRE COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

This document should be read in conjunction with the Etheridge Shire Councils Communications Plan.

1. THE PROGRAM

In 2023 the Queensland Government awarded Etheridge Shire a grant, one of only 14 Shires in Queensland, to become a Sustainable Destination. To enable us to undertake this project we have partnered with Griffith University and EarthCheck Australia.

The Sustainable Destinations Program is a key initiative of the Queensland Government in response to the Towards 2032: Reshaping Queensland's visitor economy to welcome the world (PDF, 18.1MB) report, which identifies sustainability as a key catalyst for change, and forms part of the next long-term Towards Tourism 2032 strategy.

Council has an ongoing partnership with Griffith University, who have been assisting with planning tourism development in the Shire and grant applications. EarthCheck is a new partner, one of two organisations nominated by the Queensland Government for this project.

EarthCheck is the only global Benchmarking and Certification program, in Australia, for sustainable travel and tourism and is recognised and accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

The EarthCheck brand signifies better environmental and social performance, improved community interactions and savings through more efficient use of resources. It provides recognition and promotional support to a global consumer market.

The EarthCheck benchmarking and certification program was developed by the Australian Government's Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC).

2. THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING A SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION

Certification allows the Destination to promote itself as a sustainable destination (or working towards one) providing a marketing advantage that targets the responsible tourist, who wants to ensure their impact on the environment is minimalised, but their visit is contributing to the economy and wellbeing of an area.

BENEFITS OF CERTIFICATION

- A better-operating destination tends to be more efficient and is reported to lead to more engaged and supportive residents and visitors.
- Certification can provide a marketing advantage to certified destinations, as consumers learn to recognise credible certification brands. This in turn can encourage high-yield visitation by offering visitors an easy way of determining where genuine and authentic experiences are found.
- Certification provides visitors and guests with environmentally and socially responsible choices.
- Certification helps governments protect their market niches as sustainable tourism destinations, especially when the credibility of the destination is threatened by greenwashing.

- By channelling economic benefits to communities, certification can help reduce poverty, especially in rural areas.

3. THE EARTHCHECK PROGRAM

EarthCheck provides a set of guidelines which are intended to bring key stakeholders together to achieve a common set of sustainability outcomes. A Destination Authority (Council) is recognised as the catalyst to achieving community wide participation in achieving these outcomes through facilitation and communication.

The EarthCheck Program is a tool to allow the Destination to reflect its sustainability progress against specific criteria with a Self-Assessment Checklist for each step. The principal objective of the EarthCheck Program is to facilitate responsible and sustainable **Environmental, Cultural, Social, and Economic (ECSE)** outcomes for Destinations. These outcomes align with the aims and objectives in the Shire Corporate Plan (2021- 2025) and Operational Plan (2022-23) for a sustainable future for the Shire.

The EarthCheck Program provides communities with a framework to set a baseline today, from which they can measure their progress over time against the ECSE outcomes, and to find ways to continuously improve their performance. The Program can be used to underpin a vision for a Destination, as well as focussing on sound policy and action plans to help achieve the vision.

The Program is designed to empower local communities to take ownership of sustainability goals, built on local initiatives, and recognises the benefits of a community working together to achieve sustainable outcomes.

The project will be managed by a Project Coordinator, from Griffith University, who will work closely with Council and representatives from four areas of the Shire: Business; Community; Council; and Environment – The Sustainability Team.

4. HOW WILL COUNCIL COMMUNICATE ABOUT THE PROJECT?

As part of the EarthCheck Certification Program, Council will communicate on a regular basis with the community to provide updates on the progress of the Project. Council will use all available current communication media, including Council Website, the monthly newsletter and Facebook. Council will hold meetings with the community over the 18-month period of the project to discuss progress and ascertain community feedback and ideas.

The Sustainability Team, as the community's voice, will relay updates on the project through their regular networks and invite feedback, which they can pass onto the Project Coordinator.

Council undertakes to use clear and straightforward language to communicate with honesty and integrity, and transparency, allowing the Shires residents to understand the project and receiving feedback.

8. APPROVAL TABLE

Approved by Council		Meeting number and date	
		19 th July 2023	
		Resolution number	
		23.07.15CEO	
Approval by CEO			
Effective date		Review date	
19 th July 2023		1 st July 2026	
Policy Author			
Chief Executive Officer			
Current incumbent			
Ken Timms PSM			
Implementation Officer			
Chief Executive Officer			
Current incumbent		Contact number	Official file no.
Ken Timms PSM		4079 9090	