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## Garden backers progressing planning and funding to start works



A visitor centre will be built as one of first stages of the Mossman Botanic Garden project.

The plan to create the Mossman Botanic Garden is gaining momentum with backers of the community-driven project focusing on being shovel ready when funding for construction becomes available.

It is estimated it will cost more than \$50 million to transform the 50-acre site set aside for the project, with Mossman Botanic Garden chairman John Sullivan saying building in stages is the best way to make the grand plan come to life.

A master plan for the project was developed a year ago, and to help progress planning, including a business case and detailed design in a bid to attract government funding, former JCU academic Dr Joshua Russell has been brought on board.

"The plan is to be ready to start construction when the next round of funding becomes available," Mr Sullivan said.

"We want to break the project down so it can be built over time.

"We estimate it will cost about \$20 million to build the first stage, which will include things that are fairly crucial to getting the gardens up and running and attracting visitors.

"Things like a visitor centre, lakes and wetlands through the site, which would give us a product worth visiting."

A lot of work has already been done to get to this stage, with talks being held between backers of the project and the Federal Government about accessing funding through the Building Better Regions Fund for construction.

The plans have also been supported by local government and the State Government.

"We are working closely with government, particularly the Federal Government, to make sure we have the right things in place in terms of planning and modelling so we are ready to go with the next round of funding comes up," he said.

#### **COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIPS KEY**

Mossman Botanic Garden Inc has been set up as a not for profit organisation with membership driving the project towards construction and helping to position the garden as a part of the community.

"Membership is key to our plans at the moment. Members can get involved at the grassroots level to help the whole project grow," he said.

"Once we have the first stage completed any money we make we would put back into the project to complete further stages.

"We will also generate funding ourselves through tourism, as well as research and development and as we develop further we will have a garden to showcase to investors and the community to attract further funding."

There are now about 100 members involved, with Mr Sullivan hoping this can reach more than 500 within the next year.

#### **BENEFITS FOR TNQ**

Ultimately, the plan is to develop a world-class tourism attraction in the heart of Mossman that will complement TNQ's already established markets, transform the community, provide jobs and link in with JCU, the Australian Tropical Herbarium and the Wet Tropics Management Authority to drive research into tropical plants.

"We are not trying to build a rainforest, we are building a botanic gardens," he said.

"This will help us to see how plants perform and grow outside their usual habitat and environment and this may deliver far greater genetic diversity among species of plants and that is very exciting.

"We can use the resources of groups such as JCU to identify the characteristics of different plant species and identify applications for these plants.

"There are also possibilities that the greater diversity in plant species will lead to applications in bush foods, as well as for use in medicinal areas."

### MUST-SEE TOURISM ATTRACTION

When completed, Mr Sullivan said the Mossman gardens would become another must-see destination for visitors to TNQ.

"This is a regional development project, it won't just benefit Mossman but tourism operators from Cairns to the Daintree will be adding it to their itineraries," he said.

"It is not something that would take away from Cairns' world-class Flecker Botanic Garden either, it would add to it."

For more information on the Mossman Botanic Garden, including membership, click [here](http://www.mossmanbotanicgarden.com.au/) (http://www.mossmanbotanicgarden.com.au/).

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