



Media Release

Embargoed 7 April 2004, 8pm

Esk Shire Council shares grand prize in Healthy Waterways Awards

Esk Shire Council has won a \$5,000 share in grand prize money for its **Toogoolawah Vetiver Grass Wetlands System** which saw the installation of innovative technology developed by Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy to upgrade the existing sewage treatment plant.

Representatives from Esk Shire Council were presented with their trophy and prize for winning the **Sinclair Knight Merz Government Award** at a ceremony held at Brisbane's Customs House last night.

Esk Shire Council shared half of the \$10,000 grand prize with Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee and four other prize-money winners who were honoured for their outstanding contribution to the improvement, protection and management of the waterways and catchments of South East Queensland throughout 2003.

About the 'Toogoolawah Vetiver Grass Wetlands System'

- Instead of undertaking a traditional and costly upgrade of the Toogoolawah sewage treatment plant, Esk Shire Council installed an innovative natural technology recently developed by Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines and Energy.
- The Vetiver Grass Wetlands System treats sewage effluent in two stages. The main treatment involves the effluent passing through a Vetiver Grass wetlands which has been constructed over three hectares in rows, following the contours of the land to allow good contact between the grass and the effluent.
- Vetiver is a grass species which takes up the water and filters it. It has traditionally been used on land but this is the first time that a Vetiver Grass wetland has been used to treat sewage effluent. This innovation has been globally recognised and Esk Shire Council presented a paper on the project at an international conference in China.
- This project relied on simplified technology used in an incredibly innovative way to produce excellent outcomes, including helping to restore the ecosystem in the local creek that feeds into Wivenhoe Dam.
- Esk Shire Council has shown itself to be a local government leader, demonstrating that high-tech and costly upgrades may not be the best solution for every situation. This project has shown how small sewage treatment plants throughout the region could benefit from inexpensive methods for protecting the environment.

The Healthy Waterways Awards recognised six category winners in the following sponsored categories:

- **Sinclair Knight Merz** Government Award
- **Australian Green Development Forum** Community Award
- **Coastal CRC** Research Award
- **SEQ Water** Rural Award
- **Commerce Queensland** Industry Award
- **Cutting Edge** School Award

Healthy Waterways is a unique regional collaboration between State and local government, industry and communities across South East Queensland. The Healthy Waterways Awards program is an annual event to celebrate and recognise the contribution and achievements made by organisations and individuals to the health and sustainability of our waterways, livelihoods and lifestyles.

The Healthy Waterways Vision for the future is: ***“By 2020, our waterways and catchments will be healthy ecosystems supporting the livelihoods and lifestyles of people in South East Queensland. This will be managed through collaboration between community, government and industry.”***

Other category winners in the Healthy Waterways Awards included:

Australian Green Development Forum Community Award + Minister’s Grand Prize (\$5,000)

- Bulimba Creek Catchment Coordinating Committee has undertaken significant works aimed at the short and long-term protection and enhancement of reserves and corridors throughout the Bulimba Creek catchment throughout 2003.

Commerce Queensland Industry Award (\$1,500)

- Australia Meat Holdings Pty Ltd (AMH) is protecting and enhancing the ecological value of the Bremer River ecosystem to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen loads to the river. In conjunction with the Bremer Catchment Association, the AMH *Green Team* planted more than 11,500 trees on the Bremer River site.

Coastal CRC Research Award (\$1,500)

- University of Sunshine Coast and Griffith University (Gold Coast) teamed up to research the effects of *brown water* river plumes on near-shore ecosystems in South East Queensland.

SEQ Water Rural Award (\$1,500)

- The Rocky Creek restoration project, managed by Yugambah Land Enterprises, includes the Traditional Owners of land in the Beaudesert area working with Queensland Parks and Wildlife, local government, neighbours of the creek and technical experts to restore and focus on the long-term management of ancestral homelands.

Cutting Edge School Award (\$1,500)

- *Molly’s Dream* – a cleaner, greener Oxley Creek is a song writing, performance and recording venture, developed by the Oxley Creek Catchment Association that highlights loss of traditional lifestyle, the impact of feral species, urban activities, sandmining and its resultant turbidity and the ways of managing these impacts on Oxley Creek. The program aimed to increase student, parent, teacher and community awareness of catchment issues and empower these groups to become involved with future management of catchments and natural resources.

Healthy Waterways Encouragement Award (Tickets for students to attend the 2004 International Riversymposium)

- *Catch On* was developed in conjunction with seven high schools located within the Pumicestone catchment to create a hands-on learning experience. This project raised students’ awareness of catchment issues and provided an opportunity for young residents of the catchment to voice their concerns about the future of their local area and environment.

For further information, please contact:

Vanessa Kennedy, The Corporate Advantage
Ph (07) 3844 7477
vanessa@thecorporateadvantage.com.au

Verena Mette, Healthy Waterways
Ph (07) 3403 4525
verena.mette@healthywaterways.org