

An aerial photograph of a coastal park. In the foreground, a paved road curves around a grassy area. On the right side of the road stands a small, white, cylindrical lighthouse with a red roof. To the left of the lighthouse is a circular viewing platform with a metal railing and a set of stairs leading up to it. The park is surrounded by dense green trees. In the background, a large bay or harbor is visible, filled with water and several small boats. The bay is surrounded by green hills and mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

A strategy for the region,
by the region

Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy 2024-2029

Forewords



Prof Hurriyet Babacan AM
Chair – RDA Tropical North



We are in a period of change and transition across our region, our nation and globally with post pandemic recovery, efforts towards low carbon emission and focus on resilience. Greater collaborative effort is needed to address the grand challenges and capitalise on existing and new opportunities

ahead of us. Regional Development Australia (RDA) Tropical North is proud to deliver the Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy (TEDS) after regional consultation and using the priorities of the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) and the Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance (TCICA).

This strategic regional plan is a cohesive vision across economic, environmental, social and cultural pillars for the economic needs of our region over the next five years. The Plan identifies key priority development areas and infrastructure projects canvassing land-use perspectives, emerging growth industries and considerations for population growth and liveability to inform government investment decisions.

The region's key economic enablers, challenges and opportunities were identified to determine six goals that would deliver the vision for the Tropical North to be a thriving, smart green economic gateway to Asia and the Pacific.

These goals are:

1. A dynamic economy, adapting to and transitioning, in the face of climate change.
2. Northern Australia's most productive region.
3. A resilient community with an abundant and healthy natural environment.
4. The north's most liveable tropical region.
5. A safe, effective and connected region.
6. A strong collaborative, integrated region.

The TEDS will strongly facilitate economic, social, environmental and cultural outcomes for the Tropical North to meet the Federal Government's vision for a strong, connected, economically prosperous and resilient regional Australia.



Cr Michael Kerr

Chair – FNQ Regional Organisation
of Councils



The Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy (TEDS) is evidence of the strong collaborative partnership that the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) enjoys with RDA Tropical North. It's noteworthy to mention that FNQROC has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with RDA Tropical North, further solidifying this partnership.

Our organisations share the same Federal Minister, the Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories the Hon. Kristy McBain MP, and worked together closely to ensure local government needs remained at the heart of the strategy.

Importantly, the TEDS was developed in parallel to the revised FNQ Regional Plan which considers the goals and issues of the region's councils to ensure regional priorities are aligned and provide consistent information for both levels of government to set budgets for the years ahead.

The alignment of these plans promises to facilitate more effective decision-making across the region. We're encouraged by the inclusion of key projects in the updated FNQ Regional Plan. This includes the Kuranda Range Road, which bridges Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands, and the designated development areas focused on resource recovery, and other economic development precincts in Lakeland in the southern part of Cook Shire and Etheridge Shire. These additions are a result of the combined advocacy efforts of all Councils in the FNQROC region, and RDA Tropical North, marking a significant stride forward.

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ABOUT THE TNQ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-2029

Regional Development Australia (RDA) is a network of 53 Committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and the community to support economic development of their regions. Under their Charter, RDA Committees have an active role in facilitating economic development that harnesses local competitive and comparative advantages, attracts trade and investment and seizes opportunities to create jobs and local procurement. The Charter also includes the development of a Strategic Regional Plan to inform Australian government investment and policy decisions.

RDA Tropical North views holistic economic development through a quadruple-bottom line lens, and as such, incorporates economic, social, environmental and cultural considerations in our service delivery. For this reason, economic development that is sustainable and inclusive is at the heart of our work.

To facilitate the RDA Charter's objective of a Strategic Regional Plan, RDA Tropical North, in collaboration with FNQ Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) and with the Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance (TCICA) as a key regional partner, State government, industry and community, developed the Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy (TEDS). The TEDS is a consolidated 'point-in-time' 5-year economic direction for the Tropical North Queensland region and builds on existing economic drivers and enablers, while addressing emerging industries and barriers to socio-economic development. The TEDS does not replace existing statutory instruments such as Regional Plans, developed by the Queensland government.

Geographically, the TEDS includes 21 Local Government Areas from Cardwell in the south, to Torres Strait Islands in the north, and Croydon to the west.



The TEDS was developed in parallel with the revised Far North Queensland (FNQ) Regional Plan, led by the State Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (DSDILGP). By working in tandem with State and Local governments, the TEDS aligns infrastructure and policy requirements with that of the statutory land use planning instruments for our region.

The primary objectives of the TEDS are to:



Identify and facilitate regional economic development outcomes, investment (public and private), trade, local procurement and jobs for the Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) region.



Inform Australian government place-based investment and policy decisions.



Promote greater regional engagement with Australian government policies, grant programs and research.

The TEDS includes an overview of the region's importance to the Pacific region and Northern Australia, the region's key economic indicators, foundation industries and key growth opportunities, the macro trends shaping the region's future and the infrastructure investment and policy change needed for growth.



What makes the TEDS work?

Engagement with the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC), industry peak bodies, economic development agencies, State government and community ensures that the plan was developed by, and for, our region. A full list of entities involved in the TNQ economic development ecosystem can be found in Appendix A. As part of this ecosystem, RDA Tropical North plays a crucial function in co-ordinating, collaborating, informing, supporting, engaging, facilitating and delivering initiatives that drive sustainable development in line with the TEDS.

By working with DSDILGP and FNQROC the TEDS enhances collaboration across all levels of government ensuring initiatives are aligned and working to common regional goals.

Alignment with the Far North Queensland (FNQ) Regional Plan enables RDA Tropical North and regional stakeholders the ability to influence investment and policy decisions at a Federal level.

Delivery of the TEDS initiatives will align with Action Plans contained in the FNQ Regional Plan.

How will the TEDS be monitored and evaluated?

As the TEDS has been authored in parallel with the DSDILGP review of the FNQ Regional Plan, but delivered prior to this plan's launch, the TEDS will be a live document, that is, it will be continually updated to align with Queensland government and local government priorities.

Review and monitoring of the TEDS will rest with RDA Tropical North governed through an oversight committee. The committee's membership will comprise FNQROC, TCICA, state government representatives, peak industry and economic development bodies and community organizations.

The oversight committee will monitor progress of TEDS activities six-monthly, and review targets with regional stakeholders annually.



THE TEDS AT A GLANCE



Unlocking TNQ's Potential for Sustainable Growth

The Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) region, renowned for its stunning natural beauty and strategic location, presents a wealth of opportunities for economic growth. However, to harness its full potential and ensure sustainable development, a comprehensive Economic Development Strategy has been crafted. This strategy is centred on addressing the key economic drivers of population, participation, and productivity to secure a prosperous future for TNQ.



Population: Attracting Talent and Families

A thriving region requires a growing and diverse population. TNQ seeks to attract young families and couples by offering not only an exceptional lifestyle but also rewarding career prospects. Investments in affordable housing, education, healthcare, and cultural amenities are essential to make TNQ an appealing destination for those seeking quality of life and meaningful work.



Participation: Empowering Youth Engagement

Youth unemployment and disengagement are challenges that demand innovative solutions. TNQ recognizes the need for a coordinated approach to address these issues. Through collaborative efforts involving government, industry, and communities, we aim to provide youth with training, job opportunities, and pathways to meaningful careers. Creating a supportive environment for skills development, retaining local talent, and enhancing workforce participation are key objectives.



Productivity: Boosting Regional Prosperity

Productivity is the cornerstone of economic growth and competitiveness. TNQ acknowledges that declining productivity trends require a thorough examination of their underlying causes. To reverse this trajectory, targeted investments in research and development, skills training, infrastructure, and supportive government policies are essential. Collaboration between industry, government, and academia will foster innovation and knowledge sharing, ultimately driving higher productivity levels across various sectors.

This Economic Development Strategy for TNQ is founded on these core principles. By addressing the facets of population growth, workforce participation, and productivity enhancement, TNQ seeks to unlock its full potential for sustainable economic growth. This strategy recognizes the importance of nurturing our natural environment, supporting local communities, and promoting cultural vitality, ensuring a prosperous and vibrant future for all who call TNQ home.

TNQ is committed to building a region that not only attracts investment and talent but also prioritizes the well-being and livelihoods of its residents. With a focus on inclusivity, sustainability, and collaboration, this strategy sets the course for TNQ's transformation into a thriving and resilient economic powerhouse. Together, we will shape a brighter future for TNQ and its people.



Indigenous led economic development

Significant parts are populated by First Nations peoples, particularly in Cape York (67%) and Torres Strait Islands (92%). There are considerable Native Title considerations and determinations in the TNQ region which presents substantial opportunities for land and sea related economic development for Indigenous communities in line with their aspirations. Economic development of Indigenous communities is multi-faceted and is closely associated with addressing socio-economic gaps and cultural responsiveness of broader society. It is vital that capacity development of Indigenous businesses takes place to lead and deliver economic outcomes that benefit their communities. This can only materialise with culturally appropriate engagement with First Nations people. Engagement with Land Councils, Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate, Indigenous-owned businesses and elected local governments, is key to driving economic development for First Nations people.

TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND TODAY

AT A GLANCE



273,000m²

Land Area 1/5 of Queensland



290,000¹

Total Population



21

Local Governments

DEMOGRAPHICS



15%²

of the population identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander



higher proportion compared to the rest of Queensland



18%³

of the population born overseas

The largest groups of overseas-born residents in Tropical North Queensland come from:

- United Kingdom
- New Zealand
- Papua New Guinea
- Philippines

POPULATION

10%

Gulf, Cape and Torres Area

58%

Cairns Urban Area

32%

Douglas/Cassowary Coast & Tablelands/Mareeba Area

2018

+1.4%⁴

2021



2036

expected to grow to over 358,000⁵

¹ ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ ABS, Regional Population Growth, Aust (3218.0)

⁵ <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/93169>

EMPLOYMENT



CAIRNS EMPLOYMENT REGION
UNEMPLOYMENT SITS AT

3.1%



5.1%



Participation rate

66% = 66.4%
in QLD

*ABS, Labour Force Survey, Aug 23 compared to Aug 22

KEY INDUSTRIES



Tourism



**Agriculture &
Fisheries**



**Healthcare & Social
Services**



Construction



Mining & Resources



Defence



Marine Services



Aviation Services



Business Services



**International
Education**



Arts & Culture

TOURISM



Total domestic and international overnight
tourism expenditure

\$3.53billion

(December 2019)



DOMESTIC EXPENDITURE

\$4.4billion

(December 2022)



60%

above the previous
year & nearly double
pre-pandemic levels



INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

13%

of pre-pandemic expenditure levels, at the
end of 2022

*TTNQ, September-2019_IVS_NVS Fact Sheet

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT (GRP)



Estimated at

\$17billion⁶

(4.4% of gross state product)



25,500 businesses⁷

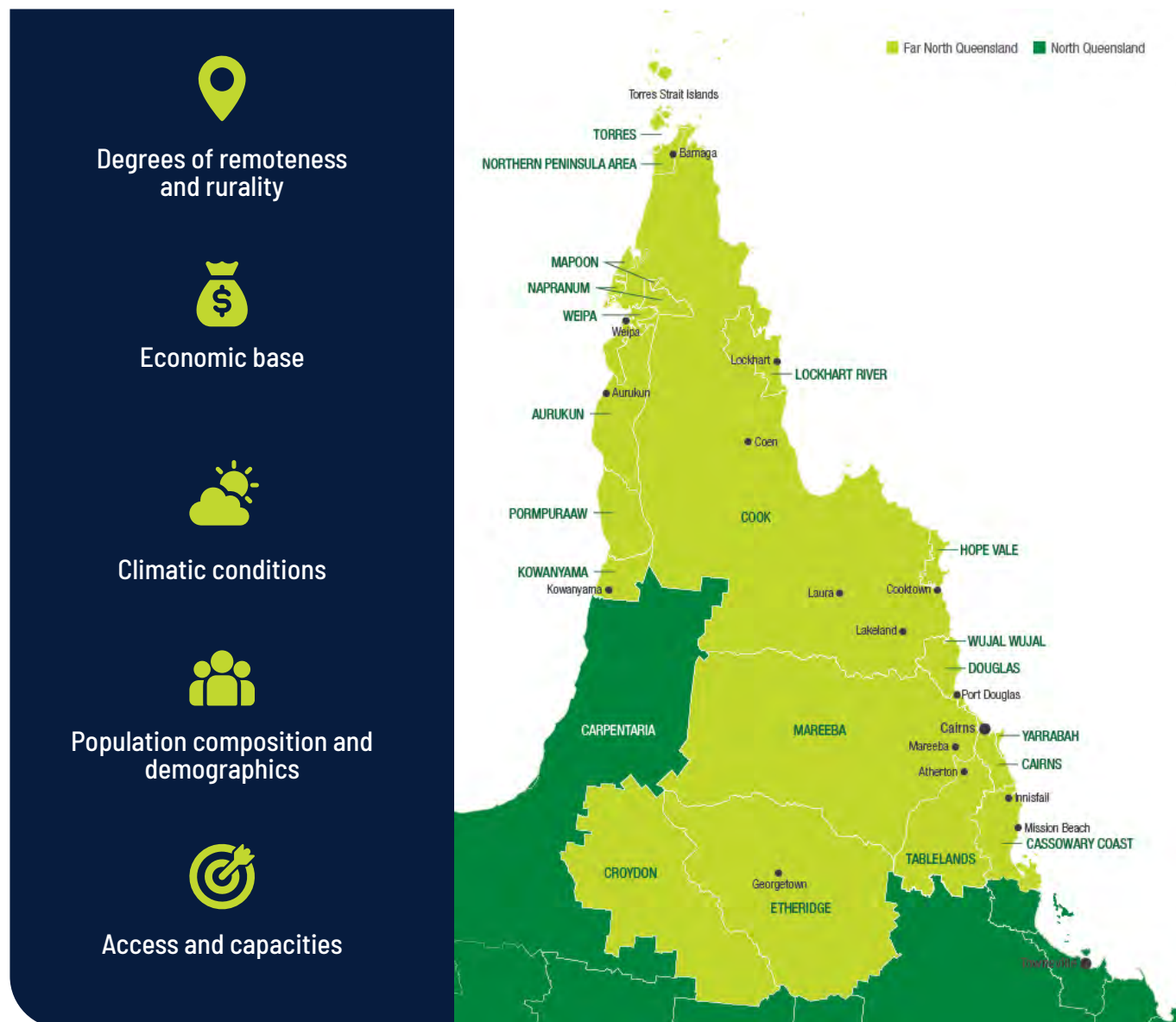
737 medium size companies and 21
large size companies with the bulk
being small business at 97 percent

⁶ NIEIR, 2023

⁷ ABS, AUSSTATS

Our Local Government Areas

An overview of the Local Government Areas in TNQ can be found in Appendix B. In summary, there are 21 local government agencies covering varied shires and municipalities covering diverse:



Our Regional Context

OUR INDO-PACIFIC NEIGHBOURS

Australia, particularly Cairns, has a long-standing trade and investment partnership with the Indo-Pacific region. Cairns' strategic location has spurred growth in marine, aviation, and education. There are strong ties across the Indo-Pacific e.g. links to PNG, Solomon Islands, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Fiji. Significant diaspora communities call TNQ home, with approximately 14% of the region being of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. There are strong historical connections to South Sea Islanders.

Cairns hosts a substantial Fly-In-Fly-Out Pacific labour force, benefiting various industries through the PALM Scheme. A 1992 MOU promotes TNQ as an innovation hub for bilateral trade. Cairns also houses a PNG Consulate.

Tradelinked Cairns-PNG-Pacific Network has fostered business engagement since 2011. A 2022 study revealed significant value from transnational households, around \$20-\$25 million annually. The TNQ region is a notable exporter to the Pacific, with \$51.3 million of goods sent by air, surpassing Townsville. The airport offers extensive facilities and training. The Regional Trade Distribution Centre aims to streamline the supply chain and boost exports of fresh produce, fish, and crustaceans to the Pacific and beyond. Refer to the full Tradelinked report for more details. Figure 1 provides an overview including an overview of TNQ's relationship with PNG, Solomon Islands, and other Pacific Nations.

Figure 1: Tradelinked and EiiC, FNQ Export Capability Profile, January 2022

SWOT Analysis of Survey Responses Cairns and Far North Region

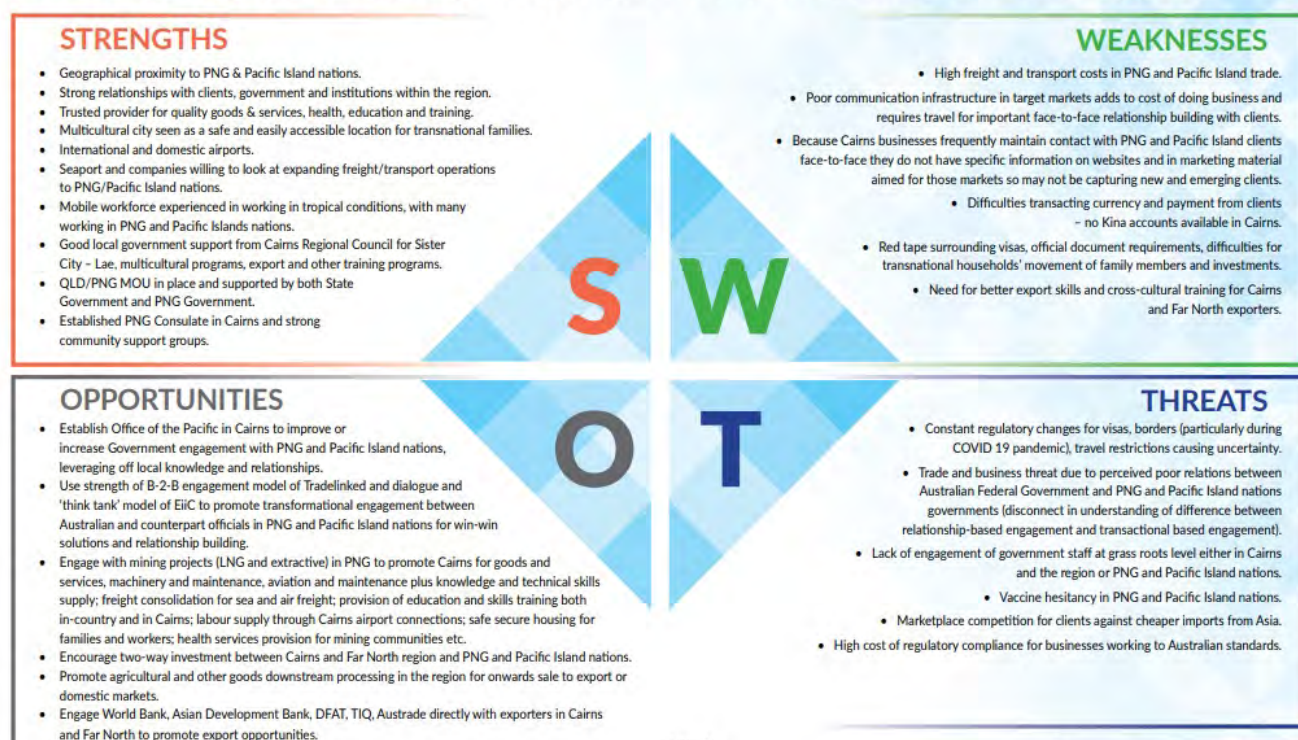


Table 43

tradelinked
CAIRNS - PNG - PACIFIC

OUR NORTHERN IMPORTANCE



Map courtesy of the Office of Northern Australia

The White Paper on Developing Northern Australia has focused greater attention on the development of the 'north'. In this context, the 'north' is defined as all of the Northern Territory and those parts of Queensland and Western Australia that intersect with the Tropic of Capricorn, including the Indian Ocean Territories of Christmas, Cocos and Keeling Islands.

TNQ is a critical part of Northern Australia. Northern Australia has a history of economic ups and downs and infrastructure challenges. Opportunities like international flights, migration, skill development, and investment have been on the agenda since the early 2000s. Initially, regional development focused on agriculture, but it now includes Indigenous opportunities, mining, secure water access, defence, and marine industries.

A report by Cumming Economics shows a major shift in exports. Northern Australia's seaports now account for 65% of Australian sea exports and 57% of total export value. In Queensland, it's even higher at 76%.

Despite a small population (5% of the nation), the north contributes significantly to Australia's GDP. The TNQ region plays a vital role, hosting RAAF Base Scherger, HMAS Cairns, and operations at Cairns Airport, bolstering defence. Marine services are crucial too, leading in marine jobs and supporting the Navy and super yachts, contributing \$160 million to the local economy and 240 jobs.

TNQ is a regional growth leader, with Cairns growing at 1.7%, outpacing other northern Queensland cities and Darwin. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Cummings Economics from Australian Bureau of Statistics

| Estimated Residential Population Growth Northern Australia Major Cities 2021-2022 Major Cities | 2021 | 2022 | Growth | % |
|---|---------|---------|--------|------|
| Townsville LGA | 195,515 | 198,577 | 3,062 | 1.54 |
| Cairns LGA | 169,312 | 172,272 | 2,960 | 1.72 |
| Mackay LGA | 123,183 | 125,162 | 1,979 | 1.58 |
| Rockhampton LGA | 82,904 | 83,723 | 819 | 0.98 |
| Darwin SA4 | 148,801 | 149,582 | 781 | 0.52 |

Cairns' growth stems from external earnings, not mining or government, driven by natural resources, expanding primary industries, and tourism. It's a significant FIFO hub for mining on Groote Eylandt. Historically connected to Asia through various airlines, efforts are needed to restore international routes post-pandemic for passengers and freight.

THE NORTHERN AUSTRALIA WHITE PAPER

The 2015 White Paper on Developing Northern Australia (White Paper) provides a comprehensive framework for unlocking the economic potential of Australia's northern regions. It emphasizes priorities such as infrastructure development, business investment, innovation, education, and Indigenous economic development while preserving the region's unique natural and cultural assets. Collaboration and partnerships among governments, communities, and industry stakeholders are central to achieving these goals. The paper has been periodically updated with budgetary support for implementation.

Key entities resulting from the paper include the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF), Co-operative Research Centre for Northern Australia (CRCNA), and the Office of Northern Australia (ONA). The Northern RDA Alliance (the Alliance), including RDA Tropical North, supports the Australian government and allied stakeholders in realizing the White Paper's objectives.

At the 2023 Federal Budget, the Australian Government committed to a refresh of the White Paper. The refresh has been hailed as an opportunity to take stock of initiatives delivered through the White Paper and align the direction of the developing Northern Australia agenda to current government policies and priorities including those agreed by the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum. The Office of Northern Australia (ONA) commits that:

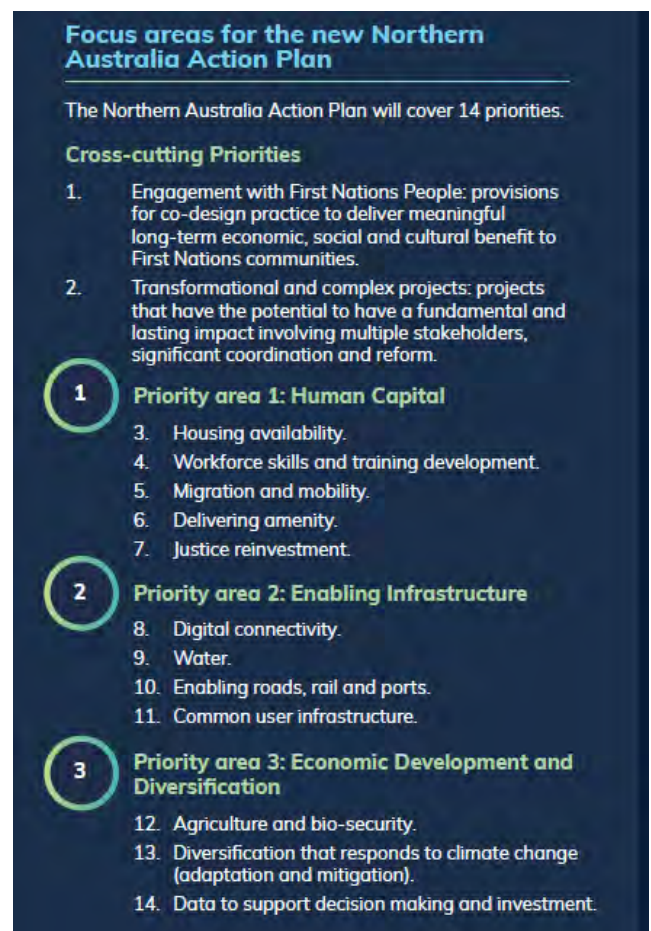


A refresh of the White Paper will address past criticisms by placing First Nations outcomes at the forefront and establishing a genuine partnership approach to meeting First Nations' economic and social aspirations. It will address the recommendations of the Senate Select Committee into the Effectiveness of the Australian Government's Northern Australia agenda. These recommendations included refreshing the Northern Australia agenda in light of new challenges and opportunities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing solutions to address housing supply issues, exploring options to facilitate funding opportunities for First Nations projects, and facilitating strategic planning between all levels of government and other stakeholders to de-risk the investment environment in Northern Australia.

The refresh of the White Paper offers opportunity to revisit the Action Plan for northern Australia, particularly aligned with the Regional Investment Framework adopted by the Australian Government. The Action Plan will cover 14 priorities across three broad themes (see Figure 3). Potential focus areas that will make a big impact include investment in East-West connectivity, enabling infrastructure, supply chain improvements, connectivity to the Indo-Pacific and Indigenous development.

Collaboration with Infrastructure Australia, advocacy to the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum, and focus on connectivity, water security, land tenure, workforce development, Indigenous advancement, and access to health and social services are among the Alliance's priorities. Informing the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum is seen as critical as the body will drive the agenda for Northern Australia.

Figure 3: 14 Priority Areas identified by the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum



Drivers of the Tropical North Queensland Economy

TOURISM



11,811 people

make up the tourism and hospitality workforce in RDA Tropical North.



11%

of the region's total industry workforce.

53.1%

full-time

47.2%

part-time or were away from work

*Economy ID, RDA Tropical North Tourism Workforce

AGRICULTURE & AQUACULTURE



\$4.4billion

gross value (agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries)



Aquaculture is supported by the largest fishing fleet across the north

700

commercial ships

\$121million

contribution to regional economy

*NIEIR, 2023

CONSTRUCTION



TNQ's construction sector generates

11,000 JOBS



\$9.1billion

in value added productivity, the third most productive industry in the region

*NIEIR, 2023

MINING & RESOURCES



Accounting for

12%

of the region's exports



Gold, copper, silica, zinc and bauxite deposits.

However critical minerals, those required to support a move to net zero, are also within the TNQ region including, **Tungsten, Indium, Titanium, Cobalt and Graphite.**

*NIEIR, 2023

HEALTHCARE & SOCIAL SERVICES



The healthcare and social services sector is the biggest employer in the region, totalling some

22,500 jobs

in 2021/22.



17%

of total jobs

*NIEIR, 2023

DEFENCE & MARITIME



HMAS Cairns has

900

navy and civilian personnel and is the home port for

7

naval Vessels



Largest marine services sector in northern Australia

4,600 workforce

across 270 organisations

EDUCATION & RESEARCH



35

secondary schools

6

TAFE campuses

2

world class research universities



International Education contribution in direct expenditure

\$130million⁸



20%⁹

of Queensland's international student numbers

ARTS & CULTURE



\$158million

annual sector output (Cairns)

Supporting some

1,000 jobs &

347 businesses



Region is the only place in Australia where the two national Indigenous cultures in Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander culture, meet.

*NIEIR, 2023

For an overview of the region's total employment numbers by industry and compared to Queensland, see Appendix C (i).

See Appendix C (ii) for a summary of the region's most productive industries.

⁸ Cummings Economics, RDATN Development of Strategic Regional Plan Working Paper, June 2021

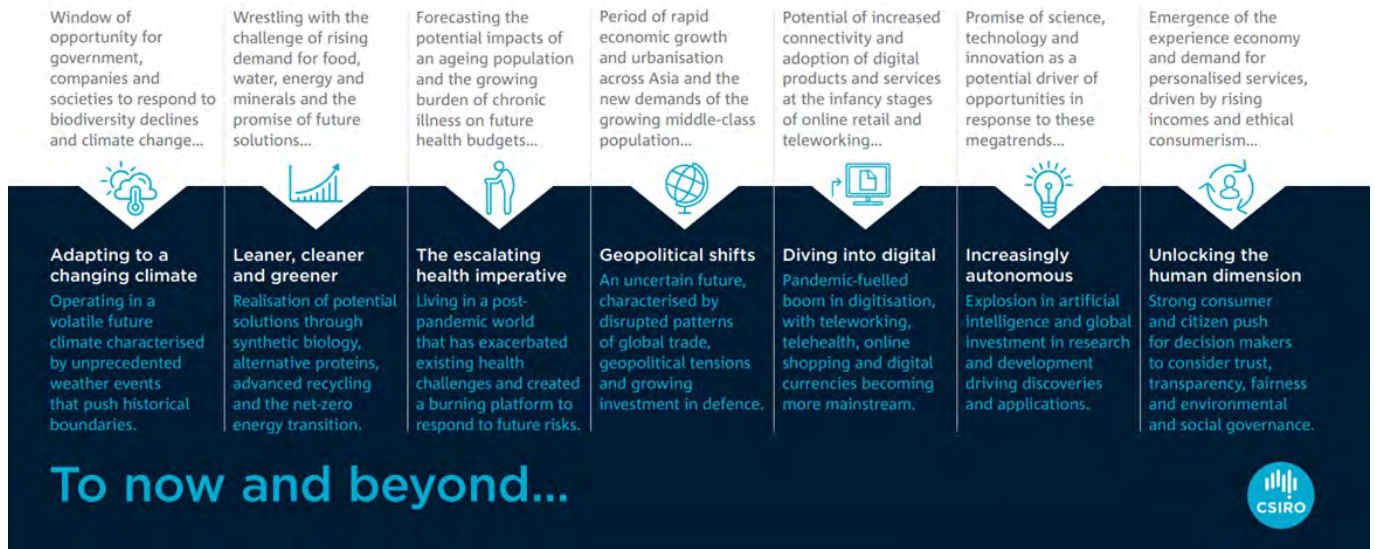
⁹ Study Cairns, Fact Sheet, September 2023

Current Macro Environment

GLOBAL

Our future world; seven global megatrends

From 2012



According to the CSIRO's report *Our Future World (July 2022)*, a number of Megatrends will impact Australia over the coming 10 to 20 years. See Appendix D.

Space: The Final Frontier

A recent global trend has been an acceleration of interest in moving into space with private enterprise entering strongly into the field. *NSR's Satellite Manufacturing & Launch Markets, 13th Edition (SMLM13)* report forecasts over 32,500 missions to be ordered and to launch over the next decade, generating \$598 billion in revenues between 2022-2032. Given the region's northern most location in Australia, particularly Weipa's proximity to the equator (ideal for satellite launch), and the location of other infrastructure such as a deep-water port and Australia's first world, stable Government, there are national and overseas interests exploring a satellite launch opportunity.

Great Barrier Reef

Successive announcements by UNESCO to list the Great Barrier Reef as 'In Danger' citing the impacts of climate change, places the region's tourism industry under great pressure and requires a coordinated response from the region to influence national and international opinion.

NATIONAL

Regional Investment Framework

From an Australian government and affiliated agencies' perspective, the [Regional Investment Framework \(RIF\)](#) will guide federal government investment in the regions.

Appendix E provides a snapshot of the TEDS alignment with the RIF.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS

our investments in regions will have key objectives across all Australian Government

- ✓ Meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, First Nations people.
- ✓ Supporting the transformation to a net zero economy and decarbonisation.
- ✓ Achieving gender equality.



Investing in People

Putting people at the forefront of growth, with local voices influencing decision making.

- ✓ Listening to local voices and partnering with communities.
- ✓ Targeted investment in skills, education, training and local leadership capacity.



Investing in Places

Targeted and place-based investment that enables communities to thrive.

- ✓ Supporting adaptive, accessible, sustainable and liveable regions.
- ✓ Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed.



Investing in Services

Investment in regional services with a focus on improving quality and accessibility.

- ✓ Enhancing connectivity, accessibility and equity of services.
- ✓ Investment including across communications, health, water, and transport.



Investing in Industries and Local Economies

Ensuring regional industries and economies are positioned for sustainable growth.

- ✓ Investment to help activate economic and industry growth.
- ✓ Supporting the conditions needed for industries to diversify and grow.

Moving to More

A [2019 report](#) by the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) highlighted the benefits of a more evenly distributed population. A 2021 campaign research report found that one in five people in major cities considered moving to regional Australia for space, well-being, and affordability. Top reasons to leave cities were avoiding traffic congestion, reducing stress, and lowering the cost of living. Attracting factors included a sense of space, connection with nature, and improved well-being. See [Move to More campaign](#).

A [2020 RAI report](#) confirms that regional Australia had a net inflow of 65,204 people, attracting more than it lost to cities in the five years leading up to 2016. Between 2011 and 2016, over 1.2 million people moved within or to regional Australia, with more moving from cities to regions than the other way around. The trend continued during and after COVID-19, with 35.9% moving from elsewhere in Australia and 3.4% from overseas to TNQ. Of those moving within Australia, 64,045 relocated within RDA Tropical North. This reflects both seasonal workers and permanent movers, supported by a rental vacancy rate of less than one percent.

The Conscious Traveller

Global travellers increasingly prioritize sustainability, seeking low-carbon and community-friendly travel experiences. Over 75% of travellers globally, and even up to half in Southeast Asia, are committed to sustainability. This influences their choices in destination, transportation, accommodation, and experiences. However, recognizing sustainable options can be challenging, presenting an opportunity for Australian tourism operators to educate and raise awareness.

Indigenous tourism is an emerging opportunity for Australia, offering authentic experiences rooted in the land, culture, language, and philosophy of the country's first people. While Australia is not widely known for Indigenous tourism, there's potential to tap into this demand, particularly when paired with appealing experiences that align with Australia's natural environment, wildlife, coastal attractions, and agritourism.

STATE

From a Queensland government perspective, some of the policies, programs and priorities impacting our region include:

Brisbane Olympics 2032

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games are expected to bring \$8.1 billion in benefits to Queensland, including a \$4.6 billion economic boost from tourism and trade and \$3.5 billion in social improvements. TNQ should seize this opportunity to leverage the Games and create a lasting legacy.

In alignment with the 2032 Olympics, [Arts Queensland's Creative Together](#) roadmap aims to prioritize First Nations arts. It will work closely with the Queensland Government's commitment to a redefined relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, emphasizing self-determination, local decision-making, and co-designed initiatives. The focus will be on sharing stories, truth-telling, healing, ethical First Nations arts products, and strengthening cultural experiences and tourism.

Energy Generation Changes

TNQ lacks coal and gas reserves unlike other Queensland regions. To balance the intermittency of wind and solar power, there's interest in enhancing hydroelectricity and utilizing fresh water for hydrogen fuel. The region's abundant plant-based feedstock can be used to produce biofuels, including ethanol, biomethane, and biodiesel from crops like soybeans and algae.

Energy & Jobs Plan

Released in September 2022, the Queensland government's [Energy and Jobs Plan](#) has a renewable energy targets of 50 percent by 2030, 70 percent by 2032 and 80 percent by 2035. The \$4 billion investment aims to:

- Build a clean and competitive energy system for the state economy and industries as a platform for accelerating growth
- Deliver affordable energy for households and businesses and support more rooftop solar and batteries
- Drive better outcomes for workers and communities as partners in the energy transformation.

Queensland New-Industry Development Strategy

The Queensland government's Strategy focuses on developing industries aligned with a decarbonizing world, building on strengths in mining and agriculture. Key commitments include deploying the Queensland Jobs Fund for economic growth, establishing the Local Economic Opportunities Network (LEO) to diversify economies, and promoting responsible industry development. Integrated land use planning, support for regional growth, and industry development services will also be continued.

All Things Green, Circular Economy and Regenerative

Various Queensland strategies and roadmaps aim to address waste management, organics, resource recovery, and sustainability:

- [Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy](#) (2019) focuses on environmental impact reduction, transitioning to a circular economy, and creating economic opportunities.
- [Queensland Organics Strategy 2022-2032](#) aims to improve organic materials management, supported by the Organics Action Plan.
- [Resource recovery roadmap](#) (2019) has priorities like accelerating projects, developing markets, responsive policies, and advancing technologies.
- [Respecting Country strategy](#) guides waste management in First Nation communities, promoting improved outcomes.
- [Energy from Waste \(EfW\) Policy](#) (2021) ensures environmentally and socially responsible development of the EfW sector.
- [Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap](#) (2022-2032) offers opportunities for industry and government collaboration to reduce agriculture emissions.
- [Queensland BioFutures RoadMap](#) aims to make Queensland a hub in biomanufacturing and biorefining, promoting an attractive environment, industry development, and investment opportunities.

REGIONAL

Smart Green Economy

Cairns Regional Council's vision is for Cairns and Far North Queensland to become recognized as a leader in the [Smart Green Economy](#). The strategy aims to align with national, state and international trends and policies towards green investment, innovation and sustainability.

Regional Resource Recovery Plan

The FNQROC Regional Resource Recovery Plan aims to promote sustainable waste management and resource recovery in Far North Queensland. It focuses on reducing waste, increasing recycling, and fostering collaboration among member councils to create an environmentally responsible waste management system.

First Nations Food Production

The [TCICA Food Production Study Opportunities Report](#) highlights the potential benefits of expanding farm production in the Cape, Torres, and Gulf Region. This can be achieved through collaborations, adopting advanced agriculture technology, and investing in new infrastructure. The increased food production is expected to enhance access to fresh produce, lower food costs, improve health outcomes, and create employment opportunities, including training and upskilling. Clustering related opportunities and fostering symbiotic ecosystems can further boost social and economic development in the region. This study is supported by several other studies commissioned by TCICA focusing on economic opportunities for the Cape and Torres regions, tourism development and digital connectivity.

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



An independent organisation, led by voluntary community leaders that brokers, facilitates, connects, coordinates and delivers initiatives on behalf of the TNQ region through the Regional Investment Framework, while disseminating Australian government program information and informing Federal policy and investment decisions.

The RDA Charter (July 2023) includes the need for RDAs to **'assist to bridge the regional development gaps in regions by working with a broad range of stakeholders across sectors'**. RDATN has since inception worked with all three levels of government, industry, community organisations, membership bodies and industry peaks and academia, to address the development needs of the TNQ region.

The economic development ecosystem in our region is vibrant and abundant. The main entities, external to government agencies and departments, have distinct roles, including:



Represents 12 member councils and fosters cooperation and resource sharing between councils and effectively advocates regional positions and priorities (impacting local government), working closely with regional partners and stakeholders.



Consisting of 16 local governing authorities from across Cape York, Torres Strait and the Gulf, TCICA operates as a collaborative partnership of councils to represent the common interests of members within the region including resource sharing and advocacy.



Supports local business members by making it easier to increase their exposure, take advantage of networking opportunities, and access information and services that can increase business efficiency.



As a membership organisation, brings together the industry and community to drive the value of the visitor economy through destination marketing.



A business funded, apolitical advocacy and economic development organisation, that drives regional infrastructure and policy priorities.



Founded in 1997, Study Cairns is the prominent representative entity for the international education and training sector in the Cairns region. Collaborating closely with members and key stakeholders, Study Cairns strives to enhance global recognition of Cairns as a sought-after destination offering a wide array of high-quality study options and fostering a positive student experience within a welcoming and diverse multicultural setting.



The TNQ region's largest local government authority with a dedicated economic development team, supports and drives advocacy and infrastructure priorities for Cairns.



As a membership organisation, facilitates for the Gulf Savannah region, innovative economic and agricultural development projects for the benefit of its stakeholders.

Other relevant organisations include:

- Regional Chambers of Commerce
- Local Tourism Organisations
- Universities and education providers (two universities and TAFE)
- Key industry groups (e.g. sugar, horticulture, tourism, Superyachts)
- Transport: Port, airport
- Natural Resource Management agencies (three in our region)
- Land Councils, Prescribed Body Corporates and other First Nations agencies
- Health and social service providers

RDATN maintains strong relationships and MOUs with FNQROC and TCICA. RDATN facilitate the FNQ CEO Forum for quarterly intelligence sharing and co-chairs the FNQ Trade and Investment Group, focusing on the Regional Investment Framework. RDAs contribute to the Australian government budget and policy positions. RDATN collaborates with regional partners, including councils, chambers of commerce, and community organizations, gathering local data through semi-annual Regional Town Halls.

ECONOMIC ENABLERS

The TNQ region's economic enablers can be summarised as follows:



Infrastructure

TNQ boasts strategic infrastructure, serving northern Australia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Key hubs include Cairns, Thursday Island, Weipa, and the Gulf. Infrastructure includes Cairns International Airport, Cairns Port, deep-water ports, trade centres, industrial zones, and cultural venues. While some roads need improvement, major centres and remote communities have transport options. Digital connectivity covers fibre, fixed wireless, and satellite, with plans for fibre upgrades. Renewable energy, especially solar and wind power, is growing with government support. Substantial investment in a strategic approach to water security includes water projects like the [Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme](#) and the [Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct](#) which address urban and agricultural needs. Other investments by State and Australian governments include the Tablelands Regional Water Assessment and Cairns water security project. Queensland's Renewable Energy Zone aims to boost renewable development in the FNQ region.



Education and Workforce Development

TNQ boasts two renowned universities (James Cook University and Central Queensland University) and robust vocational training facilities including TAFE, marine training, aviation skills, and more. Plans are underway for the Cairns University Hospital Redevelopment in two phases, aiming to expand healthcare capacity and services, supported by various partners. The region offers a diverse range of public and private schools with industry partnerships. TNQ is also a hub for international education with four English language providers. Workforce North, a group of registered training providers and employment services providers meet regularly to address long-term unemployed in the region.



Industry and Business Clusters

TNQ's robust business community includes Chambers of Commerce and networking groups like Trading Mates, F4BG, and Tradelinked, facilitating information exchange and collaboration. An influential advocacy network supports economic development efforts. Cluster development, dating back 25 years, began with the Cairns Regional Development Corporation (CREDC) to diversify the local economy and enhance export performance. Clusters like TTNQ, Super Yacht Group, and Study Cairns contributed significantly to the region's economy. Emerging clusters encompass hydrogen, [food and agribusiness](#), and [circular economy](#) initiatives.



Innovation and Research

Both JCU and CQU are recognised as research universities. Multiple facilities exist within our universities that drive innovation and research including JCU's Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine (AITHM), Australian Tropical Herbarium, The Ideas Lab, The Cairns Institute and the Indigenous Education and Research Centre, to name a few.



Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses

Launch Y(E)P is a local program that helps entrepreneurs create businesses by partnering with all levels of government and industry. The program also delivers the [Tropical Innovation Festival](#) annually – a week-long event bringing together investors, government, business and industry and community organisations to drive innovation and entrepreneurship in our region.

With over 25,000 businesses of which 97 percent are small business, the region has a strong track record of entrepreneurship, supporting diversification of our local economy.



Healthcare and Social Services

Quality healthcare and social services play a vital role in enhancing well-being in TNQ. The region is served by two Hospital and Health Services, with Cairns Hospital being a Tier 5 public facility catering to a diverse population, including international visitors. Additionally, eight smaller hospitals, 10 primary health centres, and 10 community centres provide healthcare services outside Cairns. Cairns Private Hospital, operated by Ramsay Healthcare, offers specialized services like cardiology, oncology, and orthopaedics.

The Torres and Cape region has three hospitals, a multipurpose health service, and numerous primary and community health centres. Several Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organizations, such as Apunipima and NPA Family and Community Services, operate in Cape York. Other culturally sensitive healthcare providers include Mulungu, Mamu Health Services, Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service, Wuchopperen, Gindaja, and Mookai, focusing on specific areas and populations.

The North Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) collaborates with healthcare providers to achieve health goals in northern Queensland, while the Cairns Alliance of Social Services (CASS) brings together social service providers dealing with housing, homelessness, domestic violence, disabilities, and substance abuse, both within and outside the Cairns SA4 region.

The Department of Housing is working with councils across Queensland to increase and diversify the supply of housing to meet the needs of communities. Through the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025, Local Housing Action Plans are a place-based approach to a defined geographic area, that respond to housing challenges enabling all stakeholders to work together to deliver the identified actions.



Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship

Environmental sustainability is becoming increasingly important, offering opportunities for responsible economic development. In TNQ, several organizations like the Wet Tropics Management Authority, Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Reef Rainforest Research Centre, Terrain Natural Resource Management (NRM), and Cape York NRM are dedicated to environmental stewardship and research in the Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef. Further west, Gulf Savannah NRM collaborates with landholders and Traditional Owners to preserve lands in Etheridge and Croydon Shires.

RDATN conducted a multi-year feasibility study on establishing a plastics recycling industry in TNQ, focusing on commercial and industrial plastics waste. The proposal is viable and could significantly boost plastics recycling rates in the region from 1.9 percent to 17.1 percent, surpassing the national average of 9.4 percent. Cairns Regional Council's Waste Reduction and Recycling Strategy 2018-2027 identifies waste as a potential resource with multiple opportunities for job creation and economic growth. Recent investments in agricultural plastic recycling facilities in Mareeba and potential operations on the Cassowary Coast reflect the strong interest from the resource recovery and recycling sector.

RDATN also released the Composting for a Farming Future report in early 2023 which shows the potential for reduced nitrogen runoff into the Great Barrier Reef catchment, by replacing 60 percent of chemical fertiliser with compost. The report makes recommendations to address the lack of investment in the composting sector.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND IMPEDIMENTS

While the region has many strengths and is the most diverse economically that it has ever been, TNQ is not immune to barriers that provide socio-economic progress, which plague much of northern Australia. In economic development terms, the key drivers of population growth, workforce participation and productivity, are nuanced in TNQ. More broadly, there are more specific issues which need to be addressed to sustainably grow the region.

Population

The TNQ region exhibits a demographic profile characterized by a higher proportion of children (under 18) and a lower proportion of individuals aged 60 or older compared to regional Queensland, as per the ABS Census of Population and Housing 2021. There has been an increase in secondary school-aged children and young workers (aged 25 to 34) since the 2016 census. Although the 50+ age group has also increased in number, their proportion of the total population is lower than in other comparable regional areas.

This demographic skew towards a younger population is favourable for the region's future labour force. However, the challenge lies in attracting and retaining families and young couples, ensuring access to housing, quality schooling, childcare, recreational facilities, and career opportunities to sustain this trend.



higher proportion
of children (under 18)

lower proportion
of individuals aged 60 or older

Participation

Workforce participation in the Cairns region is not dissimilar to the rest of Queensland (65.9 compared to 66.5 for Queensland)¹⁰. Of concern however is the rate of disengagement by 15- to 24-year-olds – either disengaged with employment or education (14.8 percent in the TNQ compared to 10.6 percent in regional Queensland)¹¹. This correlates with the percentage of people on job seeker income support payments (9.6 percent Cairns compared to 5.9 percent Queensland)¹² and the youth unemployment rate of 8.2 percent¹³. Participation rates are noticeably lower in Indigenous communities across the region. The challenge for TNQ is to leverage the latent talent of our youth and provide education pathways and learning models, with guaranteed jobs at the end.



65.9%

workforce participation



14.8%

rate of disengagement



9.6%

people on job seeker income
support payments

¹⁰ ABS, Labour Force Survey, June 2023

¹¹ ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021

¹² Department of Social Services, Job Seeker and Youth Allowance (other payment recipients), June 2023

¹³ ABS, Labour Force Survey, June 2023

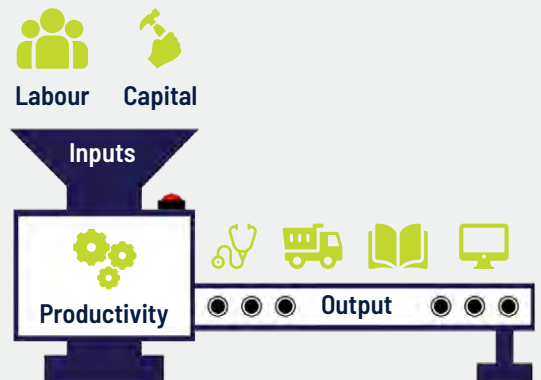
Productivity

From a national productivity perspective, productivity growth has been on a long-term slowing trend, averaging 1.1 percent annual growth in labour productivity in the 10 years to 2020 (and was the slowest in 60 years)¹⁴. The 2022 World Competitiveness Yearbook ranked Australia 41 out of 63 countries (dropping from number 20) for workplace productivity¹⁵.

In TNQ, electricity, gas, water and waste services had the highest productivity by industry, generating \$334,361 per worker in 2021/22¹⁶. In 2021/22, when compared to Queensland, total worker productivity for the region was \$104,879 (compared to Queensland at \$122,025) and \$4,079 less than 2016/17 figures¹⁷.

The inherent challenge for the TNQ region will be to embrace new technologies, foster innovation, ensure a well-educated and skilled workforce and all other aspects of productivity, to lift productivity rates well into the future.

Labour Productivity



¹⁴ <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/our-productivity-problem-may-not-be-as-bad-as-it-looks-20230706-p5dm6h.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.ceda.com.au/NewsAndResources/Opinion/Economy/Why-Australia-critically-needs-a-productivity-push#:~:text=The%20news%20on%20this%20front,in%20terms%20of%20workplace%20productivity.>

¹⁶ NIEIR, 2022

¹⁷ Ibid



Infrastructure for Connecting Our Region

The TNQ region, one of Australia's largest and geographically dispersed areas, faces unique challenges due to its remoteness and scattered communities and industries. Cairns, a major regional hub, has experienced centralization tendencies resulting in the loss of logistical services. To ensure regional development, it is essential to re-establish transport routes and hubs, including efficient corridors to the Tablelands/Mareeba area.

The competitiveness and sustainability of the agricultural sector in TNQ are closely tied to freight costs and supply chain efficiency. Logistics can account for a significant portion of farm-gate costs, making improved supply chains, proximity to processing centres and export ports, and access to wide-bodied aircraft, crucial for agricultural growth and fresh produce distribution.

While the region is broadly connected to the national electricity grid, upgrades to the electricity network infrastructure to connect renewable energy developments to the National Energy Market are needed. In addition, the region's remote communities cannot continue to rely on diesel generators for power – micro-grid and other solutions are needed to bolster liveability, reduce carbon emissions, and expand economic opportunities.

Challenges of digital connectivity limit opportunities for economic development and is a factor in attraction of population and workforce. Infrastructure challenges present as last mile connectivity issues, slow speeds, unaffordable packages, black spots for mobile connectivity limit business, tourism, education and training and liveability options in many parts of TNQ.

The recent Australian government announcement to shift the infrastructure contribution arrangement with States and Territories from an 80:20 split to a 50:50 ratio is likely to have significant implications for the TNQ region. While the change may signal a more equitable sharing of financial responsibilities between the federal government and the states, it could impact the funding available for crucial infrastructure projects in the region. The region's leaders and stakeholders may need to reassess their infrastructure plans and seek alternative sources of funding to ensure continued growth and development in the face of this change.

To diversify the region's economy and bolster traditional industries, there is a need for focused investment in port, defence, and transport infrastructure, as well as improved digital connectivity. These efforts will address supply chain

issues, especially for the Tablelands/Mareeba, Cape York, and Torres Strait Islands, while also supporting population growth and economic productivity objectives. Through the TEDS, a regional infrastructure package is sought in collaboration with State and Federal governments and can be found in Regional Outcome 5.1.

Climate Adaptation and the Environment

The TNQ region is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, with threats including coral bleaching, cyclones, droughts, and flooding. Managing global perceptions of these climate change effects on World Heritage sites is crucial.

Communities in Cape York and the Gulf face challenges like irregular wet seasons, droughts, and isolation due to flooding, with some communities being cut off physically and virtually. Improved tracking of cyclones and weather events, coordinated disaster resilience efforts across government levels, and addressing insurance costs are necessary steps. Additionally, safeguarding against biosecurity threats in agriculture is vital.

Consumer preferences are shifting towards sustainability, emphasizing carbon reduction, local produce, ethical sourcing and a net-zero economy. The region should align businesses and institutions with national and global targets. The transition to a net-zero economy also offers opportunities for youth engagement through education and collaboration with environmental organizations.

De-risking Investment

TNQ faces land tenure issues with unresolved Indigenous land claims and complex overlapping tenures. Resolving these is essential to de-risk investments in sectors like mining, agriculture, and tourism. Collaboration between government, Indigenous communities, landholders, and industry is needed for a clear and transparent mechanism.

Environmental laws like the EPBC Act and Vegetation Management Act can lead to delays and costs for developers. A coordinated approach involving governments, project proponents, and environmental bodies is necessary to assess developmental approvals in a bioregional context.

The Sustainable Ports Development Act 2015 has impacted the region by requiring capital works dredging onshore, affecting the deepening of Cairns port, and hindering the creation of new ports on Cape York. Addressing these challenges is vital to investment de-risking in TNQ.

Water Access and Security

TNQ is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, has twice the national annual rainfall and 26 percent of Australia's runoff, yet we have not constructed a water storage facility in 70 years. While the region has a high rainfall environment, the lack of investment in new water infrastructure, primarily due to the highly complex policy environment, has resulted in rural/remote communities facing significant water security and consumptive water quality issues. Our agricultural productivity will also be significantly constrained if new sources of water are not established.

By addressing this infrastructure barrier, it will support the business case for roads, ports and airport upgrades, due to increased demand through agricultural and other industry outputs, while also supporting the formation of allied small businesses to support increased industry production.

Transitioning Weipa's Economy

Integral to the entire Cape York Peninsula, Torres Strait and Gulf regions, Weipa is a key economic driver for the TNQ region. Weipa Town Authority (WTA) is governed through the Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation Pty Limited Agreement Act 1957 (Qld) (Comalco Act) and is therefore not governed through the Local Government Act (Qld). This excludes WTA from accessing local government grant funding available through the DSDILGP. Rio Tinto, who operate multiple bauxite mines in the Weipa vicinity (originally opened by Comalco), are due to close the East Weipa mine in 2024 and Andoom mine in 2027. This will have ramifications for the 4,000 strong population of this mining town. Weipa has the potential to be a major regional centre with a hub for recycling and waste, defence, space (satellite and rocket launches) and agriculture.

Land and Sea Livelihoods

While we value the wilderness of TNQ, it is critical that sustainable approaches are taken to ensure livelihoods for Traditional Owners. Purely regulatory approaches to securing these values, however, have restricted opportunities for livelihoods in Indigenous communities. We need entirely new approaches to securing the property rights for Traditional Owners and economic development, strengthening the governance of Traditional Owner institutions and the creation of an effective ecosystem services economy to lift Indigenous workforce participation rates.

Export Challenges

TNQ has strong relationships with PNG and the Indo-Pacific region however there is need to boost knowledge in export processes, cultural understanding and simplify visa and permit requirements. There is a need to take a 'relational' approach to doing business with the Pacific region and a need to improve accessibility through appropriate infrastructure development.

“

The Cape cannot continue to carry the social and environmental conscience of the State.



Cr Peter Scott
Mayor Cook Shire Council

The move by the aviation industry to slim-bodied aircrafts reduces freight capacity and therefore, the region's ability to maximise trade and export opportunities for our agricultural and fisheries sectors. A concerted effort is needed to elevate the latent demand for fresh produce exports and leverage the Regional Trade Distribution Centre, to find a healthy balance between aviation sector operating models and TNQ export potential.

Workforce

The region requires a comprehensive workforce strategy to address industry needs, considering specialized skills that can be used across sectors. It should be co-designed, multi-year, and place-based, focusing on youth engagement, skills development, talent retention, attitudes toward welfare, and overcoming transport barriers. While workforce planning exists in some sectors, a more regional and cross-sectoral approaches are needed. Skills for new and emerging industries also require attention and a stronger integration between education providers and industry is required.

There's a significant skills mismatch between job vacancies and jobseeker skills, especially among Indigenous youth. Efforts should begin at the primary and secondary school levels to engage disengaged youth and provide alternative learning methods. Additionally, coordination is needed to ensure apprentices can complete skilling programs.

To retain local talent, more locally available tertiary courses and increased Commonwealth-supported places for universities are necessary. Long-term unemployment challenges should be addressed through collaborative solutions that incentivize employment.

Inadequate public transport, especially for trade-based job seekers, is hindering training and employment opportunities. Improving transport services for satellite towns like Mareeba, Innisfail, Yarrabah, Port Douglas, and Atherton is essential to enhance workforce participation.

Liveability Constraints



HOUSING

Housing shortages, especially in tourist areas like Cairns and Port Douglas, are problematic due to the prevalence of short-term stay accommodations. Affordability issues, both for rent and purchase, hinder workforce attraction and retention. Regional planning processes should enable residential development without compromising agricultural land.

Overcrowding, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, worsens with remoteness. Finding solutions for land tenure and social housing is crucial to address overcrowding among Indigenous Australians.

The lack of student accommodation is a barrier to international education, as many accommodations were converted during COVID-19. Cairns, a significant edutourism destination, requires a comprehensive plan to meet the growing demand for student accommodation and homestay options.



COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

With its growing population TNQ must provide new essential community and recreational facilities to attract and retain families, couples, and single people to the region. While the region has many 'jewels in its crown' including the Cairns Performing Arts Centre, Esplanade Lagoon, multiple bicycle trails and sporting facilities, there is a need to continue to invest in such infrastructure to ensure a viable workforce into the future.

A key case in point is Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council's Six Pillar Strategy to advancement. Social infrastructure is seen as key enabling infrastructure and a precursor to meet the goals of other pillars – it creates pride in the community and from this pride, other aspects that drive economic growth will follow.



MOVEMENT OF GOODS

The Biosecurity Act 2015 (Commonwealth) and Biosecurity Act 2014 (Qld) are contributing to challenges in the movement of goods from the Torres Strait Islands, south to the Australian mainland. As an example, abandoned vehicles are unable to be moved to salvage yards in Cairns for scrapping, and Seaswift vessels are returning empty, due to crossing from one biosecurity zone to another. This is increasing the cost of freight and limiting recycling opportunities.



HEALTHCARE, SOCIAL SERVICES AND REMOTE SERVICE DELIVERY

In TNQ, there's a need to strengthen social and human services sectors, focusing on enabling infrastructure, place-based training, and remote service delivery. Collaboration among government departments is essential to address housing challenges in remote communities, enabling a consistent local workforce instead of relying on FIFO workers.

The lack of vocational training qualifications in remote areas calls for embedding supervisors within communities, offering cadetships and traineeships, and revising compliance-related barriers. Cannibalization of workers between the aged care and NDIS sectors highlights the need for long-term, place-based training and exploring alternative care models for small populations.

To address healthcare workforce issues, it's crucial to offer Nurse Practitioner and Rural Generalist training in Cairns, promoting regional retention and supporting the Cairns University Hospital Redevelopment project.

Opportunities

Several opportunities exist for the TNQ region over the next five (5) years. These can be found in greater detail in Appendix F. TNQ has several strategies to leverage its strengths and foster collaboration:

Indo-Pacific Relationships: Capitalize on Cairns' strengths and the Regional Trade Distribution Centre to establish it as an international gateway to the Indo-Pacific. Strengthen exchanges with the Indo-Pacific by creating an 'Office of the Pacific' in Cairns, focusing on sports investment and facility upgrades for rugby, tennis, hockey, and swimming.

Northern Australia Collaboration: TNQ, Northern Territory, and Kimberley regions aim to improve First Nations workforce participation, enterprise startups, healthcare, education, and income standards. Collaboration with northern-focused agencies like ONA, CRCNA, NAIF, and Infrastructure Australia is vital. Developing East West connectivity and addressing enabling infrastructure challenges will enable provide significant opportunities across TNQ.

Promising Sectors

- Net Zero and Environmental Markets (Renewable Energy, Composting, Hydrogen, Aviation Fuels, Plastics Recycling, Environmental Markets)
- Indigenous Cultural Experiences
- Film and Entertainment Industry
- Food and Beverage Production
- Aviation and Maritime MRO
- Ship Building/Boat Building
- International Education
- Defence and Aerospace

Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program (rPPP): The Australian Government's rPPP encourages transformative investments in regional areas, emphasizing unity, economic growth, and community service. It promotes partnerships between governments and communities to create regional precincts that address local needs and align with the region's vision.



REGIONAL VISION

The thriving, diverse and sustainable powerhouse of Northern Australia, linking the nation to the Indo- Pacific.



TRANSFORMATIONAL GOALS



Goal 1: A dynamic economy, adapting to 21st century challenges, and transitioning in the face of climate change

Renewable Energy in TNQ

TNQ is a leader in renewable energy usage, with 74% of its energy coming from renewables thanks to abundant sunlight and wind resources. Initiatives like the Far North Queensland Renewable Energy Zone (FNQREZ) and the Energy and Jobs Plan aim to enhance construction, advanced manufacturing, and electricity generation, exemplified by projects like the Kaban Green Power Hub. Future developments in renewable energy must prioritize community well-being and environmental sustainability.

Hydrogen, Green Energy Transition, and Sustainable Aviation

TNQ's economy is shifting towards sustainability and renewable energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve carbon neutrality. Collaborations with Hydrogen Queensland (H2Q) are exploring green hydrogen adoption in the region, considering infrastructure, regulations, skills development, and Indigenous involvement. Hydro power projects may emerge from initiatives like the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme, Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct, and Koombooloomba Hydro. TNQ is also becoming a hub for sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production, capitalizing on its climate, resources, and proximity to aviation hubs, contributing to global emission reduction efforts.

Composting Sector and Sustainable Agriculture

TNQ recognizes the potential of its composting industry, particularly in reducing reliance on chemical fertilizers and enhancing environmental sustainability. By replacing a significant portion of chemical fertilizers with compost, the region can benefit both environmentally and economically. The global concentration of fertilizer production and exports highlights the need for TNQ to develop its composting sector for food security and economic diversification.

Plastics Recycling

Federal, State, and regional governments, along with the Cairns Regional Council, are committed to advancing a circular economy in TNQ by exploring plastic recycling options. A 2020 feasibility study conducted through RDATN revealed that only about 2% of TNQ's plastic was currently recycled, but it concluded that investing in recycling infrastructure is economically viable and beneficial to the community. In 2021, a comprehensive business case assessed the market's potential for a solution, showing an estimated Internal Rate of Return (IRR) of around 14% for private sector investment. The demand for recycled plastics is strong, driven by market dynamics and government initiatives like an export ban on unprocessed plastics and increased funding for domestic recycling.

Environmental Markets

TNQ sees opportunities in environmental markets, such as carbon and reef credits, including emerging concepts like Cassowary Credits. The region already sequesters carbon through agriculture and fire management, offering job opportunities for First Nations people. TNQ aims to attract investment into its World Heritage-listed areas, generating income for local communities and supporting environmental conservation. Achieving these goals relies on collaboration among government, communities, businesses, and stakeholders to ensure sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation.

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)

ESG investing, focused on environmental, social, and governance factors, has gained global momentum, driven by increased awareness of businesses' impact on society and the environment. Sustainable investment assets reached \$35.3 trillion globally in 2020, accounting for 36% of total assets under management. Europe leads in sustainable investing with \$17.6 trillion, while the US saw a 42% growth to \$17.1 trillion in sustainable assets. The trend is expected to continue growing, with 85% of individual investors and 95% of millennials expressing interest in sustainable investing. TNQ should assess its ESG contribution to attract ESG-based investments and position itself as a "smart green powerhouse" in Australia.

1.1. Regional Outcome – Achieve Net Zero Targets

Achieve net zero and decarbonization targets set by governments.



Regional Pathways

- 1.1.1. Leverage Cairns Regional Council's Smart Green Economy project (TNQ Region-focused) through regional collaboration and develop a TNQ Clean Energy Transition Strategy
- 1.1.2. Regional collaboration in delivery of the FNQREZ
- 1.1.3. Explore opportunities for hydrogen conversion (and generation) in the region
- 1.1.4. Support development of SAF feedstock sector within the region
- 1.1.5. Regional collaboration on establishment of a plastics recycling industry in TNQ
- 1.1.6. Progress recommendations from the RDATN Composting for a Farming Future Report



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting the conditions needed for industries to diversify and grow by brokering partnerships and funding, to support development of a Clean Energy Transition Strategy and support environmentally sustainable energy technologies and recycling practices, as presented by regional stakeholders and external investors.
- B. Support the Australian Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) in securing funding for conversion of reef fleet engines to sustainable fuels and/or hydrogen.



I found the data, research and project work RDATN had conducted as part of the FNQ Plastics Recycling Industry Proposal incredibly helpful and invaluable for our application to the Qld Recycling Modernisation Fund. The easily accessible research and data available via the RDATN website was critical, pertinent, and timely. Equally valuable was the continuous support, guidance, and availability of RDATN Board and Staff during the process. RDATN were able to facilitate introductions to other agencies, the wider plastics industry ecosystem and critical networks that will continue to be an asset to the project both now and in the future. The exploration of future industry opportunities, connections and funding options, such as NAIF will be crucial in future decision-making. The opportunities to recycle plastics in the Ag-sector are much larger than initially thought and it is apparent, the demand and availability of stock is high eg. shade cloth, soft plastics, wide variety of farm plastics and consumer plastic. With the rising cost of diesel impacting transport costs, a medium-long-term vision would be to establish satellite collection points throughout the region to facilitate an expansion of services and reach outside of Mareeba to areas including Tully, Innisfail, Townsville and Bowen.



Marc Jackson

Director Enviroplas Recycling

1.2. Regional Outcome – Skilled Workforce for Net Zero Transition

A workforce to support the transition to Net Zero.



Regional Pathways

- 1.2.1. Leverage Regional Australia Institute's Move to More campaign
- 1.2.2. Regional collaboration on alternative youth education pathways
- 1.2.3. Deliver a regional workforce strategy
- 1.2.4. Investigate alternative models for incentivizing employment (to address long-term unemployed job security concerns)



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Targeted investment in skills, education, training and local leadership capacity by partnering with stakeholders in delivery of a regional workforce summit with the aim of understanding 'where to from here' to address future workforce requirements.
- B. Convene relevant roundtables linking industry development, workforce planning and education and training.

1.3. Regional Outcome – ESG Investment

Attract above our market share (per capita) of ESG investment to the region.



Regional Pathways

- 1.3.1. Harness the capacity and capability within First Nations communities to be part of the ESG revolution
- 1.3.2. Broaden awareness of environmental markets within the region (e.g. attendance at the Global Nature Positive Summit 2024)
- 1.3.3. Develop and implement a region-wide ESG investment strategy
- 1.3.4. Deliver education about the benefits of blockchain technology to track ESG elements within supply chains



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, First Nations people by facilitating a roundtable with First Nations organisations and relevant government departments and agencies, to understand Indigenous aspirations, capacity and capability for involvement in delivering ESG initiatives.
- B. Partnering with NRM bodies, undertake awareness raising opportunities about environmental markets in TNQ through a variety of mechanisms.
- C. Investing in industries by brokering funding, to undertake a pre-feasibility into opportunities for the region's ESG positioning and funding requirements for an ESG investment strategy (including allocation for an industry campaign to raise uptake of blockchain technology and allocation for environmental markets campaign).



Goal 2: Northern Australia's most productive region

Productivity is vital for economic growth, allowing more output with fewer resources, leading to increased wealth and living standards. TNQ's diverse industries each face unique productivity challenges and opportunities. The region has assets for innovation, like the JCU Ideas Lab and FNQ Food Incubator. Factors affecting productivity include remoteness, workforce skills, capital availability, technology access, supply chain challenges and infrastructure development. Policymakers and stakeholders should address barriers to productivity growth through investments in R&D, skills training, infrastructure, and supportive policies. Collaboration between industry, government, and academia is key to fostering innovation and best practices along with utilising various mechanisms to realise areas of economic opportunity.

2.1. Regional Outcome – Increased Productivity

Lift total worker productivity to above the Queensland average.



Regional Pathways

- 2.1.1. Investigate the systemic issues underlying the region's reduction in productivity
- 2.1.2. Refresh and implement the FNQ Innovation Strategy



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Investing in local industries and economies by brokering funds to research the underlying productivity issues in TNQ including worker productivity, impacts of supply chains and business inputs, industry impacts and growth and overall economic contexts and productivity.
- B. Support the refresh and implementation of the FNQ Innovation Strategy.



2.2. Regional Outcome – Priority Development Areas

Sustainable and resilient sites of economic development that drive sustainable population growth, contribution to Gross Regional Product and enhanced social services.



Regional Pathways

- 2.2.1. Establishment of sites that provide significant economic opportunity using appropriate delivery models and mechanisms (eg. State's land use planning instruments), noting that realization of these economic areas will require multiple parties and state and local governments working together over a period of time

Masterplan implementation

- Yarrabah (for Australia's largest Indigenous community)

Industry Innovation Precincts

- Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct (link to Weipa)
- Cairns University Hospital Re-development
- TNQ Resource Recovery and Recycling Precinct
- General Aviation Precinct

Potential Hub and Spoke model (or other appropriate models)

- Cape York Innovation Precinct (Weipa, Mapoon, Aurukun, Northern Peninsula Area, Napranum) (to address East Weipa mine closure and positioning of various economic diversification initiatives)
- Cooktown Knowledge Precinct (Cooktown, Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal)
- Cairns as the hub with Mareeba/Tablelands, Cassowary Coast and Mossman as the spokes (net zero targets)

Priority Agricultural Areas

- Lakeland (Cook Shire)
- Etheridge Shire (Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct)

- 2.2.2. Regional collaboration to co-design the DSDILGP's FNQ Regional Plan (statutory land use plan)

- 2.2.3. Maintain a 'watching brief' on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) Insurance Monitoring reports for the Cyclone Reinsurance Pool-related insurance premiums, and if premiums have not reduced to CPI-adjusted pre-2011 (Cyclone Yasi) rates, advocate for changes to the Pool's architecture

- 2.2.4. Regional advocacy on access to reliable water for economic and livability purposes

- 2.2.5. Regional collaboration to advocate for resolution of existing land tenure challenges to de-risk investment (e.g. flexible use of leasehold tenures)

- 2.2.6. Positioning of the region to pilot bio-regional development approvals processes to de-risk investment

- 2.2.7. Regional advocacy to the State government for investment in the State Development Area, to enable the area to be developed (ie trunk infrastructure)



Delivery of the Yarrabah Masterplan would give a very strategic and evolutionary joint vision for what our community wants for the future. Through a coordinated effort with Council and the two PBCs and Native Title holder groups, it will bring the community along together on this important journey. Although nationally, all First Nations communities require ongoing funding, being the largest First Nations community in Australia, Yarrabah would welcome funding prioritization to support our proactive LGA to facilitate the upgrade of inherited and inadequate infrastructure (housing, water, waste) and to provide better opportunities for our youth and small business (art/culture, CBD/retail, sport/entertainment). We have a strong business case for our Master Plan, but we have a lot of catching up to do, to break the welfare cycle.



Cr Ross Andrews

Mayor Yarrabah
Aboriginal Shire Council



As custodians and traditional owners of Yalanji Country and the land on which the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme is proposed, we express our resolute support of this project that we believe will bring immense potential and benefit to not only our people, but also the wider community of Cook Shire and Cape York.

We firmly stand behind this transformative initiative that offers a remarkable opportunity to change the narrative, encourage self-determination, create employment and foster economic growth. It will enable our people to build a strong, prosperous future and one that facilitates the preservation of our cultural heritage while embracing modern advancements.



Brad Grogan

Chief Executive Officer, Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Targeted and place-based investment that enables communities to thrive by continuing to engage with DSDILGP and regional stakeholders, around inclusion of priority development areas (as outlined in 2.2.1) in the FNQ Regional Plan review.
- B. Lead a strategic approach and advocacy by partnering with communities to identify potential precincts and areas of development (as required by Australian government programs).
- C. Improving water access, and reliability, by facilitating partnerships across governments and private sector to realise the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme and Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct initiatives.



2.3. Regional Outcome – Economically Sustainable Emerging Industries

Economically sustainable emerging industries that embrace innovation at its core, delivering better than industry average productivity (i.e. hydrogen, SAFs/bio-fuels, film production, aerospace, cultural tourism, food and beverage production, ship/boat building, international education, resource recovery and recycling, and environmental markets).



Regional Pathways

- 2.3.1. Form industry clusters and/or innovation precincts to drive investment, research and development
- 2.3.2. Input emerging industry workforce, education and training needs into the regional workforce strategy
- 2.3.3. Regional collaboration on an overarching investment strategy (linked to ESG Investment Strategy)
- 2.3.4. Creating opportunities for access to First Nations environmental market initiatives (and other Indigenous-led economic development)
- 2.3.5. Implementation of the TNQ First Nations Tourism Action Plan led by TTNQ
- 2.3.6. Cross-sector collaboration to drive a strategic partner country/city approach, to build international education numbers



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting the conditions needed for industries to grow and diversify by coordinating regional roundtables to identify industry cluster opportunities and potential precincts.
- B. Investment to help activate economic and industry growth by supporting project proponents in the development of innovation precincts, through partnership brokerage, funding identification and data provision.
- C. Deliver the Regional Arts Services Network (RASN) project to support capacity building of artists as part of the TNQ First Nations Action Plan.
- D. Supporting the conditions needed for industries to grow by working with Study Cairns on an international education student attraction plan, that provides collective benefit for TNQ.



The Mossman CBD to Mossman Gorge Cycleway is another step in completing a cycle network across the Douglas Shire. There's a strong cycling culture in FNQ and this popular track provides residents and tourists a safe route to one of the region's most beautiful locations. The ultimate aim is to make the shire accessible to everyone, whether they are travelling on two wheels or four. Without the Building Better Regions Fund this project would've not have been possible for a small council like ours.



Cr Michael Kerr
Mayor Douglas Shire Council



I feel thoroughly supported by the Regional Arts Services Network Tropical North (RASNTN) team, which includes visits to my home town of Weipa; this support has made a marked difference to my growth as an artist. I have had the ability to access funding opportunities and receive practical advice in the grant process. My successful RADF grant application will enable me to showcase my work in an exhibition, engage with others in a floor talk and provide a workshop in Cooktown and Weipa in 2024. Remote artists would welcome Australian Government investment in the Cape York and Torres Strait art centres, as it would empower all artists in the region. Benefits include artists' ability to showcase their work resulting in economic advantages to artists themselves, but also it would increase tourism, and add value to the wellbeing of the community as a whole.



Lisa Sharf
Weipa-based artist

2.4. Regional Outcome – Better Performing Foundation Industries

Impediments to full industry functionality are removed.



Regional Pathways

- 2.4.1. Build on the Advance Cairns Export 2030 report and secure funding to raise awareness of export opportunities for the agricultural and fisheries sectors, and deliver a demand analysis for use in aviation industry advocacy, to increase the number of wide-bodied aircrafts
- 2.4.2. Delivery of actions related to cycling, hiking and walking trails (for the Conscious Traveller segment) as identified in the TNQ Destination Tourism Plan and TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy to support eco-tourism and First Nations tourism development
- 2.4.3. Re-think the current funding, investment and ownership model for energy generation and transmission to enable energy affordability
- 2.4.4. Collaboration between industry and government to build efficiency in existing port facilities through common user infrastructure (or similar) to negate impacts of the Sustainable Ports Development Act 2015
- 2.4.5. Delivery of a TNQ Regional Water Strategy, linked to a wider northern Australia water strategy that identifies existing water infrastructure, unused water allocations, water efficiency options to secure reliable water for economic development and business resilience



RDATN Next Steps

- E. Supporting the agricultural and fisheries sectors to increase exports through collaboration with Trade and Investment Queensland (TIQ) and the Cairns Airport by facilitating necessary relationships at the Federal government level, if needed.
- F. Working with the Northern RDA Alliance, secure through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum funding to undertake a northern Australia water strategy.



Goal 3: A resilient community with an abundant and healthy natural environment

TNQ is committed to preserving its UNESCO World Heritage-listed wonders, the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics rainforest. Climate change poses significant challenges to these ecosystems. Innovative and collaborative strategies are essential. The region recognizes the interconnectedness of environmental health and community well-being. Biosecurity threats must be managed to protect the agricultural sector while also allowing movement of goods within TNQ. Fisheries face potential threats from Chinese vessels, necessitating stronger border force presence. [Waste management in remote communities](#), such as Cape York and Torres Strait, requires improved infrastructure and funding. Disaster preparedness in the face of natural disasters is crucial for residents, flora and fauna. Gaps in disaster warning infrastructure must be addressed to ensure safety on ground. These efforts aim to ensure regional resilience, environmental sustainability, and community vitality in the face of climate stress.

3.1. Regional Outcome – Retention of the Reef’s Iconic Status

Retention of the Great Barrier Reef’s World Heritage Listing status.



Regional Pathways

- 3.1.1. Coordinated regional advocacy to retain reef health policy and funding and World Heritage Listing status, citing the many initiatives to support reef health and vitality



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting adaptive and sustainable regions by facilitating activities, in collaboration with the wider reef stewardship ecosystem, that improve outcomes for the GBR’s health, while increasing the resilience of our farming and tourism communities and Traditional Owners.
- B. Broker partnerships and funding that bring new investment and technologies, to deliver better environmental and economic outcomes for the GBR (including delivering on the recommendations from the Composting for a Farming Future report).
- C. Support critical initiatives of NRM bodies in TNQ to deliver sustainable resource management solutions.



For both the French Ambassadorial visit and the Migration QLD

Business Investors Showcase, without the critical connection, facilitation and coordination provided by RDA Tropical North, the groups’ introduction to the Tablelands, our industry and regional offerings, simply would not have happened.

For a small Council to have access to such an opportunity, is incredibly valuable. Although trade and investment outcomes may not be immediately tangible, we place high value on the relationship-building, the connection and opportunity to showcase our unique region and the opportunity to be front-of-mind for future investment.



Cr Rod Marti

Mayor Tablelands Regional Council

3.2. Regional Outcome – Climate Adapted Region

A region that is more resilient to a wide range of climate stresses, including drought, cyclones, flooding and bush fires as measured by a continued focus on sub-regional resilience metrics.



Regional Pathways

- 3.2.1. Through coordinated efforts in the emerging Regional Drought Resilience Plans and the extended TNQ Drought Hub, ensure there is regional coordination to drive a consistency of analytical and planning frameworks, strategy, actions and measurement of regional climate resilience
- 3.2.2. Continuation of the existing benchmark of climate adaptation and resilience metrics for ongoing use within TNQ and its sub-regions (Wet Tropics, Gulf Savannah, Cape York and Torres Strait)
- 3.2.3. Funding support for a comprehensive study for the benefits of a Doppler Radar Station in the Croydon/Gulf area



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting sustainable and liveable regions by facilitating sub-regional partnerships and elevating this coordination at a TNQ level.
- B. Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed by supporting Croydon Shire Council to secure funds for a feasibility study/business case for a Doppler Radar Station.
- C. Supporting climate resilience regional planning e.g. regional drought plan implementation through the Cape York and Torres Strait, Wet Tropics and Gulf Savannah plans.
- D. Support the development of climate resilient workforce for the TNQ region.



A Doppler Radar station in Croydon would fill one of the remaining 'black holes' for cyclonic weather warning systems on the mainland. We are trying to get the most accurate weather reading so that people's livelihoods aren't impacted; by erecting the station on one of two nearby sites to the Croydon township, we would protect a 250km diameter footprint, taking in the communities of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, who are greatly impacted during cyclone season nearly every year.



Cr Trevor Pickering
Mayor Croydon Shire Council

3.3. Regional Outcome – Sustainable Water Flows

Maintenance of water quality and quantity for environmental flows, at levels that accommodate a thriving environmental ecosystem and sustainable development.



Regional Pathways

- 3.3.1. Regional advocacy to Federal and State governments to develop regional cooperation of water development planning and associated investment attraction between councils to identify priority and sustainable water development and efficiency investments
- 3.3.2. Maximise industry productivity through increased utilization of existing water allocations and improved water use efficiency



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Collaborate with industry and the State and Australian governments to identify barriers to uptake of water allocations.
- B. Support water related initiatives by key stakeholder groups e.g. regional drought plans, horticulture industry plans.

3.4. Regional Outcome – Strong Biosecurity

A region protected from invasive species, pests and diseases.



Regional Pathways

- 3.4.1. Regional advocacy for the re-establishment of the Coen biosecurity facility
- 3.4.2. Regional advocacy for amendments to the Torres Strait Treaty to increase biosecurity interventions for goods coming from PNG to the Torres Strait
- 3.4.3. Engagement with the State and Federal governments to assess the impact of Biosecurity Acts' provisions, for the movement of goods from the Torres Strait Islands, south



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, First Nations people by facilitating a coordinated voice for re-establishment of the Coen biosecurity facility.

3.5. Regional Outcome – Stronger Fisheries Protection

Faster responses to intercept illegal fishers in the Torres Strait Islands.



Regional Pathways

- 3.6.1. Regional advocacy and collaboration to the Australian government presenting data and evidence to identify quicker responses to protect fish stocks



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Listening to local voices and partnering with communities to facilitate meetings within the Torres Strait and with Federal Border Force agencies

3.6. Regional Outcome – Effective Waste Management for First Nations Communities

The First Nations sustainable waste strategy implemented within TNQ's 12 Indigenous communities.



Regional Pathways

- 3.6.2. Brokerage of funding and prioritization with Queensland government to deliver the waste strategy within TNQ Indigenous communities



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting adaptive, sustainable and liveable regions by supporting TCICA in advocacy efforts.
- B. Supporting the development of waste hubs in Cairns and throughout Cape York Peninsula.



The First Nations Sustainable Waste Strategy will support Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council's objectives to provide high-quality services with the aim to implement environmental management best practice. Our corporate plan outlines specific objectives for achieving environmental sustainability, with a focus on improving waste management integration, enhancing regional waste management cooperation, and strengthening recycling capabilities.

Over the next five years leveraging the First Nations Sustainable Waste Strategy, Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council hopes to establish a sustainable and efficient waste management system that benefits the community in various ways, including employment opportunities, training, and small business growth.



Cr Jason Woibo

Mayor Hope Vale
Aboriginal Shire Council



Goal 4: The north's most liveable region

Liveable communities are essential for a high quality of life, well-being, and productivity. Key elements include affordable housing, education, healthcare, green spaces, necessities, transportation, cultural and recreational activities, and inclusivity. Challenges persist in remote Gulf, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander communities, notably in access to clean drinking water. The Local Fare Scheme subsidizes airfares to remote areas, vital for health, education, and cultural connections. Housing shortages, especially affordable housing, hinder worker attraction and retention, requiring expanded development without harming agriculture. Indigenous communities face overcrowding due to limited investment in social housing and low home ownership, necessitating land tenure and social housing solutions. Collaboration is needed among government departments to address housing and workforce issues, reducing FIFO practices.

Healthcare and social services require strategic support, vocational training accessibility, and reduced cultural and compliance-related barriers. Cannibalization of workers occurs in the aged care and NDIS sectors due to FIFO practices, requiring a long-term, place-based training commitment and alternative care models. Expanding training programs for healthcare professionals in Cairns is necessary. Cultural vitality plays a role in population attraction and retention, fostering unique cultural identities that draw residents, boost tourism, and enhance community belonging. Community infrastructure development, arts spaces, and upgrades in Cape and Torres Strait Islands are essential. Sporting infrastructure, including potential NRL support, contributes to economic and recreational activities. Investment in social infrastructure is crucial for community pride and economic growth, particularly in planning for population growth.



4.1. Regional Outcome – Affordable and Suitable Housing

Homelessness and overcrowding rates below the national average.



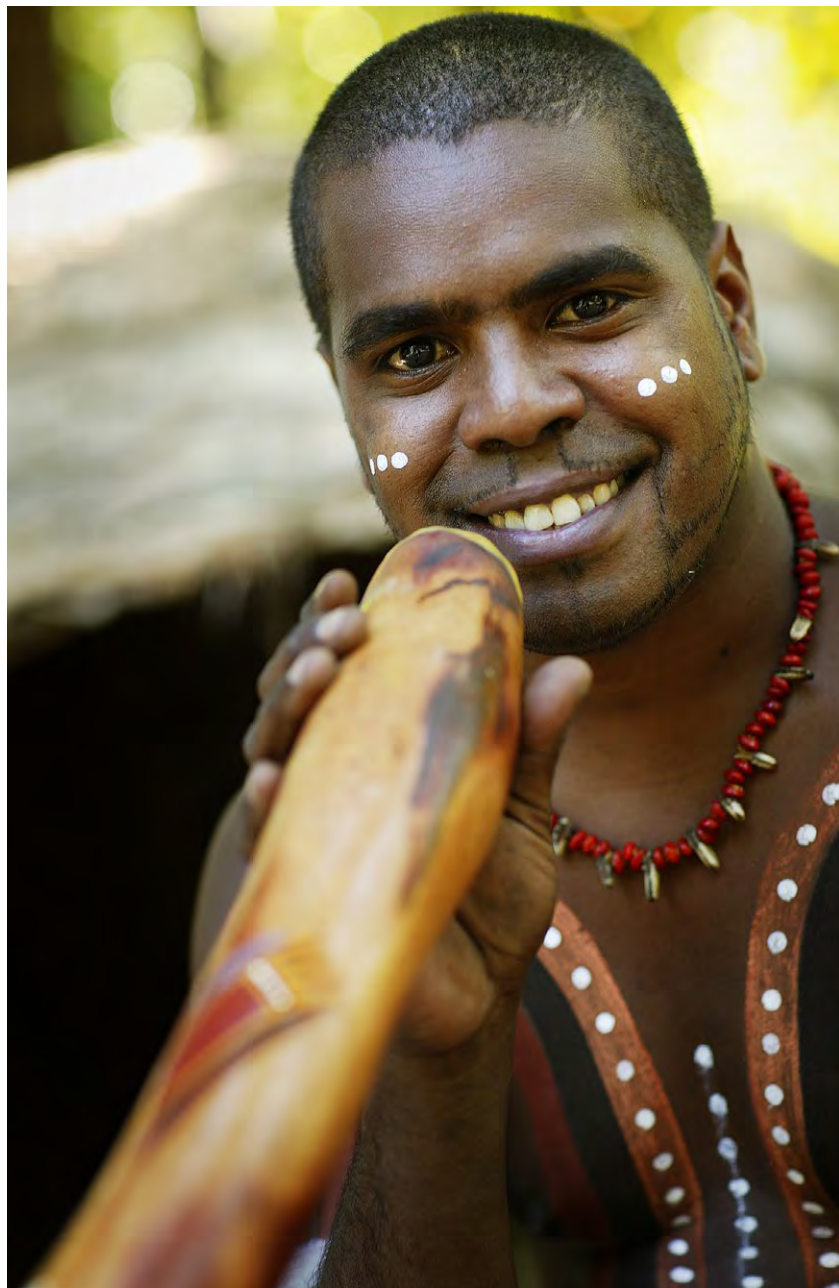
Regional Pathways

- 4.1.1. Regional collaboration on an overarching investment strategy
- 4.1.2. Collaboration and coordination with State government to co-design and implement the Our Place: A First Nations Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2024-2027 to address land tenure challenges, identify land availability, progress planning for new sub-divisions and to enable greater investment in social housing and opportunities for home ownership
- 4.1.3. Investigate alternative models of housing construction to expedite reductions in overcrowding, and to shift homeless people into housing
- 4.1.4. Regional input into the Queensland government's review of the FNQ Regional Plan
- 4.1.5. Build capacity of real estate and housing support services to work with diverse communities
- 4.1.6. Investigate the use of Housing Trusts operated by councils, in remote areas
- 4.1.7. Multi-year funding for specialized case workers to support migrants and refugees navigate housing services
- 4.1.8. Support head leasing options in the private market by boosting public awareness of the model and exploring other strategies to increase access to this option



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting liveable regions by ensuring alignment of the TEDS with the FNQ Regional Plan.
- B. Targeted and place-based investment that enables communities to thrive by facilitating regional Housing Summit(s).
- C. Support the Cairns Housing and Homelessness Network by brokering relationships and funding where needed.



4.2. Regional Outcome – Social Services Transformation

A healthcare and social services eco-system that is well resourced, and meets the needs of the TNQ community.



Regional Pathways

- 4.2.1. Develop strategies to tap into other resources including industry, government and philanthropic agencies to support the sector
- 4.2.2. Drive new funding models to deliver preventative and proactive outcome-based service delivery
- 4.2.3. Develop a regional narrative about the social and community services in TNQ
- 4.2.4. Identify and document key workforce issues and gaps and incorporate into the regional workforce strategy
- 4.2.5. Drive for a significantly devolved and coordinated approach to social and community planning
- 4.2.6. Identify strategic research priority areas for the sector through engagement with stakeholders
- 4.2.7. Build regional coordination and capacity around health services provision



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting adaptive and accessible regions by facilitating a healthcare roundtable to identify the broad spectrum of eco-system needs.
- B. Coordinating multi-stakeholder engagements between the social services sector, residents and academic institutions to identify eco-system research needs.

4.3. Regional Outcome – Cultural Vitality

Increased usage of the region's arts spaces and sports facilities.



Regional Pathways

- 4.3.1. Delivery of the SoARTS Report key findings
- 4.3.2. Secure funding to deliver a staged approach to upgrading arts centres in remote Indigenous communities prior to the Olympics
- 4.3.3. Regional advocacy to support the headquartering of the 18th NRL team in Cairns



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Delivering infrastructure where it is needed by brokering a funding package to support arts centre upgrades.



The support that we received from RDA Tropical North was absolutely vital in ensuring our message was clear and met the grant requirements of the Northern Australia Development Program. The grant provided a 'fit for purpose' facility ensuring that gymnastics programs and the facility broadly was designed with end users in mind, a truly unique, place-based approach. From an economic perspective, being able to increase our membership base meant not only more jobs during construction, but additional coaches and program staff ongoing. We can now attract bigger national and regional events, with smaller regional clubs travelling to Cairns to compete.



Jody Payne

President South Cairns Gymnastics Club

4.4. Regional Outcome – Access to Drinking Water

Every remote community has access to water that meets or exceeds the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.



Regional Pathways

- 4.4.1. Gaining commitment from both the Australian and Queensland governments to adopt the full seven recommendations of the Closing the Water for People and Communities Gap report



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Investment in regional services with a focus on improving quality and accessibility to water by supporting TCICA in its advocacy efforts and elevating prioritizing TNQ remote communities through the RIF and Australian government budgetary cycle.

4.5. Regional Outcome – Enhanced Public Transport

A public transport system that enables increased workforce participation.



Regional Pathways

- 4.5.1. Regional collaboration with and advocacy to, Queensland government to address gaps in bus routes in Cairns and between satellite towns



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting accessible and liveable regions by providing evidence of the public transport gaps, by consulting with employers and job services providers.

4.6. Regional Outcome – Freight Equalisation Strategy

Freight equalization policy in place for the Cape York Peninsula, Torres Strait and Gulf communities.



Regional Pathways

- 4.6.1. Regional advocacy to support TCICA's Freight Equalisation position



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Provide evidence of, and advocate the inequities experienced by remote communities in terms of good pricing to the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum and other northern agencies as part of the White Paper refresh.



Goal 5: A safe, effective and connected region

Addressing infrastructure lags is crucial for TNQ's strategic location and economic opportunities, especially with its proximity to Asia, PNG, and the Pacific. Adequate road, port, airport, and digital infrastructure are needed to support supply chains, tourism, and defence posture. Airstrips in regional and remote areas play a vital role in community access to essential services. Funding for airstrip upgrades under the Regional Aviation Access Program is set to expire in 2023-24.

Inter-modal distribution nodes will enhance supply chain efficiency but securing passenger and freight air routes (with wide-bodied aircrafts) and integrating new aircraft technology are essential. Continued dredging of the Weipa port is vital for defence efforts in the north. Water infrastructure development, including dams, is crucial for economic growth, population increase, and agricultural production.

Improving digital connectivity is necessary, with a focus on regional-scale planning to address blackspot locations and ensure the Universal Service Guarantee is met. The Regional Tech Hub should continue, with increased promotion. A regional investment package is needed to support opportunities in the Pacific and northern Australia and should align with the Developing Northern Australia White Paper.

5.1. Regional Outcome – Infrastructure for Connecting Our Region

Fully funded regional infrastructure package.



Regional Pathways

- 5.1.1. Regional advocacy for \$21million for a Preliminary Evaluation and Business Case for the Cairns to Mareeba/Tablelands access corridor (Kuranda Range Road)
- 5.1.2. Continuation of the Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI) program, and advocate for additional funds to enable the full efficiency of outcomes for High Productivity Vehicles (HPV), including:
 - Burke Developmental Road (3.5km left to seal)
 - Gulf Developmental Road (23-30km left to seal)
 - Kennedy Developmental Road (Hann Highway) (10km left to seal)
 - Ootann Road (72.6km left to seal)
 - Richmond to Croydon Road (connecting Gulf Developmental Road to Flinders Highway)
- 5.1.3. Regional advocacy to seal the remaining 389km of the Savannah Way linking the east coast to the west, with much of it unsealed west of Doomadgee (317km) and 72km unsealed between Normanton and Burketown
- 5.1.4. Secure funding for Stages 3 and 4 of the Cape York Regional Package (Peninsula Developmental Road sealing to Weipa)
- 5.1.5. Regional advocacy for continued support for the Cairns University Hospital Redevelopment and Central Queensland University campus project
- 5.1.6. Regional advocacy for continued support of the Cairns Marine Precinct and Ports North Master Plan (considering the Defence Strategic Review and emerging potential for ship building)
- 5.1.7. Commitment to the continued dredging of Weipa bulk port
- 5.1.8. Commitment to continuation of funding for a further four years, towards the Australian government's Regional Aviation Access Program and quarantine a portion of funds for projects in northern Australia
- 5.1.9. Explore opportunities for inter-modal distribution and logistics nodes across the region
- 5.1.10. Regional advocacy to establish a program similar to the Regional Aviation Access program to support investment in marine access infrastructure to communities serviced by sea
- 5.1.11. Development and implementation of a strategic digital infrastructure investment plan for the Cape York, Torres Strait and Gulf sub-regions



Regional Pathways

- 5.1.12. Compel Telstra through force of legislation to upgrade its infrastructure in Cape York so that it meets acceptable standards of reliability and addresses critical safety issues
- 5.1.13. Regional advocacy for funding to undertake an assessment as to the lost economic value of under-utilised water allocations within the region
- 5.1.14. Regional advocacy to support the findings of the Tablelands Regional Water Assessment, to enable additional water for economic and community purposes
- 5.1.15. Engagement with the National Water Grid Authority and the Queensland government to review the figure used to determine the economic life of dams within Benefit-Cost Ratios, and other return on investment calculations
- 5.1.16. Regional advocacy to include the Lakeland Irrigation Areas Scheme bulk water requirements within the Mitchell Catchment Water Resource Plan review
- 5.1.17. Regional advocacy to continue the Regional Tech Hub and increase awareness of its services to TNQ communities
- 5.1.18. Secure funding to upgrade the electricity network infrastructure from Mareeba to Cooktown via Lakeland from 132kV to 275kV



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed by coordinating collation of evidence and data, to support Australian government investment decisions as part of the budgetary cycle for the TNQ region and more broadly, as part of the east-west connectivity package through the northern RDA Alliance and ONA relationship (White Paper refresh).
- B. Supporting the conditions needed for industries to diversify and grow by brokering funding for Stages 3 and 4 of the Cape York Regional Package.
- C. Investment in regional services with a focus on improving reliability and access to water by brokering funds for a water storage feasibility study.
- D. Continue to support Cook Shire Council and Etheridge Shire Council in their respective irrigation and agricultural precinct projects, through advocacy, investment brokerage and governance services, where needed.
- E. Support TCICA and other stakeholders in advocating for better digital connectivity infrastructure, affordable plans and digital skills development in the TNQ region.



RDA's role is pivotal to the region in terms of economic and social development. The Tropical Economic Development Strategy encompasses the needs of the region and prepares us for the future. The long term view taken by Etheridge Shire Council is that the Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct offers strong economic sustainability across our region. RDA Tropical North's has provided leadership in terms of advocacy and providing support mechanisms in and around the Precinct proposal. The precinct falls within both TEDS and RDA's remit and we look forward to the future stages of our collaboration.



Cr Barry Hughes
Mayor Etheridge Shire Council



Goal 6: A strong collaborative, integrated region

TNQ is focused on achieving devolved governance, involving both decision-making and budgeting, as well as government staffing. The region seeks a gradual but strategic approach to decentralization, particularly in key areas like Transport, Environment & Resource Management, Indigenous Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Trade, Investment, and Development related to PNG, Indonesia, and the South Pacific. This move aims to reduce costs and improve outcomes by having more government functions based in the region.

Voluntary regionalism is crucial, where entities willingly cooperate for mutual benefit, based on shared interests and geographical proximity. The State government's new model of regional engagement has potential, but local government remains essential for community planning and service delivery. TNQ has made progress in voluntary regionalism through organizations like FNQROC and TCICA, but more work is needed to enhance this approach.

The role of the RDA network has been elevated to provide data, inform investments, and support place-based decision-making. Efforts are also required to explore longer-term models for localized governance in the Torres Strait. Strong sub-regional organizations in social, economic development, and natural resource management sectors are needed to enhance capacity and coordination.

6.1. Regional Outcome – Better Local Decision Making

A new devolved decision-making model supported by the devolvement of key agencies.



Regional Pathways

- 6.1.1. Regional advocacy for a North Queensland Coordinator-General based in region, to support decision making for large projects and to coordinate cross-portfolio responses to barriers
- 6.1.2. Assess the feasibility of multi-function government offices, where existing staff are encouraged to relocate to the region for lifestyle or career reasons and work remotely
- 6.1.3. Design and trial the State's proposed new regional engagement mechanisms, combined with more stable investment and support in regional organisations of councils, and key regional organisations in the social, economic development and natural resource management sectors
- 6.1.4. Regional advocacy for the Office of the Pacific to be relocated to the region to support PNG and Indo-Pacific relations



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Listening to local voices and partnering with communities to elevate evidence to inform Australian and State government policies, research and programs, by facilitating various community and industry roundtables.
- B. Work closely with the State/Federal Governments to design and trial a devolved decision-making model, based on the State's new regional engagement /RIF frameworks.
- C. Continued collaboration with northern Australia departments and agencies to elevate local investment opportunities and barriers to development.

“

RDA Tropical North, along with the other three northern Queensland RDAs led a consortium with RACQ, LGAQ, Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs) and other stakeholders, to drive the 10-year multi-billion dollar investment into the Bruce Highway back in 2012. The real benefit of that investment for the Cassowary Coast was lessening the effect of annual flooding events on the Bruce Highway. The flow on benefits meant that supply to larger city centres like Cairns, was instrumental in ensuring food security. This collaborative locally-led investment model became the foundation for the Inland Queensland Roads Action Plan which delivered an additional \$2billion to inland roads. This was important as inland roads provide an extra link, rather than relying on one road only. The model shows that outcomes are always better when decisions are made locally, rather than from Brisbane or Canberra; it is critical to talk to ROCs and the like. The benefits of inland roads are often overlooked, yet they are critical for getting goods to markets in the south. Brisbane and Canberra decision makers wouldn't know of the implications of expanding the Lakeland area for example, if the RDA and ROCs did not provide input. ROCs are a powerful voice with large population bases that cannot be ignored.



Bill Shannon

Mayor Cassowary Coast Regional Council (2008-2016)



6.2. Regional Outcome – Solid Regional Leadership

Local governments and key regional organisations define and implement their communities' strategic priorities identified within strategic plans.



Regional Pathways

- 6.2.1. Regional conversation about State and Federal recognition that Strategic Plans represent the priority directions of communities within Local Government Areas (self-determined), and that joint active implementation is required (financial and resources) to deliver identified priorities 'on ground'
- 6.2.2. Commitment from senior State and Federal agencies, that staff have delivery of Councils' Strategic Plans built into their Key Performance Indicators



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Putting people at the forefront of growth, with local voices influencing decision making by circulating a discussion paper about local government Strategic Plans' recognition.
- B. Lead the development of and advocacy for, capacity building for place-based leadership.
- C. Initiate strategic leadership partnership across key issues with diverse stakeholders.



We need courageous, visionary leadership. The world is moving at such a fast pace; if we're not relevant for tomorrow, then our good intention does not cut the mustard anymore, even with the right information, without courage we will miss the mark. Are we willing to ask the courageous questions? Are we asking questions that sets our whole region up, that has the potential to develop the region? We need to build strong regional partnerships and look at cross sector workforce solutions and ask the questions that we've never asked before.



Fraser Nai

21st Century Leader from the Torres Strait



6.3. Regional Outcome – Better Indo-Pacific Relations

Increased engagement with the Indo-Pacific region including trade and investment, and knowledge transfer for mutual economic and social outcomes.



Regional Pathways

- 6.3.1. Regional collaboration with key northern Australian agencies to leverage their resources (e.g. ONA, NAIF, CRC for Northern Australia, Northern Australia Universities Alliance) to build joint capability to engage with our Indo-Pacific neighbours
- 6.3.2. Long term relational approaches with working with Indo-Pacific countries in the TNQ region.
- 6.3.3. Work towards the establishment of Office of the Pacific in the TNQ region
- 6.3.4. Leverage the Queensland government's Pacific Trade Strategy



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Continued collaboration with northern Australia departments and agencies to elevate institutional and governmental capabilities that support 'soft diplomacy' efforts.
- B. Advocate Indo-Pacific connectivity in the refresh of the White Paper for developing northern Australia.
- C. Work with Northern and Qld RDAs for identifying initiatives for increased exchanges in the Indo-Pacific region.
- D. Support the development of a long term sustainable model of integration of northern Australia and TNQ into the Indo-Pacific region by working with Tradelinked, TIQ and DFAT.



Building on the 50 year flight connection between Cairns and

Papua New Guinea, new direct flights between Cairns and Fiji will facilitate considerable opportunity to connect reliably with the broader Pacific and the strategically significant countries within.

More importantly, the Office of the Pacific would have the advantageous position of being able to leverage trusted regional relationships and networks, long-established by local on-the-ground operators and businesses who work with their Pacific partners on a regular basis.

The greatest opportunity and advantage between Cairns and the Indo-Pacific is the extraordinary trust and friendship that exists between businesses and the value and strength this holds with inter-country relations, security and for socio-political benefit across the Pacific. A secure Pacific is a secure Australia.



Tony Sheehan

*President Tradelinked
Cairns-PNG-Pacific*

ROADMAP

MOBILISATION

Data gathering and secondary research for key advocacy processes and documents (eg. Northern Australia White Paper refresh, FNQ Regional Plan review, NQ RDA Bloc, Federal & State govt budgetary processes, grant rounds)



Pre-feasibility / data / evidence

PROPOSALS - ADVOCACY DOCUMENTS - BUDGET / INQUIRY SUBMISSIONS - DISCUSSION PAPERS



NET ZERO

- Clean Energy Transition Strategy
- rPPP submissions
- AMPTO reef fleet engine conversion support
- Global Nature Positive Summit 2024 Working Group
- ESG Investment Strategy (as part of wider Regional Investment Strategy)



WORKFORCE

- Regional Workforce Summit
- Scoping for Climate Resilient Workforce



PRODUCTIVITY

- Scoping for TNQ Productivity Research
- Industry Cluster Roundtables



WATER

- Support proponent with progressing the Etheridge Agricultural & Irrigation Precinct
- Support Cook Shire Council with progressing the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme
- North Qld Water Strategy
- Northern Australia Water Strategy



TRADE & INVESTMENT

- Study Cairns International Student Attraction Advisory Group
- Co-Chair FNQ Trade & Investment Group
- Support Cairns Airport & Regional Trade Distribution Centre with Export plans



REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

- Industry and government roundtables
- Regional Capability Statement for Pacific engagement



ENVIRONMENT

- Doppler Radar Station
- Coen biosecurity facility reinstatement
- First Nations Sustainable Waste Strategy
- Protect Torres Strait Island fish stocks



LIVEABILITY

- Regional Housing Summit
- Indigenous Arts Centres upgrades
- Inter-township bus routes
- Freight equalisation (Cape, Torres, Gulf)



HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

- Health roundtable
- Scoping for research document (resource aggregation, alternative funding models, regional narrative, workforce issues, devolved approach to social and community services planning)
- Closing the water gap for people and communities report



INFRASTRUCTURE

- Regional Infrastructure Package
- Co-chair Cape York Region Package



FUNDING SOURCED/ CONTINUED COMMITMENT

- Clean Energy Transition Strategy
- rPPP precincts
- AMPTO marine fleet business case
- Regional Investment Strategy and ESG Investment Strategy
- Regional Workforce Strategy
- Alternative Youth Education Pathways pilot
- TNQ Innovation Strategy
- Identifying Blockages to TNQ's Productivity Research
- Etheridge Agricultural & Irrigation Precinct
- Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme
- North Qld Water Strategy
- Northern Australia Water Strategy
- Regional Leadership Capability development
- Trial of Qld govt and local govt joint implementation model
- Compost for a Farming Future recommendations
- Doppler Radar Station
- Coen biosecurity facility
- Cairns Housing & Homelessness Network
- Research for social services sector
- Indigenous Arts Centres upgrade
- Freight Equalisation



IMPLEMENTATION



NET ZERO

- Clean Energy Transition Strategy
- rPPP
- AMPTO reef fleet engine conversion Business Case
- Global Nature Positive Summit 2024 Working Group
- ESG Investment Strategy (as part of wider Regional Investment Strategy)



WORKFORCE

- Regional Workforce Strategy
- Alternative Youth Education pathways
- Regional Arts Services Network delivery



PRODUCTIVITY

- FNQ Innovation Strategy
- Instigation of new industry clusters
- Findings from TNQ Productivity Study



WATER

- Etheridge Agricultural & Irrigation Precinct
- Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme
- North Qld Water Strategy
- Northern Australia Water Strategy



TRADE & INVESTMENT

- International investment attraction & trade plans
- Leverage TIQ Investment Strategy through FNQ Trade & Investment Group



REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

- Submission for North Qld Coordinator General
- Discussion paper to Qld govt re: devolved decision making
- Pilot joint Qld & local govts implementation model



ENVIRONMENT

- Case studies for GBR
- Compost for a Farming Future recommendations progressed
- Regional Drought Resilience Plans delivery
- Reinstatement of Coen biosecurity facility
- Solution to faster border security in Torres Strait (fish stocks)



LIVEABILITY

- Housing report to Qld Govt
- Indigenous Arts Centres upgrades
- New Inter-township bus routes
- Freight Equalisation introduced



HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

- Health workforce needs incorporated into Regional Workforce Strategy
- Deliver report on social services sector



INFRASTRUCTURE

- Construction attached to Regional Infrastructure package
- Stages III and IV of Cape York Region Package

APPENDIX A – TNQ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE

International Airport, numerous regional airports, Cairns Port, Weipa Port, Mourilyan Port, various smaller sea ports, digital connectivity, Regional Trade Distribution Centre, road network, Tinaroo Dam, Cairns Convention Centre and other water storage

FIRST NATIONS LED DEVELOPMENT

Cape York Land Council, North Queensland Land Council, Balkanu, Cape York Partnership, Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance, Local Thriving Communities Program, Qld Indigenous Business Network

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Natural Resource Management agencies (Cape York, Gulf Savannah, Terrain), Wet Tropics Management Authority, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Prescribed Body Corporates, Great Barrier Reef marine fleet operators, Eco-Markets, Green Collar

EDUCATION

James Cook University, Central Queensland University, TAFE (inc Marine Training College), Aviation Skills Training Centres, Regional University Centres, VET providers, Study Cairns, Dept of Education (public and private schools)

INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

Chambers of Commerce, industry peak bodies, Qld govt departments (DTIS, DSDILGP, DRDMW, Arts Qld), Advance Cairns, Qld Indigenous Business Network, Forum for Business Growth network, AusIndustry, nbn

ADVOCACY AND NETWORKING

Advance Cairns, Chambers of Commerce, Tradelinked Cairns-PNG-Pacific, GBR Super Yachts Group, Tourism Tropical North Qld, industry peak bodies, Trading Mates, Hydrogen Qld (H2Q)

SOCIAL SERVICES AND HEALTH

Tier 5 hospital and Tier 4 hospitals, multi-purpose health services and primary health clinics, numerous Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, Cairns Alliance of Social Services, health professionals' networks, Tropical Medicine research

LIVEABILITY

Cairns Performing Arts Centre and numerous arts performance facilities across the region, Indigenous Art Centres, Cairns Housing and Homelessness Network, various property developers, Cairns and District Chinese Assoc and other migrant community groups

WORKFORCE AND SKILLS

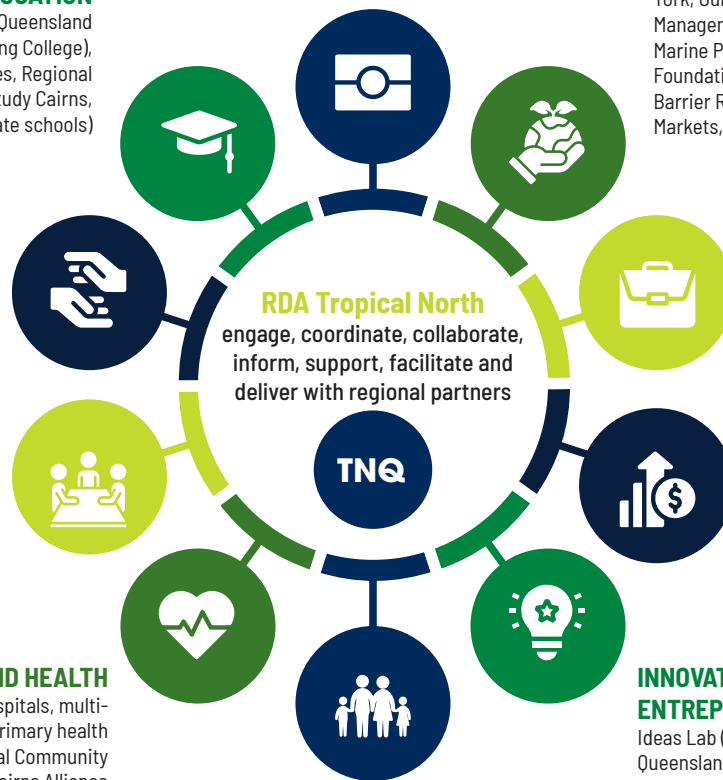
Regional Jobs Committee (Qld), Cairns Employment Facilitator (Federal), various job service providers, recruitment agencies, Designated Area Management Agreement (Cairns Chamber of Commerce), Business and Industry Regional Outreach (BIRO), Migration QLD

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Trade and Investment Qld, FNQ Trade & Investment Group, Regional Trade Distribution Centre, Cairns Regional Council (Investment Strategy), Advance Cairns

INNOVATION, RESEARCH AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Ideas Lab (JCU), The Cairns Institute, Central Queensland University, Launch Y(E)P, Tropical Innovation Festival, Advance Queensland, Dept Tourism, Innovation and Sport, Partner Up QLD, Hydrogen Qld (H2Q)



REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

FNQ Regional Organisation of Councils, Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance, FNQ Regional Leaders Network (previously Regional Managers Coordination Network), Cairns Chamber of Commerce Emerging Leaders Program, Aust Institute of Company Directors scholarships for regional and remote, various Rural Leadership programs, Northern RDA Alliance, North Queensland RDA Bloc, FNQ CEO Forum

APPENDIX B – LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OVERVIEW

The Cairns Region is the largest of the local government areas, with a population of over 167,000 people¹⁸, however the numbers increase significantly due to tourism (approx. 1,200 international visitors daily and 3,100 domestic visitors¹⁹). The region includes the city of Cairns, which is the major hub for tourism in the region, as well as the surrounding suburbs and rural areas. The population of Cairns is diverse, with a mix of Indigenous Australians, people from other parts of Australia, and international visitors.

The Cassowary Coast Region is located to the south of Cairns and includes the towns of Innisfail, Tully, and Cardwell. The region has a population of approximately 30,000 people and is known for its agricultural industry, including sugar cane, bananas, and tropical fruits. The region is home to Mourilyan port which will become the main export facility for livestock, explosives and minerals. The region also has a thriving tourism industry with Mission Beach and numerous islands off the coast.

The Tablelands Regional Council area is located inland from Cairns and includes the towns of Atherton, Malanda, Yungaburra, Mt Garnet and Herberton. The region has a population of around 26,000 people²⁰ and is known for its farming and mining industries. Livestock farming including beef and dairy cattle, is also prominent in the region. Tourism plays an important role in the community with natural attractions such as Lake Eacham, many waterfalls and caves, the Historic Village Herberton and the Atherton Herberton Historic Railway.

The Mareeba Shire Council area is located west of Cairns with a population of approximately 23,000 people²¹. The demographics of the Mareeba Shire are diverse, with a mix of Indigenous Australians, Europeans, and other ethnic groups making up the population. The main industries in Mareeba are agriculture and tourism. The area is known for its production of coffee, mangoes, avocados, and other tropical fruits, as well as beef production. Mareeba is also a popular tourist destination, with attractions such as the Mareeba Heritage Museum, Mareeba Wetlands, and the annual Mareeba Rodeo drawing visitors from all over Australia and beyond.

The Douglas Shire is located to the north of Cairns and includes the towns of Port Douglas and Mossman. The region has a population of around 12,000 people²² and is known for its tourism industry, including easy access to the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest. Port Douglas is primarily a tourist-oriented town with substantial short-term accommodation, tour operators and tourist attractions. Mossman's economy is primarily driven by agriculture, with sugar cane farming being the dominant industry. The Mossman Sugar Mill is the largest employer in the area and processes the harvested sugar cane into raw sugar for export, and value adds through creation of cane by-products. Other agricultural industries in the region include tropical fruit and vegetable farming, as well as cattle grazing. Tourism also plays an important role for the Traditional Owners the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people who own and operate the Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, which is the gateway to Mossman Gorge.

Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council is located some 45-minute drive from Cairns situated on Cape Grafton. The published population of Yarrabah, acknowledged as Australia's largest discrete Aboriginal community is 2,500 people, however estimates place the actual population at 4,500. Yarrabah has a relatively young population, with a median age of around 25 years old²³. The main industries in Yarrabah include fishing, tourism, government administration, healthcare and the arts.

Cook Shire covers an area of approximately 108,000 square kilometres and occupies 80 percent of Cape York Peninsula. It is located to the north of Cairns and includes the towns of Cooktown, Laura, Lakeland and Coen. The population of Cook Shire is around 4,500 people²⁴, with a mix of Indigenous Australians, people from other parts of Australia, and international visitors. Approximately 21 percent of the population identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander²⁵, which is significantly higher than the state average. The main industries in Cook Shire are agriculture, fishing, mining and tourism. Cooktown as the main population centre is best known for Captain Cook's landing in 1770 which was the first meaningful contact and reconciliation with local Aboriginal people. Lakeland further south, is a growing agricultural hub producing some \$95million in farm gate value annually²⁶.

¹⁸ NIEIR, 2022

¹⁹ <https://economy.id.com.au/cairns/tourism-visitors-nights?Tourismtype=2>

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2021*

²¹ Ibid

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2021*

²³ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA37600>

²⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2021*

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics – *Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced (Cook Shire) - 2020-21*



Cape York Peninsula is located to the north of Mossman, extends to the tip of the Peninsula and encompasses the Cook Shire Council area. The Peninsula is home to nine Indigenous local government areas, including Aurukun, Hope Vale, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Napranum, Northern Peninsula Area, Pormpuraaw and Wujal Wujal. Weipa township while not a local government authority, is its own community built upon the resources sector. Each community ranges in size from a few hundred people through to 4,000 in Weipa²⁷. The region has a high proportion of Indigenous Australians with the main industries being mining, tourism, fishing, government administration, and 'care for country' practices such as carbon farming and feral pig management.

The Torres Strait consists of two local government areas, namely the Torres Shire Council (15 islands and parts of Cape York Peninsula) and Torres Strait Island Regional Council (15 islands). Papua New Guinea (PNG) shares its border with the Torres Strait, with much daily trade occurring between the islands and PNG. The population of the Torres Strait Islands is estimated to be around 4,500 people, with approximately 90 percent identifying as Torres Strait Islander peoples. The main industries in the Torres Strait are fishing, government services and tourism. The Torres Strait is also an important shipping route and has strategic significance for the Australian government due to its proximity to Papua New Guinea and other countries in the region.

The Etheridge Shire Council area is located approximately 300km west of Cairns and is home to 714 people²⁸. The area has a diverse demographic with a mix of Indigenous Australians and people of European descent. The main industries in the region include mining, agriculture, and tourism. The mining sector is particularly significant, with the region being home to several large mining operations. The agricultural industry focuses mainly on cattle grazing and some cropping, with pockets of horticulture starting over the past decade. Cotton, sorghum and legumes are fast becoming crops of interest in the Shire. The tourism

industry is also important, with the region attracting visitors for its natural beauty, including the spectacular Undara lava tubes and the rugged Australian outback landscape. The Savannah Way a 3,700km route, is Australia's longest nationally recognised tourist route and is a crucial link from east to west coasts of Australia. The Savannah Way meanders through the council area creating jobs and tourist spending opportunities.

Croydon Shire Council is the TNQ region's furthest west local government area, some 500km west of Cairns. Like Etheridge Shire, the Croydon area is in the Gulf Savannah region and benefits from the Savannah Way tourist route. The population of the shire is 266 people²⁹, with most residents residing in the town of Croydon. The demographics of the area are diverse, with a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents. The main industries in the shire include pastoralism, mining, and tourism. Cattle grazing and mining have been the traditional sources of income for the region, with the recent growth of tourism providing additional opportunities for economic development. The shire is known for its rich history and heritage, with many historical landmarks and attractions drawing visitors to the area.

Weipa Town Authority (WTA) is governed through the Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation Pty Limited Agreement Act 1957 (Qld) (Comalco Act) and is therefore not governed through the Local Government Act (Qld). The township has a population of around 4,000 people and is heavily reliant on mining operations, however tourism and fishing also play a large role in the community's economy. Rio Tinto, who operate multiple bauxite mines in the Weipa vicinity (originally opened by Comalco), are due to close the East Weipa mine in 2024. WTA is working with Rio Tinto, Traditional Owners and the State government to realise its vision to be a prosperous, diversified and economically sustainable remote town.

²⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2021*

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*

APPENDIX C(i) – TOTAL EMPLOYMENT NUMBERS BY INDUSTRY

Figure 4 provides an overview of the region's total employment numbers by industry and compared to Queensland.

Figure 4: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) ©2023.

| Employment by Industry (total) | | 2021/22 | |
|---|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Industry | Number | % | Qld % |
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing | 8,317 | 6.1 | 2.5 |
| Mining | 2,575 | 1.9 | 2.7 |
| Manufacturing | 5,682 | 4.2 | 6.6 |
| Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services | 1,553 | 1.1 | 1.3 |
| Construction | 10,938 | 8.1 | 9.2 |
| Wholesale Trade | 2,680 | 2.0 | 2.6 |
| Retail Trade | 13,509 | 10.0 | 9.3 |
| Accommodation and Food Services | 12,220 | 9.0 | 6.9 |
| Transport, Postal and Warehousing | 7,282 | 5.4 | 5.3 |
| Information Media and Telecommunications | 1,021 | 0.8 | 1.1 |
| Financial and Insurance Services | 1,559 | 1.2 | 2.7 |
| Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services | 2,005 | 1.5 | 1.9 |
| Professional, Scientific and Technical Services | 6,653 | 4.9 | 7.4 |
| Administrative and Support Services | 4,578 | 3.4 | 3.3 |
| Public Administration and Safety | 11,359 | 8.4 | 6.6 |
| Education and Training | 13,086 | 9.7 | 9.2 |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 22,560 | 16.7 | 15.6 |
| Arts and Recreation Services | 2,112 | 1.6 | 1.5 |
| Other Services | 5,798 | 4.3 | 4.2 |
| Total industries | 135,488 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

APPENDIX C(ii) – TNQ'S MOST PRODUCTIVE INDUSTRIES

Figure 5 provides a summary of the region's most productive industries.

Figure 5: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) ©2023

| Value Added by Industry Sector | | 2021/22 | |
|---|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Industry | \$m | %. | Qld % |
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing | 1,584.3 | 11.1 | 4.1 |
| Mining | 679.9 | 4.8 | 8.5 |
| Manufacturing | 623.1 | 4.4 | 6.9 |
| Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services | 519.3 | 3.7 | 3.4 |
| Construction | 1,292.4 | 9.1 | 9.0 |
| Wholesale Trade | 401.6 | 2.8 | 3.9 |
| Retail Trade | 888.9 | 6.3 | 5.6 |
| Accommodation and Food Services | 570.2 | 4.0 | 2.8 |
| Transport, Postal and Warehousing | 890.8 | 6.3 | 6.2 |
| Information Media and Telecommunications | 152.7 | 1.1 | 1.6 |
| Financial and Insurance Services | 444.0 | 3.1 | 6.5 |
| Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services | 361.8 | 2.5 | 3.5 |
| Professional, Scientific and Technical Services | 739.0 | 5.2 | 7.9 |
| Administrative and Support Services | 576.3 | 4.1 | 4.0 |
| Public Administration and Safety | 1,222.2 | 8.6 | 6.5 |
| Education and Training | 960.7 | 6.8 | 6.0 |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 1,787.3 | 12.6 | 10.2 |
| Arts and Recreation Services | 123.5 | 0.9 | 1.0 |
| Other Services | 391.9 | 2.8 | 2.4 |
| Total industries | 14,209.9 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

APPENDIX D – GLOBAL MEGATRENDS

Adapting to a Changing Climate

The protection of livelihoods, infrastructure and people's quality of life as the climate changes. Adapting the healthcare system, critical infrastructure and settlement patterns to climate change and extreme weather conditions will become a growing reality for many countries in the years and decades to come. This megatrend speaks to the new ways of operating that organisations and communities will need to adapt to in the face of a changing climate.

Leaner, Cleaner and Greener

The global push to reach net zero and beyond, protect biodiversity and use resources efficiently. There will be escalating pressures on finite food, water, mineral and energy resources. This megatrend explores the opportunities pushing us towards a more sustainable horizon and the importance of science, technology and innovation in helping organisations to operate within much tighter envelopes. RDA Tropical North released in 2022 the Compost for a Farming Future Report which aimed to test the use of compost to replace chemical fertilizer and the economic, commercialisation and environmental impacts (water usage rates, runoff into the Great Barrier Reef) of such use. The findings lend themselves to supporting this macro trend and offer an insight into the composting sector in TNQ.

The Escalating Health Imperative

The promotion of health in the face of rising demand, demographic ageing, emerging diseases and unhealthy lifestyles. Healthcare expenditure continues to show an upward trajectory and this trend will likely be exacerbated as global populations age and as new health challenges emerge. This megatrend highlights the opportunities provided by preventative health and precision health in supporting better health outcomes for all Australians.

Geopolitical Shifts

The increase in efforts to ensure global stability, trade and economic growth. Recent geopolitical developments are likely to have long-lasting impacts. The Ukraine crisis and Asia-Pacific tensions have led to record-level defence spending, in Australia and globally, and increasing collaboration and cooperation across matters of security, technology and defence capability. This megatrend explores the implications of emerging geopolitical shifts relation to science, technology, trade, supply chains and defence strategy.

Diving Into Digital

The rapidly growing digital and data economy. The rapid adoption of digital and data technologies in recent times has meant that many sectors and organisations have experienced

years' worth of digital transformation in the space of months. While this progress has been significant, experts predict that this is just the tip of the iceberg, with the vast majority of digitisation yet to occur. This megatrend details the next wave of digitization for organisations and the opportunities enabled by digital and data technologies. A downside of the pace of this change is a widening gap between industry needs, and training and equipment. The education sector faces a lag especially in regional and rural contexts with local businesses using next generation equipment that are at levels beyond what is in schools and TAFE.

Increasingly Anonymous

The rise of artificial intelligence and advanced autonomous systems to enhance productivity and outputs across all industries. We have seen astonishing improvements in the ability of software and machines to solve problems and perform complex tasks without explicit human guidance. Today, practically all industry sectors and policy spheres in all regions of the world are increasingly adopting AI technology and developing their AI capabilities. This megatrend unpacks how AI and related science, research and technology capabilities are helping to boost productivity and solve humanity's greatest challenges and the socio-economic considerations of these technology developments.

Unlocking the Human Dimension


The elevating importance of diversity, equity and transparency in business, policy and community decision making. Consumers are demanding increased transparency from organisations, governments and scientists to maintain their trust, and there are concerns around the spread of misinformation. This megatrend highlights the social drivers influencing future consumer, citizen and employee behaviours.


More from Less

Another Megatrend identified by CSIRO in its 2021 update revolves around shaping Australian agriculture. More from Less megatrend notes the rise of the middle class, demanding higher volumes of quality food and fibre, including more diverse diets and more protein. A paper published in research journal Trends in Food Science & Technology finds that the broader plant-based meats global industry will be worth \$181b by 2030. This denotes a key advantage and opportunity for TNQ.


Other global trends impacting our region include the image of the Great Barrier Reef and satellite launch demand.

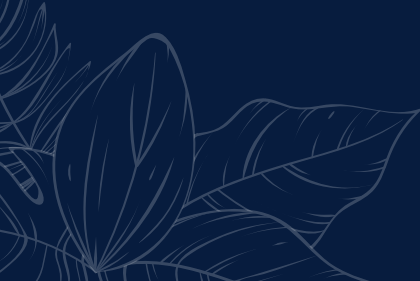
APPENDIX E – TEDS ALIGNMENT WITH THE REGIONAL INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

| RIF Alignment | Regional Outcome | RDATN Next Step |
|--|------------------|---|
|  Investing in People | 1.2 | Targeted investment in skills, education, training and local leadership capacity by partnering with stakeholders in delivery of a regional workforce summit with the aim of understanding 'where to from here' to address future workforce requirements |
| | 1.2 | Convene relevant roundtables linking industry development, workforce planning and education and training |
| | 1.3 | Meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, First Nations people by facilitating a roundtable with First Nations organisations and relevant government departments and agencies, to understand Indigenous aspirations, capacity and capability for involvement in delivering ESG initiatives |
| | 2.3 | Deliver the Regional Arts Services Network (RASN) project to support capacity building of artists as part of the TNQ First Nations Action Plan |
| | 3.2 | Support the development of climate resilient workforce for the TNQ region |
| | 6.2 | Putting people at the forefront of growth, with local voices influencing decision making by circulating a discussion paper about local government Strategic Plans' recognition |
| | 6.2 | Lead the development of and advocacy for, capacity building for place-based leadership |
| | 6.2 | Initiate strategic leadership partnership across key issues with diverse stakeholders |

| RIF Alignment | Regional Outcome | RDATN Next Step |
|--|------------------|--|
|  Investing in Services | 2.2 | Improving water access, and reliability, by facilitating partnerships across governments and private sector to realise the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme and Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct initiatives |
| | 3.3 | Collaborate with industry and the State and Australian governments to identify barriers to uptake of water allocations |
| | 3.3 | Support water related initiatives by key stakeholder groups e.g. regional drought plans, horticulture industry plans |
| | 3.6 | Supporting adaptive, sustainable and liveable regions by supporting TCICA in advocacy efforts |
| | 3.6 | Supporting the development of waste hubs in Cairns and throughout Cape York Peninsula |
| | 4.1 | Support the Cairns Housing and Homelessness Network by brokering relationships and funding where needed |
| | 4.2 | Supporting adaptive and accessible regions by facilitating a healthcare roundtable to identify the broad spectrum of eco-system needs |
| | 4.2 | Coordinating multi-stakeholder engagements between the social services sector, residents and academic institutions to identify eco-system research needs |
| | 4.4 | Investment in regional services with a focus on improving quality and accessibility to water by supporting TCICA in its advocacy efforts and elevating prioritizing TNQ remote communities through the RIF and Australian government budgetary cycle |
| | 4.5 | Supporting accessible and liveable regions by providing evidence of the public transport gaps, by consulting with employers and job services providers |
| | 4.6 | Provide evidence of, and advocate the inequities experienced by remote communities in terms of good pricing to the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum and other northern agencies as part of the White Paper refresh |
| | 5.1 | Investment in regional services with a focus on improving reliability and access to water by brokering funds for a water storage feasibility study |
| | 5.1 | Support TCICA and other stakeholders in advocating for better digital connectivity infrastructure, affordable plans and digital skills development in the TNQ region |
| | 6.1 | Work closely with the State/Federal Governments to design and trial a devolved decision-making model, based on the State's new regional engagement /RIF frameworks |



| RIF Alignment | Regional Outcome | RDATN Next Step |
|--|------------------|--|
|  Investing in Places | 2.2 | Targeted and place-based investment that enables communities to thrive by continuing to engage with DSDILGP and regional stakeholders, around inclusion of priority development areas (as outlined in 2.2.1) in the FNQ Regional Plan review |
| | 2.2 | Lead a strategic approach and advocacy by partnering with communities to identify potential precincts and areas of development (as required by Australian government programs) |
| | 3.1 | Supporting adaptive and sustainable regions by facilitating activities, in collaboration with the wider reef stewardship ecosystem, that improve outcomes for the GBR's health, while increasing the resilience of our farming and tourism communities and Traditional Owners |
| | 3.1 | Broker partnerships and funding that bring new investment and technologies, to deliver better environmental and economic outcomes for the GBR (including delivering on the recommendations from the Composting for a Farming Future report) |
| | 3.1 | Support critical initiatives of NRM bodies in TNQ to deliver sustainable resource management solutions |
| | 3.2 | Supporting sustainable and liveable regions by facilitating sub-regional partnerships and elevating this coordination at a TNQ level |
| | 3.2 | Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed by supporting Croydon Shire Council to secure funds for a feasibility study/business case for a Doppler Radar Station |
| | 3.4 | Meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, First Nations people by facilitating a coordinated voice for re-establishment of the Coen biosecurity facility |
| | 3.5 | Listening to local voices and partnering with communities to facilitate meetings within the Torres Strait and with Federal Border Force agencies |
| | 4.1 | Supporting liveable regions by ensuring alignment of the TEDS with the FNQ Regional Plan |
| | 4.1 | Targeted and place-based investment that enables communities to thrive by facilitating regional Housing Summit(s) |
| | 4.3 | Delivering infrastructure where it is needed by brokering a funding package to support arts centre upgrades |
| | 5.1 | Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed by coordinating collation of evidence and data, to support Australian government investment decisions as part of the budgetary cycle for the TNQ region and more broadly, as part of the east-west connectivity package through the northern RDA Alliance and ONA relationship (White Paper refresh) |



| RIF Alignment | Regional Outcome | RDATN Next Step |
|---|------------------|---|
|  Investing in Industries and Local Economies | 1.1 | Supporting the conditions needed for industries to diversify and grow by brokering partnerships and funding, to support development of a Clean Energy Transition Strategy and support environmentally sustainable energy technologies and recycling practices, as presented by regional stakeholders and external investors |
| | 1.1 | Support the Australian Marine Park Tourism Operators (AMPTO) in securing funding for conversion of reef fleet engines to sustainable fuels and/or hydrogen |
| | 1.3 | Partnering with NRM bodies, undertake awareness raising opportunities about environmental markets in TNQ through a variety of mechanisms |
| | 1.3 | Investing in industries by brokering funding, to undertake a pre-feasibility into opportunities for the region's ESG positioning and funding requirements for an ESG investment strategy (including allocation for an industry campaign to raise uptake of blockchain technology and allocation for environmental markets campaign) |
| | 2.1 | Investing in local industries and economies by brokering funds to research the underlying productivity issues in TNQ including worker productivity, impacts of supply chains and business inputs, industry impacts and growth and overall economic contexts and productivity |
| | 2.1 | Support the refresh and implementation of the FNQ Innovation Strategy |
| | 2.3 | Supporting the conditions needed for industries to grow and diversify by coordinating regional roundtables to identify industry cluster opportunities and potential precincts |
| | 2.3 | Investment to help activate economic and industry growth by supporting project proponents in the development of innovation precincts, through partnership brokerage, funding identification and data provision |
| | 2.3 | Supporting the conditions needed for industries to grow by working with Study Cairns on an international education student attraction plan, that provides collective benefit for TNQ |
| | 2.4 | Supporting the agricultural and fisheries sectors to increase exports through collaboration with Trade and Investment Queensland (TIQ) and the Cairns Airport by facilitating necessary relationships at the Federal government level, if needed |
| | 2.4 | Working with the Northern RDA Alliance, secure through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum funding to undertake a northern Australia water strategy |
| | 5.1 | Supporting the conditions needed for industries to diversify and grow by brokering funding for Stages 3 and 4 of the Cape York Regional Package |
| | 5.1 | Continue to support Cook Shire Council and Etheridge Shire Council in their respective irrigation and agricultural precinct projects, through advocacy, investment brokerage and governance services, where needed |
| | 6.1 | Listening to local voices and partnering with communities to elevate evidence to inform Australian and State government policies, research and programs, by facilitating various community and industry roundtables |
| | 6.1 | Continued collaboration with northern Australia departments and agencies to elevate local investment opportunities and barriers to development |
| | 6.3 | Continued collaboration with northern Australia departments and agencies to elevate institutional and governmental capabilities that support 'soft diplomacy' efforts |
| | 6.3 | Advocate Indo-Pacific connectivity in the refresh of the White Paper for developing northern Australia |
| | 6.3 | Work with Northern and Qld RDAs for identifying initiatives for increased exchanges in the Indo-Pacific region |
| | 6.3 | Support the development of a long term sustainable model of integration of northern Australia and TNQ into the Indo-Pacific region by working with Tradelinked, TIQ and DFAT |

APPENDIX F – REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Pacific Relationship

Given the region's strengths in tourism, education and training, marine and defence industries, aviation maintenance, the Regional Trade Distribution Centre, agriculture, healthcare and construction, there is a real opportunity to position Cairns as an international gateway to the Pacific region. There is benefit in leveraging the work of Tradelinked, to formalize the relational nature of our exchanges with the Pacific and establish an 'Office of the Pacific' in Cairns with funding to fully realise the economic and social benefits of the existing relationship. This on the ground support would strengthen the region's desire to encourage investment in sport resulting in necessary upgrades to existing sporting facilities to enable Cairns and surrounds to be utilized as a training and conditioning hub, especially in the areas of rugby, tennis, hockey and swimming.

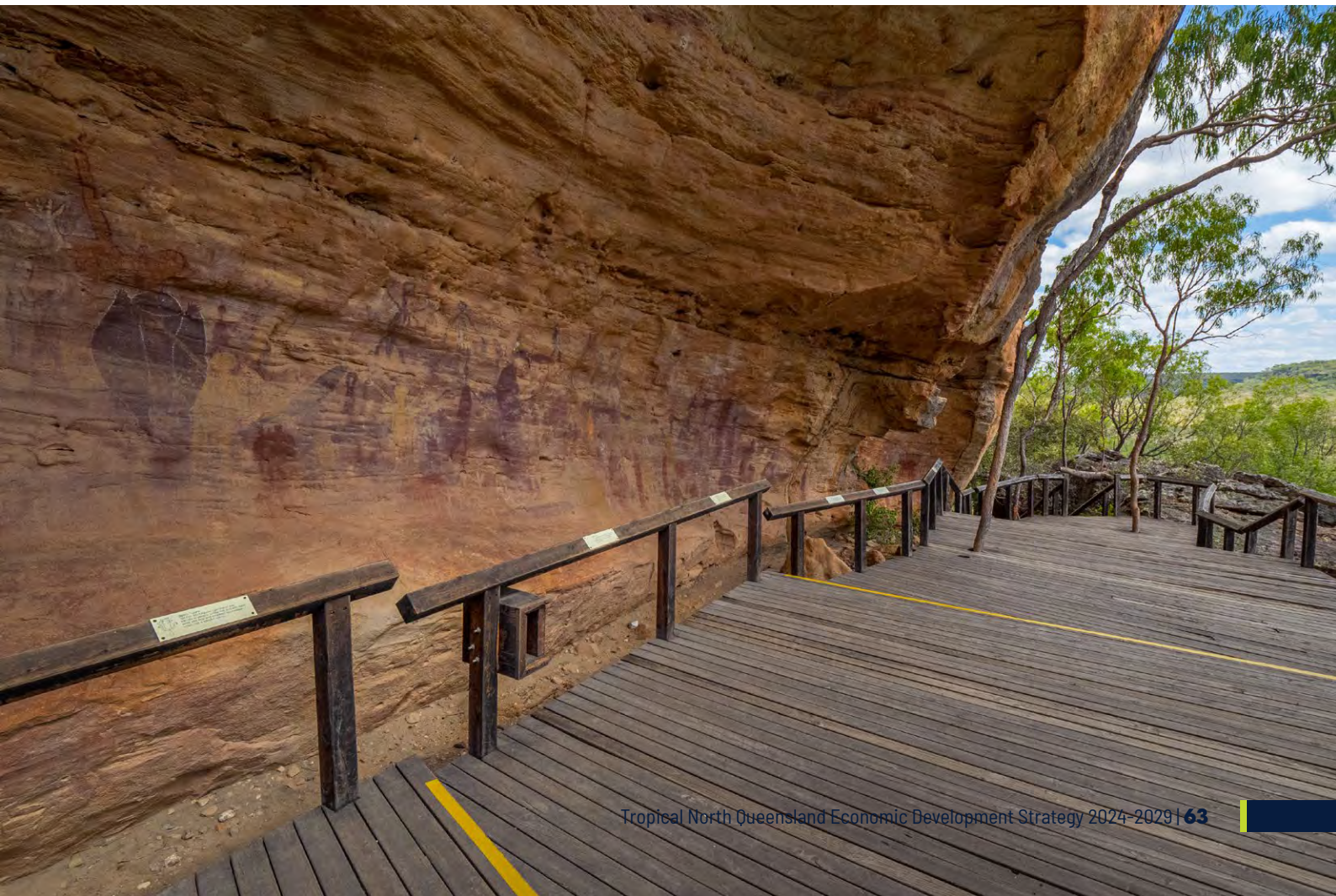
Northern Australia Collaboration

TNQ along with the Northern Territory and Kimberley region is at the forefront and well positioned to meet the challenge and leverage of regional experience to develop place-based

policies, to lift First Nations people to first world workforce participation, enterprise startups, health, education and income standards. A strong collaborative model with northern focused agencies such as ONA, CRCNA, NAIF, the Northern RDA Alliance and Infrastructure Australia must continue to develop a meaningful package of priorities and investment, led by Indigenous people.

TCICA Cape, Torres and Gulf Opportunities Plan

The Cape York, Torres Strait, and Gulf region in Australia is primed for significant growth and development, supported by an expanding population, vast land area, and ongoing infrastructure improvements. With a focus on sustainable development, the region's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and proximity to Asian markets create ample opportunities for targeted investment. TCICA is instrumental in actioning the economic opportunities outlined in the Cape York, Torres Strait, and Gulf Opportunities Plan; the Plan outlines shared objectives and transformational strategies to drive sustainable growth in the region.



Sectors That Hold Promise

Net Zero, Environmental Markets, Circular and Regenerative Economy

Renewable Energy: Tropical North Queensland has significant potential for renewable energy generation. The region's abundant sunlight and wind has been harnessed for solar and wind power projects. According to the Queensland Department of Energy and Public Works, the Barron River Hydro Scheme was the first of its kind in Australia while the TNQ region is second only to Denmark in its use of renewable energy (74% of energy use is from renewables (based on Annual Share of 'Variable' Renewables). The FNQ Renewable Energy Zone (FNQREZ) and Queensland government's Energy and Jobs Plan, will drive growth in construction, manufacturing, and electricity generation. An example of recent renewable energy investment is the Kaban Green Power Hub. It includes a 157-megawatt wind farm and is located within the FNQREZ. The project is expected to be operational in 2023, and publicly-owned CleanCo has agreed to purchase all of the energy generated from the project. The region is also home to many of Energy Queensland's isolated networks—microgrids that supply energy to remote communities. Future developments of renewable energy will need to ensure positive outcomes for the community and support biodiversity in the region.

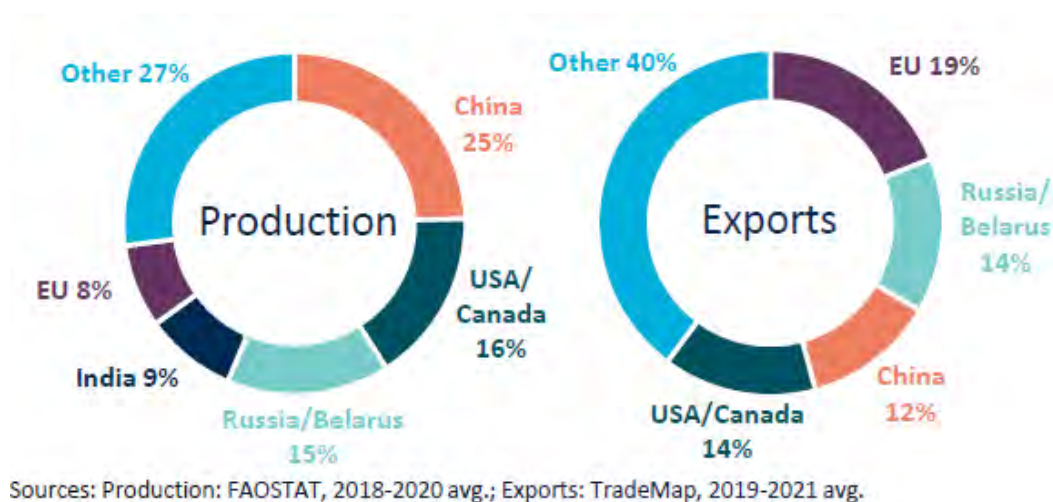
Composting Sector

While the Compost Report released by RDA Tropical North noted that all available green waste is currently consumed by local compost manufacturers, it did identify substantial quantities of new green waste available within the region, as feedstock. By replacing 60 percent of chemical fertilizer with compost, the benefits to the environment, farmers and the economy cannot be underestimated. Increasingly over time, growers have experienced Urea price shocks, a key ingredient in chemical fertilizer, thereby making compost a viable alternative. Other key ingredients include nitrogen, potash and phosphate.

World fertiliser production and exports are concentrated, with China, India, the US, Russia and the EU accounting for 66 percent of world nitrogen and phosphate fertiliser production. Canada, Russia, Belarus and China account for 80 percent of world potash production, with all three countries plus the EU accounting for 46 percent of the world's fertiliser exports. See Figure 6.

From a national food security and sovereignty perspective, there is potential to grow TNQ's composting industry, which aligns with state and federal objectives and further diversifies our economy.

Figure 6: World fertiliser production and exports



Hydrogen

Tourism, agriculture, mining, education, and healthcare sectors significantly drive the TNQ region's economy. With the region's economy being reliant on these sectors (excluding healthcare), there is a growing interest in developing sustainable and renewable energy solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve carbon neutrality. These sectors could benefit from the use of green hydrogen as a low-carbon energy source.

In collaboration with H2Q (Hydrogen Qld), some work has already been done in the region to commence the formation of a hydrogen industry cluster. While in its infancy, an emerging opportunity could involve the evaluation of opportunities for the adoption of green hydrogen in these industries and the identification of energy-intensive processes, equipment and services, existing and required future infrastructure for transport, storage and use of green hydrogen, the regulatory environment, the existing and required future skills base, demand drivers and obstacles, and opportunities for Indigenous participation in the local green hydrogen economy.

Sustainable Aviation and Heavy Transport Fuels

Sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) are an essential component of the aviation industry's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint and achieve carbon neutrality in the coming decades. SAFs are produced from renewable resources such as waste materials, agricultural residues, and algae, and can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional aviation fuel. The production and use of SAFs have the potential to create a sustainable and low-carbon aviation industry, which is critical for achieving global climate goals. The aviation industry is actively exploring ways to increase the production and use of SAFs, and the demand for these fuels is expected to grow significantly in the coming years.

Far North Queensland has the potential to become a powerhouse in producing feedstock for sustainable aviation fuels. The region's favourable climate and abundant natural resources make it an ideal location to produce feedstock for SAFs. The region has vast areas of sugarcane, which can be used to produce biofuels. Additionally, Far North Queensland has significant biomass resources, including agricultural waste and forestry residues, which can be used to produce

advanced biofuels. The region's proximity to major aviation hubs in Asia and the Pacific also makes it an attractive location for SAF production. Developing a sustainable aviation fuel industry in TNQ would provide significant economic benefits to the region while contributing to the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the aviation sector.

Plastics Recycling

Dedicated to fostering a circular economy, the Federal, State, and regional (Cairns Regional Council) governments have diligently explored the potential for plastic recycling capacity within TNQ. The project, delivered by RDATN, included a 2020 feasibility study that meticulously mapped the plastic material flows from waste sources to recycling, revealing that only a modest portion of TNQ's plastic (about 2 percent) was currently being recycled. Encouragingly, this study concluded that investing in recycling infrastructure is not only economically and financially feasible but also offers significant net benefits to the community.

Further strengthening the case, a 2021 business case was developed, thoroughly assessing the market's capacity and capability to provide a suitable solution. This involved an evaluation of potential solutions and an updated feasibility assessment based on one of those solutions. Remarkably, indicative analysis suggests that private sector investment in this endeavour holds substantial financial viability, with an estimated Internal Rate of Return (IRR) to equity of approximately 14 percent.

The demand for recycled plastics is robust and steadily growing, supported by both market dynamics and government initiatives. The government's export ban on unprocessed plastics, combined with stricter export market standards and funding to boost domestic recycling capacity, has created a conducive environment. Concurrently, the trend toward utilizing recycled content in packaging and plastic products has prompted significant investments by major companies like Coca-Cola Amatil and the Asahi Group in plastics reprocessing facilities.

Environmental Markets

TNQ has significant opportunities in environmental markets, particularly in relation to carbon and reef credits - new credits are emerging in the form of Cassowary Credits. The region already sequesters carbon through agricultural and fire management practices, however there is further opportunity to create jobs for First Nations people.

The region is already positioned globally as an environmental wonder, a logical step is to leverage environmental markets to drive investment into our World Heritage listed areas, providing a valuable source of income for local communities, while also contributing to the preservation and restoration of our environmental icons.

Successful implementation of these opportunities requires collaboration between government bodies, local communities, businesses, and stakeholders to ensure sustainable development, respect for the environment, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Indigenous Cultural Experiences: TNQ is home to diverse Indigenous cultures, offering unique opportunities for cultural tourism and experiences. Any First Nations tourism development must be led by Indigenous communities to showcase their heritage, art, and traditions. In the lead up to the 2032 Olympics, this region can lead the nation with place-based cultural tourism experiences, providing economic benefits while fostering cultural preservation and understanding. Integral to these experiences are Indigenous Arts and Crafts. TNQ is rich in Indigenous art and craftsmanship. Supporting the development and promotion of Indigenous arts and crafts can create economic opportunities for local artists, artisans, and entrepreneurs, in readiness for the Olympics. The region has a thriving arts scene with the Cairns Arts Precinct and 14 Indigenous arts centres across Cape York and Torres Strait regions. Indigenous cultural tourism development approach is supported by the Tropical North Queensland First Nations Tourism Action Plan led by Tourism Tropical North Queensland and the Cairns Indigenous Experience Cluster Group.

Film and Entertainment Industry: The region's breathtaking landscapes, unique wildlife, and diverse ecosystems provide a picturesque backdrop for film productions. With the State government's investment in a film and television production

facility in south Cairns, encouraging the film industry to use Tropical North Queensland as a filming location can create jobs, boost local businesses, and promote the area's natural beauty to a global audience.

Food and Beverage Production: Tropical North Queensland's agricultural resources already support food and beverage production, mainly through the Far North Queensland Food Incubator, Food Manufacturing Hub and the Cairns Advanced Manufacturing Hub. Encouraging value-added processing, such as fruit preserves, tropical juices, coffee, native food products and boutique wineries and distillers, can create new business opportunities, Indigenous jobs, support local farmers, and promote the region's distinct flavours. There is also an opportunity to address food waste through circular economy initiatives.

Aerospace

With the heightened global demand in stable and secure satellite launch facilities, Weipa's ideal location for launches and current interest in aerospace within the region, the aerospace sector provides strong opportunities over the next decade. The keys will be Federal government diplomacy and positioning of the capacity to allied nations, inclusion of any such facility within the wider economic diversity potential of the Western Cape (including associated infrastructure requirements) and ensuring a skilled workforce in both Cairns and Weipa.

Ship Building

Advance Cairns has identified a return to Cairns' shipbuilding era as an economic opportunity closely aligned to Australia's Defence strategy. Cairns has a long and proud history of shipbuilding, with Defence and Coast Guard vessels, cruise ships, and passenger ferries being constructed in the region since 1954. The Cairns Marine Precinct has proven capability in ship maintenance and sustainment, as well as pre-existing supply chain arrangements and infrastructure, and transferrable skills and knowledge that would ensure a ship and specialist vessel building industry could be quickly established whilst contributing to a Defence strategy of regionalisation.

As well as Defence vessels, there are several commercial vessels that could also be manufactured in Cairns, including tourism and cargo vessels. The Defence and commercial sectors together could provide workload for a continuous

pipeline that would enable a greater underlying level of business, leading to an increase in private investment in the region.

Investment in a specialist boat building industry and investment in supply chain resilient enabling infrastructure in Cairns will ensure highly skilled jobs and a more diversified and resilient economy for the region. Most importantly, Australian sovereign capability will be improved.

International Education

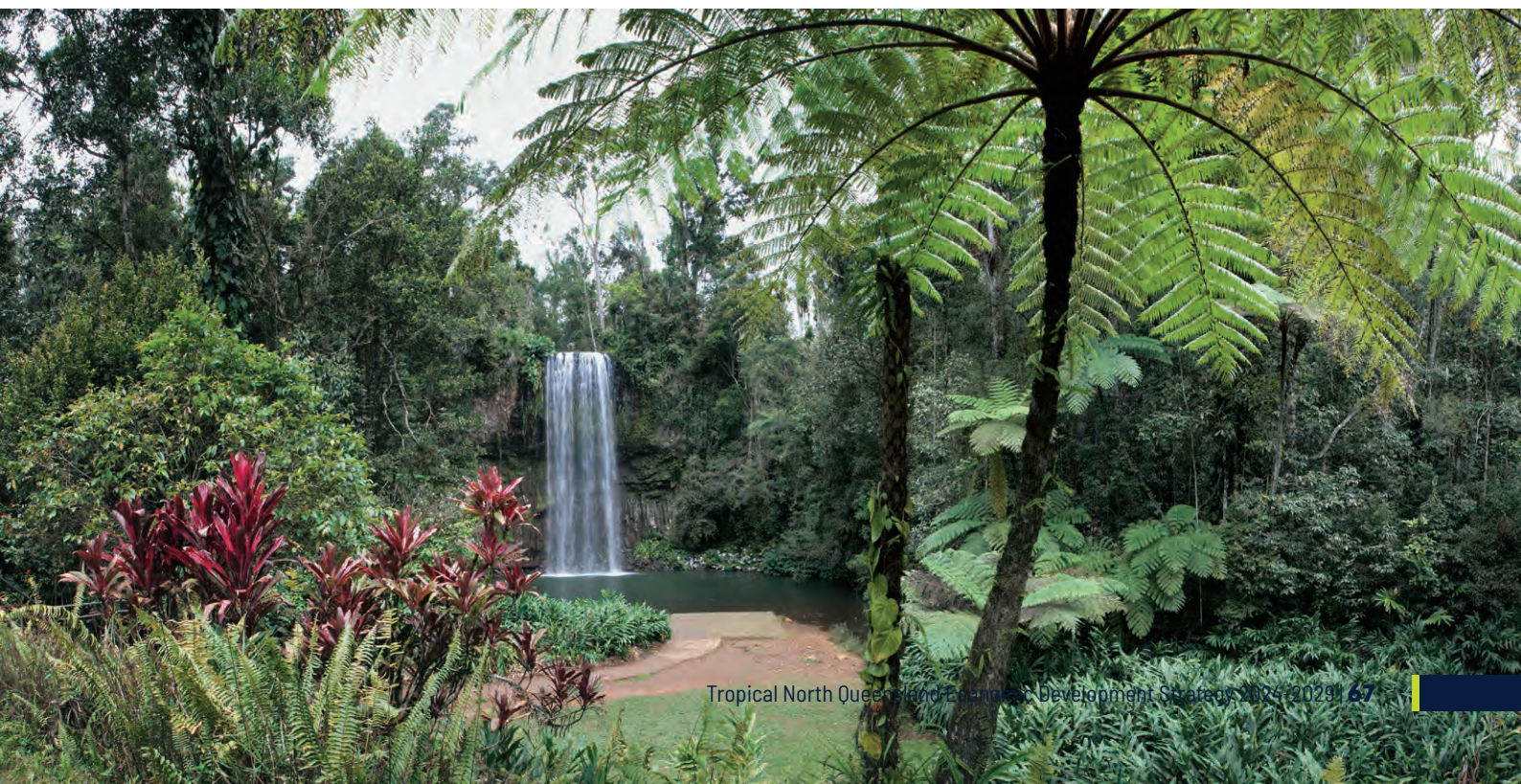
International education is Queensland's largest service export creating some 16,700 jobs in 2022 and contributing more than \$3.2 billion to the Queensland economy. . There are 25 CRICOS approved international education providers in Cairns with 348 CRICOS approved courses.

In 2022, international education contributed more than \$57.4 million (gross value added) to the TNQ region, with student numbers accounting for around 1.5 percent of Queensland's total international student numbers . TNQ is one of Australia's most popular Edutourism destinations with more than 33,000 students visiting annually . The region also hosts over 5,000 homestays annually. These figures are significant as the Edutourism visa categories are not included in the student visa numbers.

Opportunities exist to grow this sector by taking a strategic partner country/city approach leveraging the efforts of Study Cairns, Trade and Investment Queensland, Cairns airport and priority industries with high employment demand. A collective effort that benefits multiple sectors will amplify the voice of Study Cairns and elevate investment opportunities for the TNQ region.

Defence

In the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian maritime sector experienced strong revenue growth. From 2009 to 2019, sector revenue increased from \$4.3 billion to \$5.2 billion. The Cairns region has the largest marine services sector in northern Australia, and has a skilled, year-round permanent marine and engineering workforce of 4,600 across 270 organisations . This trend is expected to continue through to 2027, with industry revenue forecast to grow at 2.4 per cent per annum. The key driving factor in this forecast revenue growth is the Australian Government's increased capital expenditure on Defence capability, owing to the proposed \$575 billion investment in Defence over the next 10 years. This includes an investment of approximately \$270 billion in Defence capability, of which 28 per cent will be allocated to the maritime domain. Further north, RAAF Base Scherger located 26km east of Weipa will see a \$2 billion Australian government investment to upgrade the facility, further reinforcing Weipa's strategic importance to our nation's sovereignty.





An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia
TROPICAL NORTH



FNQ Regional
Organisation
of Councils