

State of the environment

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What have we done? What have we learned?

In this chapter we turn our attention to the people of the Gold Coast and their environmental impacts, as experienced in the 21st century. The past is gone. The damage is done. Dramatic change in landforms and ecological relationships are inevitable in building cities. From this we can only learn and do things better in the future. This is why there will never be another Gold Coast like the one we describe in this book.

Having built this city, how are we treating its environment today? In several earlier chapters we presented evidence that shows there is a variety of wildlife, most native to the Gold Coast, in the urban and farm environments that we have created. This is a result of our propensity to plant trees and bushes attractive to native birds, and to maintain aquatic environments suitable for frogs, turtles and fish. Noting this, we remind readers that experts have determined that much more of the city's remaining near-natural environment requires protection. This task will become ever more difficult if the city's population growth is encouraged. If there has to be population growth, much depends on where it occurs and how it is managed.

Fortunately we have maintained some small areas of World Heritage Rainforests within the city boundaries. Small parcels of reasonable-quality land are slowly being purchased by the Gold Coast City Council to configure wildlife corridors. A public tram system (light rail) has been built along the busiest part of the tourist strip with the aim of reducing traffic congestion. Finally, changes in business attitudes, in particular the adoption of corporate social responsibility programs, are indicative of positive environmental care initiatives. Positives are not too difficult to identify.

As we have seen, quite dramatic impacts occurred in building the city. The construction stage is only the beginning of the environmental impact of city building. A city 'up and running' has its own impacts. These are called 'operational impacts' in formal environmental impact assessment terms. This is the focus of this chapter. While we delve into this it is important to keep in mind the following question: what environmental, social and economic impacts are likely to result if the city's population is allowed to increase substantially? Keep in mind there are only half a million plus residents living in the city of the Gold Coast. You will note in the quotes below from Gold Coast City Council spokespeople and council publications that population growth has been identified as a major factor to be managed. It troubles the city's planners and engineers as much as it poses very profound questions for those of us who ponder and research the sustainability of the city.