



Laurene Hull
Secretary
Douglas Shire Sustainability Group
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Dear Laurene,

Thank you for the opportunity to answer the formatted questions for candidates as we head towards the 2020 Douglas Shire elections. I will attempt to respond to your questions as best I can, although for the sake of clarity, I feel many of the questions deserve more than a yes or no answer.

1. Will you plan, budget and commit to a comprehensive Douglas Conservation Strategy that engages the public, identifies priorities, builds capacity and delivers through corporate, operational and land use plans?

Heading into this election, [one of my lead commitments](#) has been, transparency, honesty, openness and inclusiveness, which will continue as the foundation for everything I do if I'm elected mayor. With this in mind, while I appreciate your organisation sees the Conservation Strategy as an honourable and worthy project, and considering our location, rightly so, in the interests of inclusiveness and transparency and accountability, my concern around the strategy is ensuring there has been a full community consultation around it first. My aim is to find the balance between the environment and conservation up against the wide range of work and attention needed across the shire in other areas council is responsible for. Many people I have spoken to feel this way – ratepayers and business owners (or “fund contributors” if you want to consider them in terms of council) also see this as a priority. So, until a full and thorough community consultation has been undertaken, I am unable to commit to the strategy as is. But please be reassured – I understand the importance of conservation and if during that consultation process the majority see this strategy as a priority and wish for it to proceed sooner rather than later, it will be given my full support and enacted appropriately.

2. Will you plan, budget and commit to Council taking the following actions to protect the Great Barrier Reef:
 - a) Pursuing carbon neutrality,

I have given a commitment to ratepayers that I will conduct a full and thorough community consultation around this topic. Following the failed Qantas Green Collar deal and the way it was handled, many locals I speak to are seeking stronger community involvement so as to be allowed to have their say on issues like this and the way council allocates resources. Given some residents of the shire are concerned about carbon neutrality, I would hope they join the consultation process so that their voices are heard as part of these consultations.

b) Improving water quality by working with farmers, reef tour boats, residents and business; and

Yes

c) Promoting Douglas as a Reef Safe destination?

Yes

3. Will you plan, budget and commit to a strategic future focussed plan for conservation of the Daintree Coast, including the following actions:

a) Partnering with the local residents and traditional owners in conservation and management through activation of the Daintree Landowners Kit,

I respect the concept of this, particularly around partnering with locals and traditional owners, who of course should be involved and have a say in issues like this. It could be considered going forward under a new council I lead, but again, only once we reach out to the community to get an understanding of how the shire as a whole feels about it against the wider backdrop of everything else council needs to provide. So, while conservation is important for many of us, policies like the Daintree Landowners Kit will be consulted about, and if a majority of local residents and traditional owners are requesting it, it will be assessed against all other financial obligations council has.

b) Voluntary buyback for conservation for large properties and within the Councils identified conservation zones,

Under the financial restraints I believe council will face in the near future, at present I do not believe that it will be within the budget to assist financially in any land buybacks. However, once we get our economy supercharged again and rates in check, we could then look at this once more through a community consultation process and ensuring that a sustainable population base is maintained in those areas that are currently inhabited.

c) Supporting and Initiating weed and pest programs,

Council will continue a Bio-Security program to assist in reducing weeds and pests.

d) Management of dogs and implementation of current domestic animal policy; and

The new 2020 by-law for Douglas has recently been introduced and accepted by Council. This policy will be enforced.

e) A policy on electricity that promotes conservation rather than promotes development? (DSSG believes upgrading Stand Alone Systems will reduce fossil fuel use and improve living whereas a subsidised grid will be a subsidy for development, will not reduce fossil fuel use and is not what most residents want)

I respectfully disagree with this entire proposition. I have no interest in restricting residents from the opportunity to access mains power. Having myself lived with Stand Alone Systems, I am fully aware of the difficulties involved with them. If, as you say, most residents don't want mains, then they don't have to connect, but those that do want it should not be stopped from having the opportunity to access it, and I will be supporting the micro grid system as I do not consider it to be "promoting development".

4. Will you plan, budget and commit to compliance with the existing urban footprint for Douglas Shire Council (as described in the current land use planning scheme), in all decisions taken on development applications?

The possible ramifications of any expansion to our urban footprint will be seriously considered, but I strongly believe that the future financial sustainability of Douglas will be dire if we do not attempt to stimulate the economy through sensible, considered growth and expansion into areas where cost-effective housing can be established. The environment and indigenous cultural aspects will always be taken into account, of course, but there must be balance, so given I am heading into this election under the banner of transparency, I can clearly state that it is my intention to look at increasing the footprint of Douglas Shire.

5. Will you ensure Douglas Shire Council has a plan to build on its water security strategy, including a clear understanding of the need to limit development on the basis of water availability, acknowledging the impact of climate change on water security?

I will be ensuring that Douglas Shire Council has a strong water security strategy, as per my platform, and through this policy we will calculate how much water will be required to support current and future water usage by locals and businesses, allowing the shire to grow in a sustainable way, by implementing appropriate resources, financial and otherwise in pursuit of this. I feel very strongly about the shire becoming more financially responsible and able to stand on its own feet economically, which ultimately will lead to there being more resources put into a whole range of measures, including the environment, conservation and water. But this can only occur if we have a secure population, without which the shire cannot function. The bottom line is that we do not have a lack of water; rather, we have a lack of storage for use (currently around a 60-day window of issue) and we could be using our water much better, all things I discuss [here](#) as part of my election bid platform on my website.