

“ The idea is that one city is able to figure it all out first. In a sustainable city, everyone would offset their carbon. It makes the soil healthier, it makes the crops grow better and uses less nutrient so there is less run-off to the reef ”



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If you'd like to reduce your impact on the environment, but can't commit to solar panels or a hybrid car, a new local company could have an answer. KATHLEEN SKENE reports on Townsville's fledgling carbon offset scheme

If there's anyone in Townsville who can sell people something they can't see, it's Townsville sustainability consultant Guy Lane.

It's been a bumpy take-off, but after five years and two failed attempts, he will launch Townsville's first carbon offset and education scheme, My Clean Sky, today.

The company has partnered with two other Townsville businesses - Escape Travel and Prime Carbon - and hopes to become a national leader in carbon trading.

My Clean Sky allows airline passengers to compensate for greenhouse gases generated by their flight by contributing to carbon-reducing projects through the program.

Mr Lane said until air travel became more environmentally-sustainable, offset programs were the only way to make up for the carbon released by aircraft.

"Carbon offset provides one of the rare opportunities where mums and dads can actually create carbon benefit incrementally," he said.

"You can offset one air trip or two air trips - you don't have to install solar panels or paint your roof white."

"I wanted to focus on air travel, because air travel can easily

double a household's carbon imprint."

Passengers who have booked or returned from a flight use the online calculator to work out their share of the journey's emissions and buy 'carbon credits' according to the distance and other variables.

My Clean Sky buys the credits wholesale from Prime Carbon, a Townsville company which invests in projects aimed at reducing carbon in the atmosphere.

Once a passenger buys a carbon credit, they receive a certificate and the credit is 'retired', meaning it cannot be sold again.

Travellers can choose to offset some or all of their emissions - offsetting a return trip to Brisbane would cost around \$16.

In an industry where customers are effectively buying something they will never see, transparent business practices and a flawless reputation are vital.

"I think there are some offset programs that are quite profitable and I guess that puts an extra onus on the business to double their efforts in communication," Mr Lane said.

There will be a process whereby we'll have our books audited."

Left: Guy Lane launching Townsville's first carbon offset and education scheme

Photography: TROY RODGERS

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Mr Lane said people who purchased carbon offset would receive a coded certificate which could be matched to a specific registered carbon credit.

To offset their share of carbon released on their flight, travellers select the route and My Clean Sky calculates the distance between the airports.

The online calculator then assigns a number of grams of carbon per kilometre and that figure is multiplied to include a 'radiative forcing' index, which relates to heat generated by non-carbon greenhouse gases during the flight.

As a wholesale broker of carbon credits,

Soil sequestration uses plants to capture carbon from the atmosphere and trap it in the ground.

By using less chemical fertilisers and tilling their land less, there is a reduction in erosion and chemical run-off as well as a reduction in carbon released from the soil.

Farmers sign up for five years, with an option to take on another five afterwards and receive a one-off cash payment of up to \$400 per hectare.

Farmers getting on board are from as far afield as Wagga Wagga to the Burdekin.

Wagga wheat farmer Barney Hughes is one. He became involved in the scheme after switching to microbial (bio-organic

"Going bio-organic basically moves you away from synthetic fertilisers which are a major source of soil degradation - it's like Mother Nature with a turbo-charger," he explained.

He sees agriculture moving into a phase which has enormous benefits for the nation and the world. A phase where soil degradation is halted, water polluting run-off is reduced, carbon contained, billions of carbon credits can be generated and recycling on a massive scale is occurring.

"We produce the food, it goes off to our city cousins and comes back as sludge (treated effluent) which not only works, you get your yield, it fixes the soil, it holds

ability. This was one way we could get on board now, before it becomes mandatory, so we can get in early instead of at the end when it's not always the best time to get in."

After years of work Mr Lane is happy to finally give his dream wings.

"I thought if we're going to do this, we need to do it right," he said.

"I'm a storyteller, I like to educate people about sustainability. Carbon offset services are an excellent vector to communicate this stuff to the public.

"There are little pockets of knowledge but lots of missing groups."

He believes he has taken the best aspects of existing programs to incorporate into his formula. The company hopes to contribute to a sustainable city.

"The idea is that one city is able to figure it all out first," Mr Lane said.

"In a sustainable city, everyone would offset their carbon."

"It makes the soil healthier, it makes the crops grow better and uses less nutrient so there is less run-off to the reef."

He described the arrangement as a 'win-win-win' situation.

"We will be looking at putting on more carbon offset products in the future."

While the world waits for advances in fuels and designs to make air travel more environmentally sustainable, Mr Lane said passengers should stand up and clean up their part of the sky.

"In the meantime, you've got to jump on a kerosene canary," he said.

"The only thing you can do is offset your carbon emissions if you want to be responsible for them."

Ms Glades said there was mounting pressure on businesses to act on environmental issues.

"There's been a lot of talk in the media and a lot of hype around big business taking responsibility," she said.

"The awareness that we need to do something is more in the public mind."

"There's always concerns with change, but at the end of the day, it's a change for the better."

Offsetting your journey through My Clean Sky



A client books or flies return from a flight and wants to offset their greenhouse gas emissions



Using the online calculator, the passenger purchases the applicable carbon offset from My Clean Sky and receives a carbon offset certificate



Carbon credits are generated through abatement projects - like those run by Prime Carbon - and My Clean Sky buys the credits



My Clean Sky retires the appropriate number of credits according to the passenger's air travel emissions

Prime Carbon deals with participating landholders and carbon credit retailers like My Clean Sky.

The company currently focuses on soil sequestration, which captures carbon from the atmosphere and holds it in the soil.

Farmers are paid to join the five-year program which requires them to abide by strict guidelines, including the use of biological fertilisers and minimum tillage, or digging, of their land.

recycled waste) fertilisers and seeing how quickly his soil regenerated. He met Prime Carbon principal Ken Bellamy and decided to get involved in the scheme.

He said the current move towards an organic approach with the side benefit of soil sequestration was a massive revolution in agriculture.

"There's been such a groundswell in the past 12 months, it's a revolution. There hasn't been such a huge shift in agriculture since WWII," Mr Hughes said.

water and you're not releasing harmful pollutants. It brings everything back into balance."

Escape Travel managing director Debbie Glades, who will sell the carbon offset over the counter at her four Townsville outlets, said businesses had a responsibility to limit their impact on the environment.

"It's good corporate governance," she said.

"This was an opportunity to align with a local company with local carbon offset