

A Sustainable Future



Profile: John Moynihan

Building a sustainable future. It has been a topic of voluminous presentations and discussions since we were encouraged in the 1960s 'to turn on, tune in and drop out'. But somehow, in the environmental awakening that has occurred over the past four decades, few suburban residents have a practical understanding of what it means to live an environmentally sustainable existence. Sure, we all know that we have to turn off the tap to save every drop, to take the groceries home in a Hessian bag rather than disposable plastic bags, to recycle rather than replace.

But beyond the routine tasks that are the poster images of the environment movement, what are we doing in our own backyard to ensure long term sustainability within our built environment?

Well, plenty. You just have to know where to look.

Within Queensland there is a growing requirement to demonstrate environmentally sustainable development (ESD) practices – a move driven both by consumer demand and a need to protect the surrounding environment.

The immediate challenge, according to Brisbane-based environmental consultant John Moynihan, is to educate the broader public on the many advantages of ESD – both to the environment and the region's general standard of living.

As a consultant to government and industry bodies including the Housing Industry Association and the Queensland Master Builders' Association, he says sustainable development is undergoing major acceptance in Queensland, where ESD principles are becoming standard practice.



"Both the Queensland Government and the local authorities, particularly in south east Queensland, have embraced this concept and are recognising its advantages," says Mr Moynihan, who was awarded the 'Year of the Built Environment 2004' award by the Queensland Government for his services to the built environment and sustainable outcomes.

"The Gold Coast City Council has put into place a policy that requires all development approvals to demonstrate good environmental and sustainable outcomes. Consequently, sustainable developments are now setting the benchmark for developments of the future."

Mr Moynihan is also personally breaking into new territory, having been appointed as an environmental consultant to a proposed groundbreaking apartment project on the Kirra beachfront that is expected to set new ESD standards for apartment living.

The 12-level project, which is awaiting council approval, has 36 ESD components – an unprecedented level in apartment design anywhere in Australia.

"A lot of developers will focus on just one aspect of the building such as grey water treatment and neglect the other essential elements, which effectively cancels out what they are doing from an ESD perspective," says Mr Moynihan.

"Unfortunately that's like putting a two-litre engine in a two-and-a-half-tonne car."

Cleaner air, increased use of natural light, energy and water conservation, recycling and cleaner building practices are some of the elements that are being incorporated into the project.

"Five years ago it would have been unheard of to employ an environmental consultant to oversee the ESD principles of a project," says Mr Moynihan.

The new environmental focus is being led by a change in thinking by baby boomers

"We are working with the council and developers to maximise the incorporation of ESD principles into projects – looking at practical systems and solutions that provide the desired outcome that is cost effective and people friendly.

"Statutory authorities have recognised the importance and the benefits that this balanced approach has, and are increasingly adopting the 'triple bottom line' accounting paradigm as a strong advocate of sustainable development."

Mr Moynihan says the basic principle of the triple bottom line (TBL) accounting model was created in Europe and is the crucial tool in ensuring that the long term benefits of sustainability are achieved. Basically, the principles of TBL seek to establish a balance between the three key components of any sustainable project – environmental, social, and economic benefits.

“The developers of the Kirra project, for example, have not only committed to this approach, but will also incorporate generic operating systems that will provide an educational, as well as an economic, benefit to the owners and occupiers of the apartments,” says Mr Moynihan.

“This will ultimately lead to a new level of compliance in future developments as councils become more accustomed to these incorporated ESD practices. Furthermore, the developers that have taken on these principles and shifts in consumer thinking are going to be the developers that will have further success in the future.

“They are developers with vision. They’ve proactively gone to council and said ‘this is the future’. These developers genuinely want to see what they bring out of the ground continuing to be contemporary in 15 years time.

“The unique thing about Kirra is it looks at the needs and desires of the occupants and cross references them with council requirements and environmental outcomes to deliver a balanced result.

“It’s about creating things that work in unison to give an overall balance that delivers a much more sustainable and less obtrusive outcome.”

Practical examples of the ESD design features on the proposed Kirra project, to be undertaken by the Gold Coast-based Reward Securities on a site on the corner of Musgrave and Haig streets, include:

- *A two-unit-per-floor design that allows windows to be opened on three sides to provide optimum natural ventilation and sunlight*
- *All units have main living, dining and kitchen areas facing north, protected by deep, usable balconies*
- *Storm water will be harvested and used for landscape irrigation*
- *A 30,000-litre storage tank will be located under the basement ramp. Water collected will then be pumped to a tank at the top of the building and the water gravity-fed for use in toilets and irrigation.*



Sustainability is also the driving development principle in another Gold Coast project – The Ecovillage at Currumbin which is being developed by Landmatters.

The masterplan has provision for 144 eco-homes and a retail and commercial village spread across a 110-hectare property.

The first stage of The Ecovillage is nearing completion, giving interested parties the ability to see a practical example of an ESD-conscious project. The Ecovillage aims to provide a range of ESD outcomes including:

- *Self-sufficiency in energy usage and complete autonomy in water and waste water recycling*
- *The retention of vast areas as open space*
- *The inclusion of edible landscaping and streetscaping, household farming and other productive strategies and land use providing a high degree of on-site food and material self-sufficiency*
- *Preservation of natural landforms and rehabilitation of the degraded site's environmental integrity*
- *Extensive wildlife corridors, negligible vegetation loss and extensive native plant regeneration*
- *Waste recycling strategies including an innovative recycling centre*
- *Comprehensive traffic saving strategies to reduce vehicle impacts on and off site*
- *Initial and ongoing social planning to foster cohesion and a sustainable community*
- *An 'interpretive centre' for providing continuing education of sustainable practices.*

Sales in the first two stages of the project have been brisk, indicating the ready market acceptance for such product.

Mr Moynihan says the new environmental focus in property development is being led by a change in thinking by baby boomers.

There is a genuine desire to ensure ways of minimising further environmental damage

"These people are in an age category and are from a generation that has seen so much change, both good and bad, throughout the world over the last 40 years," says Mr Moynihan.

"In a sense they feel the need to be environmentally conscious. There is a genuine desire by this demographic to ensure ways of minimising further environmental damage on a global scale.

"They feel good about playing their part in implementing environmental practices for the benefit of future generations, even if it's using recycled paper or not using plastic bags when doing the groceries.

"However, they are also a demographic that will not sacrifice the quality of their lifestyle for this to occur – hence the need to implement ESD systems in their homes that are user friendly and practical."

