



An Australian Government Initiative



Regional
Development
Australia
TROPICAL NORTH



TROPICAL NORTH

Annual Report

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Local people creating local opportunities rdatropicalnorth.org.au

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Regional Development Australia Tropical North acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We celebrate the stories, culture and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders of all communities who also work and live on this land.



FROM THE CHAIR

The Board and Team at Regional Development Australia Tropical North (RDATN) have enjoyed a highly collaborative and purposeful year, working together to advance strategic regional priorities across Tropical North Queensland.

It is with great pride that I present the 2024–2025 Annual Report for **RDA Tropical North**. Our work this year has continued to align strongly with the **Regional Investment Framework (RIF)** and the revised **RDA Charter**, reinforcing the importance of local intelligence, evidence-based data and coordinated investment in people, places, services and industries.

As Chair, I have had the privilege of leading **RDA Tropical North** through significant milestones. Throughout the year, **RDATN** played a central convening role on issues critical to the region's future. Housing affordability and supply remained a priority, with **RDATN** delivering a **Regional Housing Summit** with more than 100 attendees resulting in an evidence-based regional position. The summit served as a **unifying platform** to articulate shared regional priorities and actionable recommendations, which **RDATN** subsequently communicated to the three levels of Government.

RDATN also led important region-wide conversations through the **State of the Region Roadshow** and the **Regional Water Forum**. These engagements highlighted the foundational role of

water security and enabling infrastructure in unlocking agricultural productivity, supporting innovation, productivity and building economic resilience. Importantly, they ensured regional voices and lived experience continue to inform state and Australian Government decision-making.

Supporting communities through change was another key focus. **RDATN** continued to advocate for a coordinated and phased approach to economic transition in **Weipa**, recognising the importance of workforce planning, industry diversification and long-term liveability outcomes.

Looking beyond our borders, **RDATN** advanced an **Indo-Pacific Engagement Strategy**, recognising **Tropical North Queensland's** strategic proximity, cultural connections and economic opportunities with our international neighbours. This work reflects our commitment to supporting diversification, trade, skills exchange and long-term relationship-building rather than transactional engagement.

Across all initiatives, a consistent theme emerged: liveability underpins productivity. Whether through housing, water, infrastructure, skills or connectivity, **RDATN** remains committed to building the conditions that allow communities to thrive—now and into the future.

In line with the **RDA Charter**, we continue to support regional decarbonisation efforts and the transition to a net-zero economy. The **Tropical**

North Queensland Economic Development Strategy 2024-2029, developed in collaboration with the **Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC)** and with support from **Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance (TCICA)**, will continue to guide our region’s path to economic growth while ensuring sustainable and liveable communities.


As we look ahead, we will continue to champion local economies. Building evidence for economic development through collaborating with integrity, transparency, respect and accountability.

The Board remains proud of our role in strengthening relationships across all levels of government, industry, academia and the positioned to attract investment and respond to emerging opportunities.

Finally, I would like to thank the RDA Tropical North Board for their dedication and support. I also extend my gratitude to our CEO, Sonja

Johnson, and the RDA staff for their unwavering commitment to advancing the economic and social prosperity of our region. We are excited about the future and the role RDA Tropical North will continue to play in shaping it.

On behalf of the Board, I thank our CEO and staff for their professionalism, commitment and deep regional knowledge. I also acknowledge our partners and stakeholders for their continued collaboration. Together, we are building a more connected, resilient and prosperous **Tropical North Queensland**.



Prof. Hurriyet Babacan - Chair



“Regional Development Australia Tropical North (RDATN) remains steadfast in its commitment to shaping a prosperous, sustainable, and connected future for Tropical North Queensland. Guided by a shared vision of fostering inclusive growth and resilience across the region, RDATN continues to act as a catalyst for innovation, collaboration, and investment.”

WHO ARE WE

Regional Development Australia (RDA) is a national network of 50 Committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support the economic development of their regions.

RDA Tropical North (RDATN) is an independent, incorporated not-for-profit association that actively establishes linkages, facilitates engagement and opens conversations regarding the future planning and development of the region.

We work in close partnership with fellow RDA Committees, all levels of government, the private sector and community groups to remove silos, encourage collaboration towards a common regional vision and work to ensure regional projects and programs are inclusive, connected and considerate of their social, cultural and environmental impacts.

The **RDATN** Board, drawn from leaders and experts from across the region, has an active and facilitative role in the community and a clear focus on growing a strong and confident regional economy that harnesses its competitive advantages, seizes on economic opportunity and attracts investment.

Far North Queensland

The Far North Queensland region has a total area of 273,157.4 square kilometres accounting for 16% of Queensland's land mass. It encompasses 21 local government shires and regions:

- Aurukun Shire Council
- Cairns Regional Council
- Cassowary Coast Regional Council
- Douglas Shire Council
- Mareeba Shire Council
- Cook Shire Council
- Croydon Shire Council
- Etheridge Shire Council
- Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council
- Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council
- Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council
- Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council
- Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council
- Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council
- Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council
- Tablelands Regional Council
- Torres Shire Council
- Torres Strait Islands Regional Council
- Weipa Town Authority
- Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council



Our Board (2024/2025)



Prof Hurriyet Babacan
Chair



Cr. Brett Moller
Deputy-Chair



Stirling Taverner
Secretary



Carolyn Eagle
Treasurer



Jaime Gane
Board Member



Joe Moro
Board Member



Noeleen Selke
Board Member



Ritchie Bates
Board Member



Jodie Duignan-George
Board Member

Our Team (2024/2025)



Sonja Johnson
Chief Executive Officer



Tony Potter
Project Director



Lainie Poon
Relationship Manager



Lisa Crema
Office Coordinator



Emma Gelling
Office Coordinator



Tony Castles
RASN
Program Manager



Vanessa Gillen
RASN
Officer

REGIONAL SNAPSHOT (2023/24)



21

local government areas



\$19.96b

GRP



\$93m

building approvals



\$4.27b

output



303,102

population



142,097

jobs



25,929

businesses



4.0%

unemployment



REGIONAL SUMMARY

1. Economic Overview

The **Tropical North Queensland (TNQ)** region continues to exhibit economic resilience and growth, anchored by a **Gross Regional Product (GRP)** of **\$19.96 billion**. The region spans **21 local government areas**, serving as a critical economic zone in northern Australia, with key industries including **agriculture, tourism, mining, and renewable energy** driving the regional economy.

The region's economic output, valued at **\$4.27 billion**, reflects the strength of these industries and ongoing investment in infrastructure, evidenced by **\$93 million** in building approvals over the past year. These investments indicate significant growth, particularly in sectors such as housing, commercial construction, and tourism infrastructure.

TNQ's geographic position, strategic trade routes, and access to the Indo-Pacific region further boost its potential for international trade, particularly in agriculture and advanced manufacturing. This outward-looking focus ensures that the region not only sustains local economic growth but also contributes significantly to Australia's broader economic ambitions.

The region's diverse economy has also embraced new technologies and sustainability initiatives, with increased investment in **community master planning** and **sustainability** initiatives. This economic diversity, combined with targeted investment, ensures that the TNQ region remains adaptable and forward-focused, particularly in the face of global challenges such as climate change and shifting economic trends.

2. Employment

Tropical North Queensland offers a dynamic labor market, providing **142,097 jobs** across various industries. The region's **unemployment rate** stands at **4.0% (as of 30 June 24)**, which matched the national average and highlights the strength of the local job market and the region's ability to support both new and existing industries.

Key industries driving employment include:

- **Health Care and Social Assistance**, which is the largest employer, generating **25,688 jobs** or **18.1%** of the total regional employment. This sector's growth reflects increased demand for health services across the region, particularly as the population continues to expand.
- **Education and Training**, which accounts for **13,532 jobs** or **9.5%** of total employment, underpins the region's investment in human capital and workforce development, ensuring a well-educated and skilled labor pool.
- **Accommodation and Food Services** employs **13,016 people** or **9.2%** of the workforce, supporting the region's consumer economy and serving as a key employer in both urban and rural areas.

Emerging industries, such as **professional services, transport, and renewable energy**, are becoming increasingly important, contributing to job creation and further diversifying the regional economy. The **agriculture, forestry, and fishing** sector continues to be a significant employer, especially in rural areas, reflecting TNQ's strength in primary industries.

In addition, the region has witnessed steady job growth in sectors such as **administration, safety and support services**, reflecting the importance of compliance and communication for both local and international markets. The **construction** sector remains vital, both in terms of direct employment and as a driver of economic activity through large-scale infrastructure projects.

Key Employment Trends:

- **Health Care and Social Assistance** has experienced a notable increase in employment (+6,601 jobs between 2018-2024), underscoring the region's focus on expanding healthcare services.
- Growth in **Transport, Postal, and Warehousing** (+2,128 jobs) highlights the ongoing investments in infrastructure, which support the region's logistical capabilities.
- **Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services** expanded by (+1,942) jobs, reflecting a shift towards knowledge-based and high-value industries that contribute to innovation and economic diversification.
- **Administration and Support Services** saw an increase of (+1,903) jobs, further emphasizing the need for services that allow households to prioritise the use of resources.

The combination of a low unemployment rate, job growth in key sectors, and significant employment opportunities in emerging industries positions **Tropical North Queensland** as a region that is poised to meet future opportunities but will not be without challenges.



RDA TROPICAL NORTH

“Local People Creating Local Opportunities”

Purpose

Providing regional leadership to drive the development of appropriate infrastructure and industry to strengthen the Far North Queensland economy.

Vision

To be the economic development agency in the **Tropical North** that supports the interests of all regional and remote communities and assists in coordinating the efforts by all stakeholders.

Mission

To stimulate sustainable economic development outcomes for the **Tropical North Queensland** region through meaningful collaboration with all levels of Government, industry, community and academia.

Strategic Priorities (2024/2025)

- **Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy (TEDS):** The TEDS continues to deliver outcomes whilst aligning regional growth strategies with the **FNQ Regional Plan**.
- **Regional Housing Summit:** The summit served as a unifying platform to articulate shared regional priorities and actionable recommendations, which RDATN subsequently communicated to all levels of Government. This process reinforced RDATN’s role as a key regional convener, fostering collaboration across sectors and ensuring challenges are understood within broader national policy frameworks.
- **Agriculture and Irrigation:** In partnership with Etheridge Shire Council, RDATN provided governance oversight, administrative support, and technical coordination for the procurement of specialists to conduct spatial mapping of landholder aspirations, environmental values, and water-soil dynamics.
- **Regional Arts Services Network (RASN) project:** The final report captured the voices of more than 280 participants from urban, rural, and remote communities, highlighting the vital role of arts and culture in wellbeing, inclusion, and economic opportunity. The project’s conclusion marks a significant achievement in strengthening the region’s creative capacity and leaving a lasting legacy for future cultural development.
- **Regional Partnerships & Northern Collaboration:** We provided tailored advice, access to data, and facilitation of partnerships between local governments, community organisations, and industry. This work underscores RDATN’s leadership in fostering a unified northern voice.

Strategic Priorities for 2024-2025

In 2024–2025, **Regional Development Australia Tropical North (RDATN)** continued to advance the strategic objectives of [Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy \(TEDS\) 2024-2029](#), focusing on initiatives that strengthen regional capability, enhance economic diversity, and foster sustainable growth. **RDATN** concentrated on interconnected strategic priorities that reflect both regional aspirations and the policy directions of Federal, State, and Local governments. Each priority was designed to address long-term structural challenges, harness emerging opportunities, and deliver practical outcomes that improve resilience, connectivity, and liveability across the **Tropical North**.

1. Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy (TEDS)

The **Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy (TEDS) 2024-2029** continues as the central framework guiding regional growth and development. Developed in collaboration with key regional bodies, including the **Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC)** and with support from the **Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance (TCICA)**, the TEDS aligns closely with the **FNQ Regional Plan** to ensure consistency in regional priorities.

The TEDS identifies critical economic, environmental, social, and cultural pillars necessary for regional development and positions **RDATN** as a key player in implementing these strategies. This year's work involved establishing an oversight committee to monitor progress and ensure the strategy adapts to emerging regional needs. The strategy highlights growth in sectors like **tourism, agriculture, and green energy**, while also addressing infrastructure gaps, population growth, and housing.

2. Regional Housing Summit

Access to affordable and adequate housing remains one of the most pressing constraints to workforce participation and regional liveability. To address this challenge, **RDATN** hosted the **Regional Housing Summit**, which brought together more than 100 stakeholders from government agencies, community organisations, and industry to explore the intersection of housing policy, land use planning, and workforce development. The summit served as a unifying platform to articulate shared regional priorities and actionable recommendations, which **RDATN** subsequently communicated to both the Queensland and Australian Governments. This process reinforced **RDATN's** role as a key regional convener, fostering collaboration across sectors and ensuring that the **Tropical North's housing and workforce** challenges are understood within broader national policy frameworks.

3. Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct Project (EAIP) – Stage One

The Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct Project represents a forward-looking initiative to improve agricultural productivity, water management, and environmental stewardship within the **Gulf Savannah region**. In partnership with **Etheridge Shire Council**, **RDATN** provided governance oversight,

administrative support, and technical coordination for the procurement of specialists to conduct spatial mapping of landholder aspirations, environmental values, and water-soil dynamics. While the delivery of Stage One now sits with Local Government, **RDATN** remains committed to the project’s vision and will continue to provide support and advocacy. This approach ensures that the precinct concept remains central to regional water security discussions and continues to inform State and Federal agricultural development priorities—reinforcing the region’s long-term competitiveness in food and fibre production.

4. Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program (rPPP) Support

Securing investment in place-based infrastructure and community development remains essential to delivering on the **Tropical North’s** economic potential. **RDATN** played an instrumental role in supporting regional proponents under the Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program (rPPP), providing tailored advice, access to data, and facilitation of partnerships between local governments, community organisations, and industry. Nine proponents received direct assistance during the year, resulting in high-quality submissions aligned with national priorities for regional revitalisation. Through this initiative, **RDATN** strengthened the region’s funding readiness, enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, and ensured that local projects reflected both community needs and the broader strategic objectives of State and Federal governments.

5. Northern Collaboration and Strategic Alignment

Collaboration across northern Australia is central to ensuring cohesive regional development and strategic advocacy on shared priorities. **RDATN** worked closely with the **Northern RDA Alliance** and the **Northern Queensland RDA Bloc** to identify key cross-regional opportunities, including the advancement of a **Northern Water Strategy**, an **Indo-Pacific Engagement Strategy**, and an **East–West Connectivity Package**. Agreement on these priority initiatives led to the preparation and submission of a coordinated proposal to the Federal Government seeking support for implementation. This work underscores **RDATN’s** leadership in fostering a unified northern voice—driving collaborative planning, enhancing economic connectivity, and aligning the region’s strategic direction with State and Federal priorities for infrastructure, trade, and sustainable development.

Through these strategic priorities, **RDATN** has made significant contributions to the economic and social fabric of the region, ensuring that **Tropical North Queensland** remains a vibrant, resilient, and innovative hub for growth. Our commitment to collaboration, sustainability, and regional leadership will continue to guide our efforts in the coming years.



CEO REPORT

We have made significant improvements in communication and collaboration between the many stakeholders in the region this year.

Our mission to stimulate sustainable economic development has been underscored by our leadership in community consultation, water infrastructure, regional housing, and workforce development, all of which reflect our commitment to fostering long-term growth across Tropical North Queensland (TNQ).

The 2024–2025 year has been one of momentum and impact for **RDATN**. Our focus has been on translating regional priorities into action—strengthening liveability, supporting economic resilience and laying the foundations for a sustainable future for **Tropical North Queensland**.

RDA Tropical North successfully finalised delivery of the **Regional Arts Services Network (RASN)** project (see appendix B). The consultation explored how arts and culture are experienced, valued and prioritised throughout the region. A clear roadmap for strengthening the region’s cultural landscape. It affirms the community’s appetite for deeper participation and leadership in arts and culture, and it outlines the infrastructure, programming, and policy supports required to realise that vision. The project’s conclusion marks a significant achievement in strengthening the region’s creative capacity and leaving a lasting legacy for future cultural development.

Our focus on regional infrastructure was further demonstrated through the **Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program (rPPP)**. **RDATN** played a pivotal role in supporting nine proponents to submit high-quality submissions. Securing over \$5.8 million for regional projects, including the **Mareeba Shire CBD Revitalisation, Croydon Precinct Growth plan and Cairns Major Events Precinct Masterplan**. These achievements align with our **Business Plan’s** priority to stimulate economic development through public and private sector partnerships. The funding secured for **Mareeba Shire Council, Croydon Shire Council** and **Cairns Regional Council** will also significantly revitalise the region’s infrastructure, supporting tourism and community development.

Our work on **workforce development** and **trade** was highlighted through our leadership of the **FNQ Trade and Investment Group (TIG)**, co-chaired with **Trade & Investment Queensland (TIQ)**. In alignment with our strategic priority to grow local economies, we established an investment-ready project database for investment opportunities and facilitated closer collaboration between local businesses and government stakeholders.

Our involvement in advocacy efforts through delegations to **Brisbane** and **Canberra** ensured that our region’s workforce needs and economic opportunities were well-represented at the highest levels.

Our business planning and strategic objectives have also been strengthened through our leadership in regional policy advocacy. By positioning **RDATN** as an integral part of the **Northern RDA Alliance**, we have actively contributed to national discussions around the **Developing Northern Australia agenda**, water

security, and the need for a **Northern Australia Population Strategy**. These efforts are vital to driving systemic change and unlocking further economic potential for the **Tropical North**.

RDATN played a key role in identifying **workforce development opportunities** in the region. Through partnerships with local organisations like **Advance Cairns, Tradelinked-PNG-Pacific** and **Tourism Tropical North Queensland**, **RDATN** raised critical issues such as infrastructure, tourism, and links to the Pacific.

As part of our facilitation function, we held two roundtables to progress a **Pacific Engagement Strategy** with key regional stakeholders. This strategy will build stronger relational connections with our Pacific neighbors.

The Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct Project represents a forward-looking initiative to improve agricultural productivity, water management, and environmental stewardship within the **Gulf Savannah region**. In partnership with **Etheridge Shire Council**, **RDATN** provided governance oversight, administrative

support, and technical coordination for the procurement of specialists to conduct spatial mapping of landholder aspirations, environmental values, and water-soil dynamics. This evidence will support the further development of strategies, program design and better outcomes for the shire.

I want to extend my deepest thanks to the **RDA Tropical North Board**, our dedicated staff, and the many stakeholders across government, industry, and the community who have collaborated with us this year. Together, we are driving meaningful change and ensuring a prosperous future for **Tropical North Queensland**.



Sonja Johnson
Chief Executive Officer
RDA Tropical North



*“Across all our work, **RDATN** has remained focused on strengthening liveability as a foundation for economic success. Housing, water, workforce, infrastructure and connectivity are deeply interconnected, and addressing them holistically is essential to creating resilient, thriving communities.”*

CASE STUDY:

Far North Queensland Housing Summit 2024

In July 2024, RDA Tropical North coordinated in conjunction with Far North Queensland Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) and Torres and Cape Indigenous Council's Alliance (TCICA) to bring together all levels of government and key regional stakeholders from the not-for-profit and private sectors, to seek accommodation solutions at the Tropical North Queensland Housing Summit held at The Cairns Institute, James Cook University, Cairns, Queensland.

Opportunity

Nationally, the country is facing significant challenges with respect to housing availability which is further compounded and exaggerated in regional and remote Australia. With additional challenges associated with aging infrastructure, land availability constraints; and despite the Reinsurance Pool, rising insurance costs – these are all issues that require coordinated intervention and place-based solutions.

The Far North Queensland (FNQ) Housing Summit, held in July 2024, was convened in response to the growing housing crisis in the region. The “**Tropical North Economic Development Strategy (TEDS)**”, developed by **Regional Development Australia Tropical North (RDATN)**, highlighted the urgent need for diverse housing solutions across social, affordable, rental, and worker housing categories.

The region faces significant challenges, including rising housing costs, insufficient availability of land, outdated infrastructure, and the impact of short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb) on housing availability for essential workers. Addressing these issues has become an economic development priority due to their direct effect on workforce retention, population growth, and regional investment. Furthermore, the need to ensure equitable housing solutions, particularly for Indigenous communities in the Torres Strait and Cape York regions, was paramount to fostering social and economic sustainability.

The summit created a platform for stakeholders to identify policy gaps, explore innovative housing solutions, and advocate for government intervention to address these complex challenges.

Project Background

The FNQ Housing Summit, spearheaded by RDATN in collaboration with FNQROC, TCICA, and other regional partners, aimed to bring together local, state, and federal government representatives alongside private sector developers and non-profit organizations. The event gathered over 100 participants to discuss existing housing initiatives and programs, barriers to housing solutions, and possible paths forward.

The summit's structure included presentations from government officials, panel discussions featuring key stakeholders, and a workshop focused on identifying gaps and formulating actionable recommendations. Notably, the summit placed a strong emphasis on understanding the housing challenges faced by Indigenous communities in the Torres Strait and Cape York regions. Additionally, it addressed the broader regional challenges of affordability, rental availability, and the need for workforce housing.

The objectives of the summit were threefold:

- **Raise awareness** of current policies and programs impacting housing in the region.
- **Identify gaps and barriers** to delivering housing solutions in the short, medium, and long term.
- **Develop recommendations** for state and federal governments on housing and infrastructure interventions that align with the region's economic development strategy.

Project Outcomes and Actions

The FNQ Housing Summit produced several key outcomes and advocacy points, which now serve as the foundation for ongoing regional housing efforts:

- **Expansion of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH):** A key recommendation was for a second round of NPARIH, specifically targeting Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait, to address housing overcrowding, improve living conditions, and foster long-term social and economic development. The inclusion of Yarrabah in this new phase was emphasized due to its acute housing needs and infrastructure challenges.
- **Land Availability and Trunk Infrastructure:** The summit highlighted the pressing need for suitable land and infrastructure to support mid-density housing developments. Indigenous communities are particularly affected, with many lacking the infrastructure needed for housing projects. The summit called for government support to conduct asset audits in all remote communities and for the establishment of a dedicated Trunk Infrastructure Fund to assist local governments in developing housing-ready land.
- **Modular Housing Solutions:** While modular housing has been proposed as a solution for rapid deployment in urban areas, the summit found it unsuitable for remote Indigenous regions due to the environmental wear and tear on materials. Instead, there was advocacy for locally tailored housing solutions that better withstand the unique climatic conditions in the region.
- **Incentives for Community Housing Providers:** The summit advocated for state and federal governments to introduce incentives to attract Tier 1 community housing providers to regional Queensland. These providers could deliver sustainable housing solutions in partnership with local councils and communities, addressing both affordable and social housing needs.
- **Workforce Housing Solutions:** The region's workforce housing shortages were identified as a critical barrier to economic development. Large employers in tourism, agriculture, and construction sectors lack incentives to build or fund worker accommodation. The summit proposed new financial models, including public-private partnerships and social impact bonds, to incentivize the development of workforce housing.
- **Policy Reforms for Short-Term Rentals:** With over 5,000 properties in FNQ being used as short-term rentals, summit participants recommended policy interventions such as regulating Airbnb properties and incentivizing property owners to release stock for long-term rental. This would help alleviate the rental shortage and support the region's essential workers.
- **Addressing Strata Insurance Costs:** The high cost of strata insurance in FNQ was identified as a major deterrent to investment in mid-density housing developments. Despite the introduction of the Reinsurance Pool, premiums remain prohibitively high. The summit urged both state and federal governments to take action to ensure that the pool effectively reduces insurance costs, thereby encouraging investment and development.

Advocacy and Next Steps

The FNQ Housing Summit's outcomes form RDATN's housing advocacy efforts, co-led by RDA Tropical North and TCICA, was submitted to both state and federal governments. The document presented a unified regional position calling for urgent intervention in several areas, including:

- The renewal of NPARIH to address housing needs in Indigenous communities.
- The establishment of a Trunk Infrastructure Fund to support regional housing development.
- Policy reforms to reduce the cost of strata insurance, incentivize housing investments, regulate short-term rental markets
- Investigate new financial models for workforce housing

By addressing these critical issues, the FNQ region can create a stable and attractive housing market, foster economic growth, and ensure that vulnerable communities have access to safe and secure housing. The next phase will involve working with government partners to implement these recommendations and continue advocating for housing solutions that align with the region's broader economic development goals.

Closing Summary

With over 100 attendees, the Far North Queensland Housing Summit successfully united regional stakeholders to address urgent housing challenges impacting economic growth and social equity. Key outcomes included advocating for a renewed National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH), addressing infrastructure gaps, and reducing strata insurance costs that hinder housing development. Solutions such as incentives for community housing providers and workforce accommodation were highlighted as critical to supporting the region's labor force and addressing the housing shortage.

The summit's recommendations have been presented to The Hon. Clare O'Neil, Federal Minister for Housing of Australia and The Hon. Samuel O'Connor, State Minister for Housing and Public Works, calling for immediate action to fund infrastructure upgrades, support modular housing adaptations, and introduce incentives to unlock long-term rental properties. These collective efforts aim to create sustainable, affordable housing solutions that will strengthen both economic development and community wellbeing across the region.



Housing crisis summit

'20 people crammed in one home'

Dylan Nicholson

The executive officer of the Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance has described seeing 15-20 people crammed into four-bedroom homes as leaders met in Cairns for a housing summit.

Speaking at the Tropical North Queensland Housing Summit held at the Cairns Institute, Mick Miller — who represents 16 of the 17 indigenous councils plus Wetpa and Cook Shire — said there needed to be more accountability from the different levels of government.

"Our biggest issue is the blockage within legislation, government, policy and funding," he said.

"The funding comes from the feds and it will cascade down through tiers and by the time it hits the ground it's not there."

Mr Miller said major issues lay in the affordability of development and the cultural suitability of housing solutions



The affordability of building homes in the Torres Strait, in places like Thursday Island, is a major issue, says TCICA chief executive Mick Miller. Picture: Brendan Radde

being put in place.

"When you look at cost escalators in our communities, to deliver a four-bedroom house on the Torres islands is \$1.2m, where you can deliver that for \$400,000 in Cairns," he said.

Overcrowding is also a massive issue in Cape and Torres Strait communities.

"When you look at overcrowding in Cairns compared to some of my communities

we are seeing 15-20 people in a four-bedroom house."

Three of the major issues for the audience were, addressing how to unlock Airbnb stock for long term rentals, investigating collaborative housing models, and elevating modular housing solutions.

RDA Tropical North chair Harriyet Babacan said housing was one of the major economic and social challenges facing the Far North and that a

whole of region approach was needed.

"We have been having these conversations but this is the first time in my 10 years here I have seen we have brought it all together to take a holistic view," she said.

Ms Babacan said the region was growing at just under two per cent, population-wise, and there was a chronic problem in that housing demand and supply do not match.

"We have workers coming to the region and economic growth but we don't have the houses," she said.

"We also have significant housing stress with high rents, people are struggling."

"We will see the vulnerable become more disadvantaged. We have more low income people than other regions. It will affect our social cohesion creating a society of haves and have-nots."

Meet The Speakers



Miranda McEwan



Peter Fry



Ed Johnson



Anthony Archie



Matthew Leman



Glen Maguire



Mark Jentz



Prof. Harriyet Babacan



Brett Nancarrow



James Mort



Wayde Chiesa



Jenny Brown



Industry leaders at today's regional housing summit have discussed the steps forward to ease the state's housing crisis. #WINNews | Channel 82 during the...

CASE STUDY:

State of the Region Roadshow 2024

RDA Tropical North coordinated the delivery of information sessions to several locations across Far North Queensland and facilitated the connection between regional LGAs and participating agencies.

Opportunity Identification

Following the release of the annual **'State of the Region'** dataset, RDA Tropical North identified a prime opportunity for local councils and community leaders to access updated economic data crucial for informed decision-making. The Roadshow's sessions were aimed at highlighting economic shifts due to rising inflation, interest rate changes, and housing issues, helping participants forecast and strategize for upcoming opportunities within their regions.

The month of July was particularly selected to allow newly appointed Mayors and Councillors (March 2024) time to settle into the new roles and responsibilities; and become familiar with their regional statistics.

Background

A collaborative effort between RDA Tropical North (RDATN), FNQ Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC), and .id (Informed Decisions), the Roadshow reached various local government areas (LGAs) in Far North Queensland, including Croydon, Etheridge, Tablelands, Mareeba, Cairns, Cassowary Coast.

The initiative provided data insights specific to each Local Government Area and facilitated direct engagement with Federal representatives from agencies including AusIndustry, NAIF, Office of Northern Australia and the Department of Home Affairs, offering participants valuable connection, resources and advice for regional development.

Project Outcomes

The Roadshow achieved significant engagement across participating LGAs, with notable full Council attendance in Mareeba and Cassowary Coast and several business leaders and recruitment firms present at the Tablelands sessions.

The well-attended Cairns timeslot with approximately 50 participants, featured an expanded event with full 20-minute presentations delivered from .id, AusIndustry, NAIF, Office of Northern Australia, RDA Tropical North. Following the information session, a networking dinner for strategic and local stakeholders and agency representatives, fostered deeper collaboration with the region.

By equipping attendees with actionable data, resource material and face-to-face connection with the various agencies, the Roadshow successfully laid the groundwork for regional leaders and community groups to navigate economic challenges and capitalize on new growth avenues.

It is the intention of RDA Tropical North to host the Roadshow's annually following the release of this dataset.



Appendix A – Financial Statements

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc
ABN: 30 438 376 695

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For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

Financial Statements

- Auditor’s Independence Declaration
- Statement of Profit and Loss and Other Comprehensive Income
- Statement of Financial Position
- Statement of Changes in Equity
- Statement of Cash Flows
- Notes to the Financial Statements
- Responsible Person’s Declaration
- Independent Audit Report

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

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INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

TO THE DIRECTORS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA TROPICAL NORTH INC
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2025

We declare that, to the best of our knowledge and belief, in relation to the audit of Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc. for the year ended 30 June 2025, there have been:

- no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements as set out in section 60-40 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*; and
- no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct.

Yours faithfully
Jessups

Darren Thamm
Partner

Dated this 15th day of September 2025

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

		2025	2024
	Note	\$	\$
Revenue	4	921,650	1,874,574
Interest income		5,707	6,938
Other income	4	44,707	15,140
Employee benefits expense		(719,604)	(666,717)
Depreciation and amortisation expense		(3,040)	(11,455)
Stakeholder engagement		(9,165)	(17,975)
Consultants		(21,415)	(1,093,911)
Accounting and audit fees		(35,166)	(37,552)
Other expenses		(112,755)	(94,153)
Travel expenses		(35,820)	(32,290)
Rent expenses		(26,104)	(30,685)
Legal expenses		-	(6,253)
Unexpended grant funds		(648)	-
TNQFDN transfer payments		(298)	-
Profit before income tax		8,049	(94,339)
Income tax expense		-	-
Profit for the year		8,049	(94,339)
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year		8,049	(94,339)

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Statement of Financial Position As At 30 June 2025

	Note	2025 \$	2024 \$
ASSETS			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	5	155,143	282,807
Trade and other receivables	6	5,838	153,193
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		<u>160,981</u>	<u>436,000</u>
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	7	6,725	7,505
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		<u>6,725</u>	<u>7,505</u>
TOTAL ASSETS		<u>167,706</u>	<u>443,505</u>
LIABILITIES			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	8	20,901	41,927
Employee benefits	10	51,522	65,642
Other financial liabilities	9	-	267,277
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>72,423</u>	<u>374,846</u>
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Employee benefits	10	18,575	-
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>18,575</u>	<u>-</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES		<u>90,998</u>	<u>374,846</u>
NET ASSETS		<u>76,708</u>	<u>68,659</u>
EQUITY			
Retained earnings		<u>76,708</u>	<u>68,659</u>
TOTAL EQUITY		<u>76,708</u>	<u>68,659</u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Statement of Changes in Equity For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

	Retained Earnings	Total
	\$	\$
Balance at 1 July 2024	68,659	68,659
Surplus (deficit) for the year	8,049	8,049
Total other comprehensive income for the period	-	-
Balance at 30 June 2025	76,708	76,708

	Retained Earnings	Total
	\$	\$
Balance at 1 July 2023	162,998	162,998
Surplus (deficit) for the year	(94,339)	(94,339)
Total other comprehensive income for the period	-	-
Balance at 30 June 2024	68,659	68,659

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Statement of Cash Flows For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

	2025	2024
Note	\$	\$
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES:		
Receipts from customers	1,073,535	2,208,109
Payments to suppliers and employees	(1,204,646)	(2,362,099)
Interest received	5,707	6,938
Net cash provided by/(used in) operating activities	16 <u>(125,404)</u>	<u>(147,052)</u>
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES:		
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	<u>(2,260)</u>	(1,914)
Net cash provided by/(used in) investing activities	<u>(2,260)</u>	(1,914)
CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES:		
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents held	(127,664)	(148,966)
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year	<u>282,807</u>	431,773
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	5 <u><u>155,143</u></u>	<u>282,807</u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Notes to the Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

The financial report covers Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc as an individual entity. Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc is a not-for-profit Association, registered and domiciled in Australia.

The principal activities of the Association for the year ended 30 June 2025 were to engage with all levels of government, business and community groups to support economic development of their regions.

The functional and presentation currency of Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc is Australian dollars.

Comparatives are consistent with prior years, unless otherwise stated.

1 Basis of Preparation

The financial statements are general purpose financial statements that have been prepared in accordance with the Australian Accounting Standards - Simplified Disclosures and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis and are based on historical costs modified, where applicable, by the measurement at fair value of selected non-current assets, financial assets and financial liabilities.

Material accounting policy information relating to the preparation of these financial statements are presented below, and are consistent with prior reporting periods unless otherwise stated.

2 Material Accounting Policy Information

(a) Revenue and other income

Revenue from contracts with customers

The core principle of AASB 15 is that revenue is recognised on a basis that reflects the transfer of control of promised goods or services to customers at an amount that reflects the consideration the Association expects to receive in exchange for those goods or services.

Generally the timing of the payment for sale of goods and rendering of services corresponds closely to the timing of satisfaction of the performance obligations, however where there is a difference, it will result in the recognition of a receivable, contract asset or contract liability.

None of the revenue streams of the Association have any significant financing terms as there is less than 12 months between receipt of funds and satisfaction of performance obligations.

The revenue recognition policies for the principal revenue streams of the Association are:

Grant Income

Where grant income arises from an agreement which is enforceable and contains sufficiently specific performance obligations then the revenue is recognised when control of each performance obligations is satisfied. The performance obligations are varied based on the agreement but may include delivery of specific projects.

Other Income

Other income is recognised on an accruals basis when the Association is entitled to it.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Notes to the Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

2 Material Accounting Policy Information

(b) Income tax

The Association is exempt from income tax under Division 50 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

(c) Goods and services tax (GST)

Revenue, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of goods and services tax (GST), except where the amount of GST incurred is not recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). Receivables and payable are stated inclusive of GST.

Cash flows in the statement of cash flows are included on a gross basis and the GST component of cash flows arising from investing and financing activities which is recoverable from, or payable to, the taxation authority is classified as operating cash flows.

(d) Volunteer services

No amounts are included in the financial statements for services donated by volunteers.

(e) Property, plant and equipment

Each class of property, plant and equipment is carried at cost less, where applicable, any accumulated depreciation and impairment.

Depreciation

Property, plant and equipment, excluding freehold land, is depreciated on a straight-line basis over the asset's useful life to the Association, commencing when the asset is ready for use.

The depreciation rates used for each class of depreciable asset are shown below:

Fixed asset class	Depreciation rate
Plant and Equipment	20 - 33%

(f) Financial instruments

Financial assets

All recognised financial assets are subsequently measured in their entirety at either amortised cost or fair value, depending on the classification of the financial assets.

Classification

On initial recognition, the Association classifies its financial assets into the following categories, those measured at amortised cost. The Association does not hold any financial assets at fair value.

Amortised cost

The Association's financial assets measured at amortised cost comprise trade and other receivables and cash and cash equivalents in the statement of financial position.

Subsequent to initial recognition, these assets are carried at amortised cost using the effective interest rate method less provision for impairment.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

2 Material Accounting Policy Information

(f) Financial instruments

Financial assets

Interest income and impairment are recognised in profit or loss. Gain or loss on derecognition is recognised in profit or loss.

Trade receivables

Impairment of trade receivables have been determined using the simplified approach in AASB 9 which uses an estimation of lifetime expected credit losses. The Association has determined the probability of non-payment of the receivable and multiplied this by the amount of the expected loss arising from default.

The amount of the impairment is recorded in a separate allowance account with the loss being recognised in finance expense. Once the receivable is determined to be uncollectable then the gross carrying amount is written off against the associated allowance.

Financial liabilities

The Association measures all financial liabilities initially at fair value less transaction costs, subsequently financial liabilities are measured at amortised cost using the effective interest rate method.

The financial liabilities of the Association comprise trade payables, bank and other loans and lease liabilities.

3 Critical Accounting Estimates and Judgments

Those charged with governance make estimates and judgements during the preparation of these financial statements regarding assumptions about current and future events affecting transactions and balances.

These estimates and judgements are based on the best information available at the time of preparing the financial statements, however as additional information is known then the actual results may differ from the estimates.

The significant estimates and judgements made have been described below.

Key estimates - receivables

The receivables at reporting date have been reviewed to determine whether there is any objective evidence that any of the receivables are impaired. An impairment provision is included for any receivable where the entire balance is not considered collectible. The impairment provision is based on the best information at the reporting date.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

4 Other Revenue and Income

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Revenue from contracts with customers (AASB 15)		
- contracts with customers - grants	783,443	1,780,467
- Unexpended grants brought forward	119,796	93,507
	<u>903,239</u>	<u>1,873,974</u>
Revenue recognised on receipt (AASB 1058)		
- provision of services	18,411	600
	<u>18,411</u>	<u>600</u>
Total Revenue	<u>921,650</u>	<u>1,874,574</u>
Other Income		
- Reimbursements	22,387	3,017
- Sundry income	15,100	12,123
- Sponsorship	7,200	-
- Sale of Assets	20	-
	<u>44,707</u>	<u>15,140</u>

Government grants and other assistance

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Commonwealth government		
Dept Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water	-	1,000,000
Dept Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts	453,387	439,590
	<u>453,387</u>	<u>1,439,590</u>
State government		
Arts Queensland	277,800	284,800
	<u>277,800</u>	<u>284,800</u>
Other government revenue		
Other government revenue	52,256	56,077
	<u>52,256</u>	<u>56,077</u>
Total government grants and other assistance	<u>783,443</u>	<u>1,780,467</u>

5 Cash and Cash Equivalents

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Cash at bank and in hand	155,143	282,807
	<u>155,143</u>	<u>282,807</u>

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

6 Trade and Other Receivables

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
CURRENT		
Trade receivables	4,386	139,216
Deposits	1,452	2,010
Prepayments	-	11,967
	<u>5,838</u>	<u>153,193</u>

7 Property, Plant and Equipment

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Plant and equipment		
At cost	104,391	102,131
Accumulated depreciation	(97,666)	(94,626)
Total property, plant and equipment	<u>6,725</u>	<u>7,505</u>

Movements in carrying amounts

Movement in the carrying amounts for each class of property, plant and equipment between the beginning and the end of the current financial year:

	Plant and Equipment	Total
	\$	\$
Year ended 30 June 2025		
Balance at the beginning of year	7,505	7,505
Additions	2,260	2,260
Depreciation expense	(3,040)	(3,040)
Balance at the end of the year	<u>6,725</u>	<u>6,725</u>

8 Trade and Other Payables

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
CURRENT		
Trade payables	480	10,412
GST payable (receivable)	(3,832)	(2,415)
Accrued expenses	5,529	1,125
PAYG payable	16,594	18,844
Superannuation payable	2,130	13,961
	<u>20,901</u>	<u>41,927</u>

Trade and other payables are unsecured, non-interest bearing and are normally settled within 30 days. The carrying value of trade and other payables is considered a reasonable approximation of fair value due to the short-term nature of the balances.

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

9 Other Financial Liabilities

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
CURRENT		
Unexpended grants	-	120,041
Grants received in advance	-	147,236
	<u>-</u>	<u>267,277</u>

10 Employee Benefits

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
CURRENT		
Provision for employee benefits	<u>51,522</u>	<u>65,642</u>
	<u>51,522</u>	<u>65,642</u>
NON-CURRENT		
Long service leave	<u>18,575</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>18,575</u>	<u>-</u>

11 Financial Risk Management

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Financial assets		
Held at amortised cost		
Cash and cash equivalents	155,143	282,807
Trade and other receivables	<u>5,838</u>	<u>153,193</u>
Total financial assets	<u>160,981</u>	<u>436,000</u>
Financial liabilities		
Financial liabilities measured at amortised cost	<u>20,902</u>	<u>41,927</u>
Total financial liabilities	<u>20,902</u>	<u>41,927</u>

12 Key Management Personnel Disclosures

The remuneration paid to key management personnel of the Association is \$ 203,835 (2024: \$ 207,820).

13 Auditors' Remuneration

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Remuneration of the auditor Jessups NQ, for:)		
- auditing or reviewing the financial statements	<u>7,000</u>	<u>6,600</u>
	<u>7,000</u>	<u>6,600</u>

Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc

ABN: 30 438 376 695

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2025

14 Contingencies

In the opinion of those charged with governance, the Association did not have any contingencies at 30 June 2025 (30 June 2024:None).

15 Related Parties

(a) The Association's main related parties are as follows:

Key management personnel - refer to Note 12.

Other related parties include close family members of key management personnel and entities that are controlled or significantly influenced by those key management personnel or their close family members.

16 Cash Flow Information

Reconciliation of net income to net cash provided by operating activities:

	2025	2024
	\$	\$
Profit for the year	8,049	(94,338)
Non-cash flows in profit:		
- depreciation	3,040	11,455
Changes in assets and liabilities:		
- (increase)/decrease in trade and other receivables	147,355	(3,518)
- increase/(decrease) in trade and other payables	(288,303)	(80,611)
- increase/(decrease) in employee benefits	4,455	19,960
Cashflows from operations	<u>(125,404)</u>	<u>(147,052)</u>

17 Events After the End of the Reporting Period

No matters or circumstances have arisen since the end of the financial year which significantly affected or may significantly affect the operations of the Association, the results of those operations or the state of affairs of the Association in future financial years.



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INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

TO THE MEMBERS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA TROPICAL NORTH INC.
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2025

Report on the Audit of the Financial Report

Opinion

We have audited the financial report of Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc. (the registered entity), which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2025, the statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the directors' declaration.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report of the registered entity is in accordance with Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* (ACNC Act), including:

- giving a true and fair view of the registered entity's financial position as at 30 June 2024 and of its financial performance for the year then ended; and
- complying with Australian Accounting Standards – AASB 1060: *General Purpose Financial Statements – Simplified Disclosures for For-Profit and Not-for-Profit Tier 2 Entities* and Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013*.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the registered entity in accordance with the ACNC Act and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110: *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (including Independence Standards)* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Information Other than the Financial Report and Auditor's Report Thereon

The directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the registered entity's annual report for the year ended 30 June 2025, but does not include the financial report and our auditor's report thereon. Our opinion on the financial report does not cover the other information and accordingly we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. In connection with our audit of the financial report, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial report or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.



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A.B.N.: 99 194 967 950



Responsibilities of the Directors for the Financial Report

The directors of the registered entity are responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards – AASB 1060: *General Purpose Financial Statements – Simplified Disclosures for For-Profit and Not-for-Profit Tier 2 Entities* and the ACNC Act and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the directors are responsible for assessing the registered entity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the directors either intend to liquidate the registered entity or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial report is located at the Auditing and Assurance Standards website at: http://www.auasb.gov.au/auditors_responsibilities/ar4.pdf. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Jessups

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DT", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Darren Thamm
Partner

Dated this 15th day of September 2025

Appendix B – RASN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT



An initiative of the
Queensland Government
through Arts Queensland

Community Consultation Report

for Tropical North Queensland

by: Regional Arts Services Network Tropical North 2025
Authors: Anthony Castles, Vanessa Gillen, Waratah Nicholls



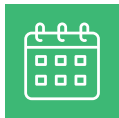
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1. Summary

This report, prepared by the Regional Arts Services Network – Tropical North (RASNTN), outlines the findings of community consultations across Far North Queensland between August 2024 and May 2025. The consultations engaged over 280 participants from urban, rural, and remote communities. The consultation explored how arts and culture are experienced, valued, and prioritised throughout the region.



**August 2024 -
May 2025**



**Over 280
participants**



**Urban, rural,
and remote
communities**

Key findings reveal that arts and culture play a critical role in fostering community connection, cultural identity, well-being, and economic opportunity. Common themes emerging from the consultations include strong support for youth engagement, the need for accessible arts spaces, and a desire to see increased investment in cultural tourism and First Nations leadership.

The report identifies several region-wide priorities. Arts activities are widely recognised for promoting mental health, social cohesion, and intergenerational connection. Communities called for dedicated and inclusive spaces for creative expression and improved transport solutions. Local stories, public art, and self-guided trails are seen as key to strengthening regional identity and attracting visitors. There is demand for expanded training and creative opportunities to support emerging and established artists. Sustained funding, mentoring, and culturally safe platforms are vital to amplifying Indigenous voices. Creative activities tailored to young people are essential to future cultural participation.

The findings align strongly with both state and federal cultural policies, including Queensland's *Creative Together 2020-2030* and the Australian Government's *Revive* policy. These frameworks recognise the transformative power of the arts in building resilient, inclusive, and economically vibrant communities.



In conclusion, the RASNTN consultation provides a clear roadmap for strengthening the region's cultural landscape. It affirms the community's appetite for deeper participation and leadership in arts and culture, and it outlines the infrastructure, programming, and policy supports required to realise that vision. Strategic investment in these areas will not only enhance community wellbeing and cultural expression but also position Far North Queensland as a national leader in regional arts and culture.

1.1. Alignment to State and Federal Arts and Cultural Policy

The findings from this regional engagement strongly align with the strategic priorities outlined in Arts Queensland’s *Creative Together 2020–2030* policy and the Australian Government’s national cultural policy *Revive: Australia’s Cultural Policy for the Next Five Years*. Both frameworks emphasize the transformative power of the arts in fostering wellbeing, inclusion, cultural identity, and economic growth—principles echoed throughout the community priorities captured in this report.

In line with *Creative Together*, the emphasis on health, wellbeing, and community collaboration directly supports the vision for a “connected and creative Queensland” where arts and culture strengthen individual and community resilience. The identified need for places and spaces for participation, education and professional development, and First Nations leadership in the arts reflects the five key priorities of *Creative Together*, particularly:



Similarly, the regional focus on accessibility, local participation, cultural tourism, and employment aligns closely with the goals of *Revive*, which envisions a culturally rich nation where

"every story has a place, and every place has a story."

Community calls for equitable access to cultural infrastructure, self-guided art trails, and the celebration of place-based identity support *Revive*’s pillars of First Nations-first approaches, a strong cultural economy, increased accessibility, and regional arts empowerment.

Both policies recognise that cultural expression is critical to a thriving, inclusive society, and the regional findings affirm that communities are eager not only to participate but to lead and shape their own cultural futures. Strategic investment guided by these national and state frameworks will be essential to unlocking the creative potential of the region and ensuring all communities can benefit from and contribute to Queensland’s and Australia’s cultural life.

1.2. Summary of Common Themes

From over 500 words gathered during consultations, where participants were asked what three words came to mind when thinking of arts and culture in their region, key recurring themes emerged. These themes highlight the community's values, aspirations, and priorities for arts and culture in Far North Queensland and include:



Community and Connection

Highlighting the importance of togetherness, shared experiences, and fostering relationships through arts and culture.



Creativity and Expression

Emphasising the role of creativity as a medium for self-expression, innovation, and exploring new ideas.



Diversity and Inclusivity

Reflecting the celebration of varied cultural backgrounds, stories, and artistic practices.



Tradition and Heritage

Underlining the importance of preserving First Nations culture, storytelling, and intergenerational knowledge sharing.



Wellbeing and Relaxation

Recognising the arts as a tool for mental health, relaxation, and community wellbeing.



Celebration and Festivals

Identifying events as a way to celebrate diversity, engage communities, and promote vibrancy.



Youth Engagement

Stressing the need for programs that inspire and connect younger generations to arts and culture.



Accessibility

Addressing challenges like infrastructure and transport to ensure equitable participation in arts activities.



1.3. Key Insights

Community Connection and Wellbeing

Arts and culture are seen as vital for fostering community connection, mental health, and cultural pride across all regions.

Cultural Heritage and Inclusion

First Nations traditions, storytelling, and intergenerational knowledge sharing are critical priorities across the region.

Barriers to Engagement

Challenges include limited infrastructure, funding access, and seasonal participation in rural and remote areas.

Youth and Accessibility

Lack of targeted arts initiatives for youth and inadequate transport options are significant hurdles.

Cultural Tourism

Communities view the arts as a way to attract visitors, boost local economies, and showcase cultural heritage.

1.4. Key Priorities

1

Cultural Tourism Development

Initiatives like art trails, public art, and heritage tours to attract visitors and support local economies.

2

Health and Wellbeing through Arts

Programs that enhance mental health and social cohesion.

3

Youth Engagement

Tailored activities, such as music and multi media workshops, to foster future community leaders.

4

Support for First Nations Artists

Funding, mentoring, and platforms to amplify Indigenous voices and art.

5

Accessible Arts Spaces

Developing venues and transport solutions for inclusive arts activities.

6

Workshops and Professional Development

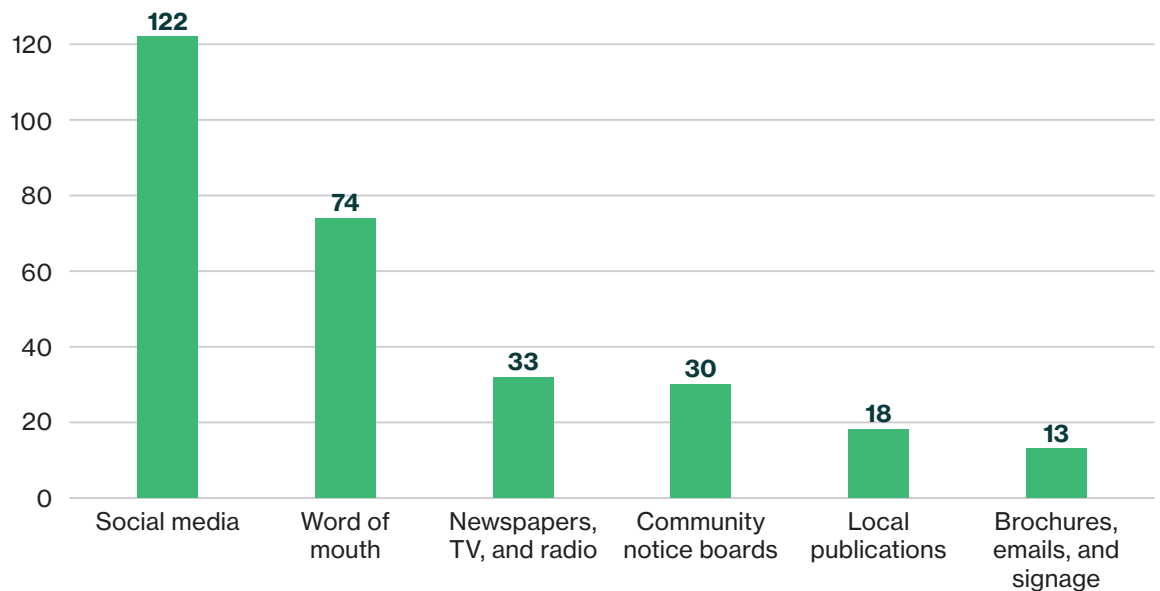
Skills-building programs in traditional crafts, digital storytelling, and grant writing.

1.5. Quantitative Findings



How the Community Hears About Arts and Cultural Events

Social media is the most utilised platform for discovering arts and cultural events, with 122 respondents identifying it as their primary source. Word of mouth is also a significant channel, cited by 74 respondents, reflecting the value of personal networks in spreading information. Traditional media, including newspapers, TV, and radio, accounted for 33 responses, followed by community notice boards (30 responses). Other channels, such as local newsletters and publications (18 responses) and alternative methods like brochures, emails, and signage (13 responses), were less commonly used.



Frequency of Participation

- « The largest group attends **once a month (67 responses)**, indicating a regular level of interest in arts and cultural activities.
- « **Weekly participation (46 responses)** reflects a smaller but highly engaged segment of the community.
- « Less frequent attendance was noted for **once every six months (50 responses) and once a year (29 responses)**, notably 18 of the once per year responses were from Cairns and Babinda.
- « Only **3 respondents reported no participation at all.**



Participation Activities

115 **In-person attendance** is the most common form of engagement, cited by the majority of respondents (115), showcasing a strong preference for live, shared experiences.

92 Creating (92 responses), reflecting **active engagement** in artistic expression.

49 Learning (49 responses) and volunteering (57 responses), indicating **community interest** in skill development and contributing to cultural events. Volunteering was more prominent in rural and remote communities.

35 **Viewing online** (35 responses) was a less common form of participation, suggesting limited reliance on digital formats for engagement.



Locations for Arts Engagement

- « **Civic centre's / community halls / Arts Centres** are the most popular venues, highlighting their role as cultural hubs.
 - « **Friends' and family homes** were more prominently used in rural and remote communities (79 responses) and within surrounding townships within the local regions (97 responses) indicate a strong preference for community-based settings.
 - « **Travel to cities** like Townsville or Brisbane (51 responses) reflects the willingness of some to seek cultural experiences outside the local area. Notably Port Douglas recorded 12 responses and those most likely to travel.
 - « **Libraries** (43 responses) and churches (16 responses) are used by smaller segments of the population, with 6 respondents indicating other venues such as schools or workplaces.
-

2. Who are the Regional Arts Services Network Tropical North

Established in 2018, the Regional Arts Services Network (RASN) aims to leverage the arts to create opportunities for artists and organizations in regional Queensland. Regional Arts Services Network-Tropical North (RASNTN) focuses on the social and economic value of the arts in rural and remote communities, fostering collaboration, support, and capacity building for creative practitioners across its geographic footprint.

2.1. Key Objectives



Champion the Arts: Promote the arts as a transformative social and economic driver particularly in regional areas.



Place-Based Community Consultation: Engage with communities through consultations and ongoing stakeholder meetings to understand the concept of the arts' meaning, value, and challenges from a local perspective.



Career Development: Provide opportunities and industry information for professional growth for creative practitioners through social media platforms, newsletters, grant support, professional development, and presentation opportunities.



In partnership with Regional Development Australia Tropical North, Cook Shire Council, and Torres Strait Islander Media Association, the program connects regional communities to arts and cultural opportunities that build their capacities and enhance local creative economies.



Between 2022 and 2025, RASNTN served Aurukun, Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Cook, Douglas, Etheridge, Hope Vale, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Mareeba, Napranum, Northern Peninsula Area, Pormpuraaw, Tablelands, Torres Strait Islands, Weipa, Wujal Wujal, and Yarrabah.



RASNTN uses a proactive, place-based approach to deepen understanding and promote the diverse cultural landscape across its regions, ensuring arts and cultural activities are integrated into community growth and development.

3. Methods

In July 2024 through to May 2025, "Have Your Say" boards were set up and staffed by representatives from the Regional Arts Services Network, Tropical North Queensland (RASNTN) to gather community feedback across the region. Our team attended the following local events to engage with residents and visitors:

1. Mt Surprise – Campdraft: 20-21 July 2024
2. Forsyth Turnout: 2-4 August 2024
3. Cairns Festival – Carnival on Collins: 1 September 2024
4. Babinda Harvest Festival: 7 September 2024
5. Coen Yarning Circle: 10 September 2024
6. Mapoon Community Hall: 11 September 2024
7. Napranum – Have Your Say Day and PCYC after school care: 12 September 2024
8. Weipa Heritage Centre: 13 September 2024
9. Gordonvale Markets: 5 October 2024
10. Palm Cove Markets: 6 October 2024
11. Mossman Light Up the Park: 27 November 2024
12. Cooktown Markets: 15 March 2025
13. Rossville Markets: 16 March 2025
14. Port Douglas Markets: 18 May 2025

These events, supported by local community champions from each area, provided valuable local insights and connections. By involving these champions, the team was able to reach a wider and more diverse cross-section of the community.

The engagement methodology was developed in consultation with Etheridge Shire Council between July and August 2024, under the guidance of esteemed Arts and Culture Consultant Lesley Buckley, to help inform the creation of a regionally responsive arts and cultural strategy. The methodology was tweaked from a reflection of learnings after each consultation.



3.1. Community Engagement Techniques

Our consultations, conducted in collaboration with local community champions, employed a range of creative engagement techniques designed to encourage inclusive participation and gather meaningful insights. With each engagement, we refined our methods, learning what worked best for different communities and adapting to the unique dynamics of each setting.

The consultations involved numerous participants across diverse social settings, though at times distractions led to some individuals not completing the entire process, resulting in partially completed responses.

Our initial approach focused on establishing a presence at local events, working alongside a trusted community face. At the Babinda Harvest Festival, we introduced interactive elements such as xylophones, tambourines, maracas, and other percussion instruments, along with drawing materials and spirographs. These hands-on activities successfully engaged children, which in turn drew in their parents and carers, creating a natural flow of conversation around arts and culture.

In Cape York, we modified our strategy to better connect with teenage youth, setting up in familiar environments like after-school activities at the PCYC and local basketball courts. While the youth engagement proved limited, the presence of adults—parents, guardians, and event staff—enabled valuable conversations that highlighted indirect youth perspectives and intergenerational engagement with the arts.

To address a recurring theme of disconnection when using the term’s “arts” and “culture,” we developed a reflective engagement method in Cooktown, Rossville, and Port Douglas. Participants were invited to share what they were currently reading, listening to, or watching, prompting natural conversations that revealed a rich and varied tapestry of creative interests and practices. This approach helped bridge the conceptual gap between everyday life and formal arts participation.

A consistent visual element across all engagements was the “Why the Arts Matter” graphic, prominently displayed at each consultation site. This illustrated the broader value of the arts in economic development, community connection, wellbeing, and placemaking (see Figure 1). It provided an accessible entry point for discussing the importance of arts and culture in everyday life.

This evolving, place-based engagement strategy has been instrumental in amplifying diverse

community voices across Far North Queensland. The feedback collected through these consultations is presented in this comprehensive regional report, offering both shared themes and specific local insights into the arts and cultural landscape.

Figure 1: Why the Arts Matter



3.2. How we told people about the project

- « Cairns Creative Life – social media
- « Etheridge Shire Council – social media, community newsletter and posters.
- « Regional Arts Services Network – social media
- « Regional Arts Services Network – bimonthly newsletter
- « Word of mouth
- « Direct email to local politicians and community leaders





3.3. The questions displayed were

1. What are three words that come to mind when you think about how important the arts and culture are to the community of (specific region) and surrounding areas.
2. How do you usually hear about arts and cultural events or activities in the (specific) area?
 - a. Community Notice boards
 - b. Social Media
 - c. Newspaper/Radio
 - d. Friends/Word of Mouth
 - e. Other please specify (e.g. Inform Newsletter; Etheridge, Vibrance Arts and Culture Magazine; Cairns Region, Newsport/Douglas Gazette; Douglas Region, Cape News; Cape York)
3. How do you or those in your household participate in the arts and cultural activities?
 - a. Learning
 - b. Creating
 - c. Attending (in person)
 - d. Viewing Online
 - e. Volunteering
 - f. Other (please specify)
4. How often do you or those in your household participate in or attend arts and cultural activities or events?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Once a year
 - c. Once every six months
 - d. Once a month
 - e. Once a week
5. Where do you or those in your household go to participate in or attend arts and cultural activities?
 - a. Friends and/or family homes.
 - b. At home on the internet
 - c. Civic Centre or community hall
 - d. Local library
 - e. Church
 - f. Surrounding townships within the Cairns region.
 - g. Outside the region in cities such as Cairns, Townsville or Brisbane
 - h. Other (please specify)

N.B. Civic Centres or Community Halls referred to as a local community meeting place, this could be a showground, hall, PCYC, football club, or cultural centre.
6. What are the key priorities that the Council should focus on over the next three years to support the arts and cultural development in the (specific) region (Choose your top five)?
 - a. Cultural tourism initiatives – such as arts and cultural activities that attract visitors and showcase the region as a vibrant destination for the arts and culture.
 - b. Promoting the area's significant places and heritage assets.
 - c. Developing self-guided art trails such as Public Art and sites of cultural and historical significance.
 - d. Increasing the number and diversity of workshops, educational programs and professional development programs in the arts such as grant writing workshops, visual art workshops, writing or performing arts.
 - e. Focusing on arts and cultural activities that support health and wellbeing and bring people together to collaborate on projects, ideas and activities.
 - f. Supporting the growth and sustainability of First Nations artists and projects.
 - g. Ensuring the council's arts and cultural services are accessible and inclusive to all members of the community.
 - h. Increasing arts and cultural activities and events will lead to increased employment opportunities.
 - i. Promoting and marketing local arts and cultural activity.
 - j. Providing places, spaces and facilities for the arts and cultural activities.
 - k. Providing more grant opportunities (increased funding pot and diversity in opportunities) to assist the development of more local arts and cultural activities.
7. Are there any other priorities that the council should focus on to support arts and culture in the region?
8. What are you currently reading?
 - « What music are you listening to?
 - « What's your favourite film/ TV-show or game?

Many questions could be answered by placing a stick-on dot next to the preferred response. For open-ended questions, respondents or station representatives manually recorded responses on sticky notes. Manning the stations enabled respondents to discuss more thoughtful answers and for these to be recorded in more detail.

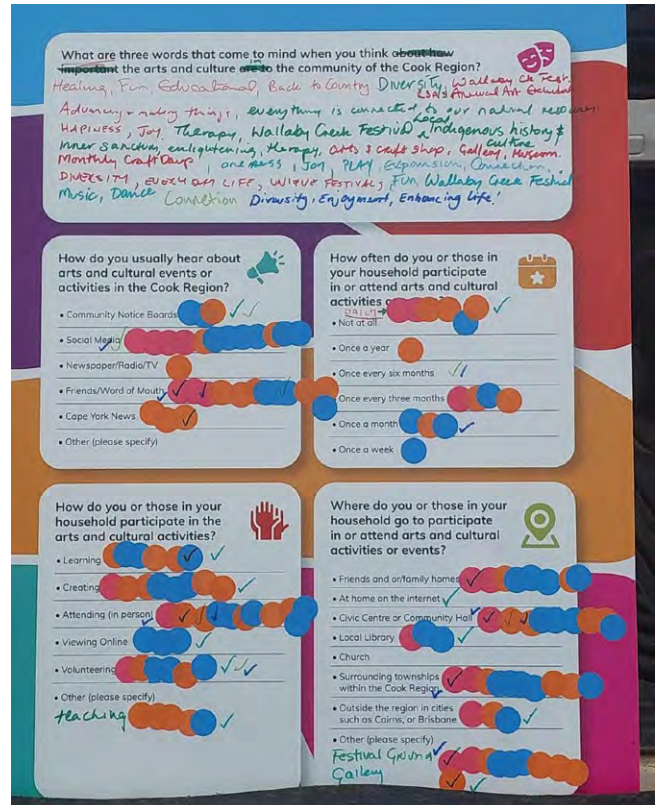
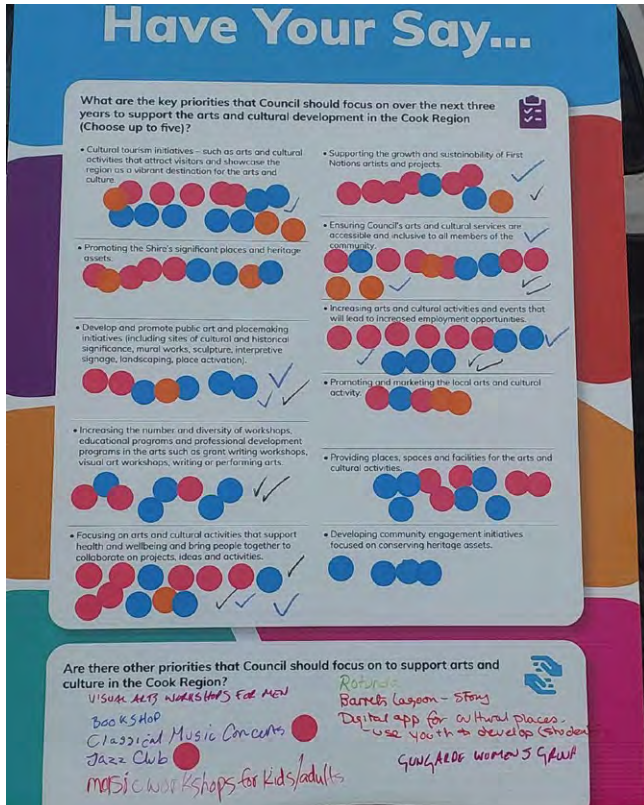




Figure 2: Mt Surprise, Cowboys Relay

Community Consultation Summary

4. Etheridge Shire

4.1. Overview

The Etheridge Shire community consultation explored the importance of arts and culture to residents at key events in Mt Surprise and Forsyth. Feedback highlighted the community's deep connection to local traditions, practical skills, and creative expression. While the community values family-centric activities and cultural pride, challenges such as seasonal engagement, limited arts infrastructure, and minimal council support were noted. The findings will inform the development of strategies to strengthen arts and cultural activities in the region.



4.2. Key Themes and Insights



Community Connection and Wellbeing

- « Arts and culture are seen as integral to fostering social connections, with words like community, fun, and wellbeing frequently mentioned.
- « Seasonal variation affects participation, with a vibrant calendar during the dry season (May-October) and limited activity during the wet season.



Cultural Pride and Practical Skills

- « Residents celebrate their unique bush culture, including farming, rodeos, and camp drafting, as distinct cultural markers.
- « Events like the Turnout and local competitions (e.g., fire lighting, swag relays) highlight community creativity and skills.



Arts and Education

- « Arts initiatives, such as the Mt Surprise school violin group, demonstrate the potential for arts to enrich education in small communities.
- « Limited resources for arts education in schools highlight the need for professional mentoring and skill-building workshops.



Barriers to Inclusion

- « A lack of engagement with Indigenous communities and minimal council investment in arts and culture present challenges to inclusivity.
- « The community's reluctance to promote events to outsiders reflects concerns about safety and preserving the local atmosphere.

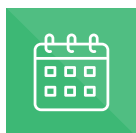


4.3. Quantitative Findings



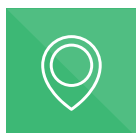
How the Community Hears About Arts and Cultural Events

Respondents predominantly rely on social media (18) to learn about arts and cultural events, followed by word of mouth from friends (8) and community notice boards (6). Other notable channels include "Other" (12 responses), where participants specified sources like informal networks. Traditional media such as newspapers, radio, or TV (1) had a minimal influence.



Frequency of Participation

Engagement with arts and cultural events occurs regularly, with 11 respondents attending events every six months, 9 once a month, and 7 participating weekly.



Locations for Arts Engagement

The most frequented locations for arts and cultural activities include surrounding townships within Etheridge (10) and friends' and family homes (8). Other venues include the civic centre or community hall (7), with fewer respondents indicating participation at the local library (3), church (2), or at home via the internet (2). Larger urban centers such as Cairns, Townsville, or Brisbane (6) were also noted as destinations for cultural engagement.



Modes of Participation

The community engages in various ways, with a significant number volunteering (13) or attending events in person (12). Other forms of participation include creating (5), learning (3), and viewing online (1). Three responses were categorized as "Other" but not specified.



Figure 3: Have Your Say - Forsyth Turnout

4.4. Key Priorities Identified

- 1 Cultural Tourism Initiatives**
Develop programs that attract visitors, such as art trails and heritage-based events (10 responses).
- 2 Workshops and Professional Development**
Increase the diversity of skill-building workshops, including grant writing, visual arts, and bush crafts (10 responses).
- 3 Health and Wellbeing**
Foster arts and cultural activities that enhance mental health and community cohesion (12 responses).
- 4 Arts Spaces and Facilities**
Create more accessible spaces for arts activities, including studios and exhibition venues (9 responses).
- 5 Grant Opportunities**
Simplify funding pathways to encourage more local initiatives (10 responses).

4.5. Additional Community Feedback

Artistic Recognition

Residents suggested acknowledging hobbyists and amateur artists to broaden participation.

Skill Sharing

Calls for industry professionals to lead workshops on sewing, drawing, and bush crafts.

Heritage Celebration

Greater emphasis on preserving farming and bush culture as key aspects of local identity.

4.6. Observations and Recommendations



Observations

- « Seasonal engagement patterns and family-centric priorities shape the region's arts ecology.
- « Limited council support and Indigenous representation pose barriers to a more inclusive cultural strategy.



Recommendations

- « Establish an arts society to foster collaboration and community-driven projects.
- « Develop transport solutions for rural areas to increase accessibility to arts events.
- « Promote inclusive programs that integrate traditional bush skills with artistic expressions.
- « Engage Indigenous communities to enrich the cultural landscape of Etheridge Shire.

4.7. Conclusion

The Etheridge Shire consultation revealed a strong community attachment to local culture and traditions, with arts playing a vital role in fostering social connections and wellbeing. By addressing gaps in infrastructure, funding, and inclusiveness, Etheridge Shire has the potential to build a thriving arts ecosystem that reflects its unique cultural identity while enhancing opportunities for both residents and visitors.





Figure 4: Weipa Heritage Shopping Centre Engagement

Community Consultation Summary

5. Cape York

5.1. Overview

The Cape York consultation engaged communities in Mapoon, Coen, Napranum, and Weipa, to explore their relationship with arts and culture. The project travelled over 1,000 kilometers through rural and remote Far North Queensland, offering a unique perspective on the vastness and challenges of the region. Key themes included preserving cultural practices, storytelling, and fostering community connections, while challenges such as funding access, youth engagement, and opportunities to develop cultural tourism were identified.



5.2. Key Themes and Insights



Cultural Preservation

« Communities emphasized the importance of traditional lore, storytelling, and cultural knowledge, reflecting a deep connection to their land, sea, and heritage.



Creative Expression

« Painting, dancing, singing, and arts and crafts were highlighted as integral to individual and community identity. These forms of expression also support intergenerational knowledge sharing.



Community Connection and Inclusivity

« Activities that foster togetherness, relaxation, and fun were valued across the communities. For youth, creativity offered a means of self-expression and engagement with their culture and wider Australian cultures.



Cultural Tourism Opportunities

« Communities identified cultural tourism as a pathway to showcase their identity and attract visitors while creating employment opportunities.



Challenges in Accessibility and Participation

« Funding barriers, limited resources, and the difficulty of retaining youth engagement due to schooling and community disconnection were consistent themes.

Figure 5: Community Engagement Napranum RUOK Day

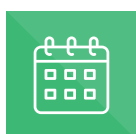


5.3. Quantitative Findings



How the Community Hears About Arts and Cultural Events

Across the communities of Coen, Mapoon, Napranum, and Weipa, social media emerged as the most common platform for discovering arts and cultural events, especially in **Weipa (10)** and **Napranum (6)**. **Friends and word of mouth** were also significant sources of information, particularly in **Napranum (9)** and **Weipa (9)**. Community notice boards remain important in Mapoon, Napranum, and Weipa but are less utilized in Coen. Traditional media, including newspaper, radio and TV, had limited reach, with a few mentions in Mapoon (**Yarn Time**) and Napranum. Other sources, such as schools, were occasionally referenced.



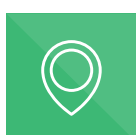
Frequency of Participation

Participation varied significantly across communities. Regular engagement was most evident in Mapoon and Weipa, where many respondents participated **once a month (Mapoon: 4, Weipa: 4)** or **once a week (Mapoon: 2, Weipa: 4)**. Coen and Napranum reported lower engagement, with some households participating **only once a year or not at all**.



Modes of Participation

Participation in arts and cultural activities took diverse forms. **Attending events** was popular across all communities, particularly in **Weipa (10)** and **Napranum (4)**. **Making arts and crafts** was another key activity, especially in **Napranum (7)** and **Weipa (9)**. Other modes included **performing, volunteering,** and **workshops**, though these were less consistent across regions. Viewing arts online was noted in each community but remained a minor mode of participation.



Participation Venues

The venues for arts and cultural engagement varied:

- « **Friends' and family homes** were common in all communities, particularly in **Weipa (7)** and **Napranum (4)**.
- « **Civic centres or community halls** were frequently used in **Mapoon (4)**, **Napranum (6)**, and **Weipa (5)**.
- « **Local libraries**, churches, and surrounding townships also hosted activities, with **churches** being particularly relevant in **Napranum (4)** and **Mapoon (2)** for Sunday School.
- « **Travel outside** the region, to cities like Cairns, Townsville, or Brisbane, was notable in **Weipa (6)** but rare elsewhere.

5.4. Key Priorities Identified

- 1 Cultural Tourism Initiatives**
Develop programs that showcase cultural heritage and draw visitors, such as self-guided art trails and public art installations.
- 2 Workshops and Professional Development**
Increase arts workshops in traditional crafts, digital storytelling, and grant writing to support skill-building and creative opportunities.
- 3 Health and Wellbeing through Arts**
Foster arts activities promote mental health, inclusiveness, and community collaboration.
- 4 Sustainability of First Nations Arts**
Support the growth of First Nations artists through dedicated funding, mentoring, and exhibition opportunities.
- 5 Improved Accessibility to Arts Spaces**
Provide accessible venues for arts and cultural activities and address transport barriers in remote areas.

5.5. Additional Community Feedback

Funding Accessibility

Simplify application processes for grants to reduce barriers for volunteers and non-English speakers.

Youth Engagement

Develop programs that actively recruit youth and align with their schedules, particularly for those returning from boarding schools.

Cultural Protocols

Preserve cultural practices and protocols, particularly through intergenerational teaching and digital archiving of traditions.

5.6. Observations and Recommendations



Observations

- « Communities demonstrated a strong cultural foundation but faced challenges in sustaining engagement due to resource limitations and administrative hurdles.
- « A lack of consistency in funding and support for arts and cultural activities was evident across all locations.



Recommendations

- « **Establish Regional Arts Hubs:** Create multi-purpose spaces for arts and cultural activities in Coen, Mapoon, Weipa, and Napranum.
- « **Streamline Funding Processes:** Standardise grant applications across organisations and increase funding accessibility.
- « **Support Cultural Tourism:** Develop partnerships to create cultural tours, heritage trails and interpretive signage to attract tourists and boost local economies.
- « **Engage Youth Through Technology:** Introduce digital storytelling and videography workshops to connect youth with their heritage.

5.7. Conclusion

The Cape York consultation underscored the central role of arts and culture in fostering connection, preserving traditions, and promoting wellbeing across the region. By addressing challenges in funding, accessibility, and youth engagement, the region has the potential to enhance its vibrant cultural identity and establish itself as a dynamic hub for arts and cultural tourism. These findings will guide strategies to support sustainable and inclusive cultural development in Cape York communities.



Figure 6: Mapoon Engagements





Figure 7: Creative Engagement activities at Babinda Harvest Festival

Community Consultation Summary

6. Cairns and Surrounds

6.1. Overview

This section combines insights from four community consultations held at the Cairns Carnival on Collins, Babinda Harvest Festival, Gordonvale Markets, and Palm Cove Markets. These engagements explored local perceptions of arts and culture in the Cairns region, aiming to identify priorities and opportunities for fostering inclusivity, creativity, and community wellbeing through arts initiatives.

Across the consultations, common themes emerged, including the importance of diversity, youth engagement, accessibility, mental health, and economic growth. Combined, the consultations involved over 115 participants, reflecting a mix of ages and demographics, although it should be noted that it was predominantly older women aged 40–60.

6.2. Key Themes and Insights



Community Connection & Inclusivity

Participants consistently associated arts and culture with fostering social interaction and a sense of belonging. Words like "community," "diversity," and "inclusion" appeared frequently. Many emphasised the need for inclusive programs that represent all demographics, particularly First Nations, LGBTIQ+, youth, and the elderly.



Youth Engagement

The lack of arts activities tailored to younger audiences was a recurring concern. Suggestions included drama, music, graffiti art workshops, and creative engagement in nature. Youth-focused initiatives were highlighted as critical for fostering future community leaders and ensuring long-term cultural engagement.



Mental Health & Wellbeing

Arts activities were seen as vital for promoting relaxation, coping with mental health challenges, and reducing social isolation. Participants highlighted the therapeutic power of creativity and the importance of accessible, family-friendly programs.



Cultural Tourism & Economic Development

Participants recognised the potential of arts to boost tourism and local economies. Ideas included promoting cultural heritage, public art installations, and supporting First Nations and multicultural initiatives to draw tourists and create economic opportunities for local artists.



Spaces & Accessibility

A lack of dedicated arts spaces, particularly in suburban and rural areas, was a key concern. Suggestions included repurposing underutilised spaces, creating public art trails, and providing transport solutions to improve access to events.

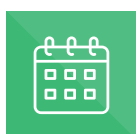


6.3. Quantitative Findings



How the Community Hears About Arts and Cultural Events

Across Palm Cove, Gordonvale, Babinda, and Cairns, social media was the dominant channel for learning about arts and cultural events, with 60 responses overall, including 26 from Cairns and 14 from Palm Cove. Word of mouth also played a significant role (26 responses overall), particularly in Cairns (9) and Palm Cove (7). Traditional media like newspapers, TV, and radio accounted for 18 responses, with a relatively even distribution across regions. Alternative sources included brochures, emails, road signs, and venue websites, cited by 10 respondents overall.



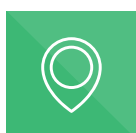
Frequency of Participation

- « Participation in arts and cultural activities varied, with the highest engagement seen in monthly and weekly attendance:
- « 24 respondents participated once a month, with Palm Cove (10) and Gordonvale (6) leading.
- « 15 respondents engaged weekly, particularly in Cairns (8) and Palm Cove (4). Less frequent participation was noted among those attending once every six months (22 overall) or annually (11 overall). Only one respondent reported no participation.



Modes of Participation

- « The most common way households participated in arts and cultural activities was through in-person attendance (56 overall), particularly in Cairns (23) and Palm Cove (11). Other modes included:
- « Creating: 28 responses overall, with Cairns (14) and Palm Cove (6) leading.
- « Learning: 16 responses overall, notably in Gordonvale (7) and Cairns (6).
- « Viewing online: Limited uptake, with only 12 responses overall.
- « Volunteering: A smaller group (7 responses overall), with minimal engagement in Babinda and Cairns.



Locations for Arts Engagement

Key locations for engaging in arts and cultural activities included:

- « Civic centres or community halls, the most frequented venue, with 47 responses overall, particularly in Cairns (25) and Palm Cove (12).
- « Surrounding townships within the Cairns region, cited by 41 respondents, including 16 from Palm Cove and 11 from Gordonvale.
- « Friends' or family homes, a common informal venue, noted by 22 respondents. Other venues included libraries (12), churches (5), and travel outside the region to cities like Townsville or Brisbane (17).

6.4. Key Priorities Identified

- 1 Health & Wellbeing Through Arts**
Community-driven programs promoting mental health and social cohesion were the top priority.
- 2 Youth-Centric Programs**
Increased focus on youth-targeted activities to spark creativity and engagement.
- 3 Spaces for Arts**
Dedicated, affordable spaces for arts workshops, rehearsals, and performances.
- 4 Cultural Tourism**
Initiatives like self-guided art trails, heritage tours, and public art to attract and engage tourists.
- 5 Support for First Nations Artists**
Amplifying Indigenous voices through representation in events and projects.



Figure 8: Palm Cove Engagements

6.5. Recommendations



Activate Underutilised Spaces

Repurpose empty shops, suburban parks, and other unused venues for creative use.

Enhanced Marketing & Outreach

Improve communication channels to inform communities, especially in rural areas, about ongoing events.

Integrated Arts & Health Programs

Develop programs that explicitly link creativity with health benefits, targeting both youth and elders.

Suburban & Rural Inclusion

Expand arts programs beyond city centres to include remote and suburban communities.

Transport Solutions

Introduce shuttle buses or other affordable transport options for accessing cultural events.

Ongoing Support for Festivals

Provide consistent funding and logistical support to sustain local festivals as community anchors.

6.6. Conclusion

The consultations revealed a strong desire for arts and culture to serve as a unifying force, fostering inclusivity, creativity, and economic growth. Addressing the identified challenges, especially accessibility and youth engagement, will be critical in developing a thriving arts and cultural landscape that reflects the diverse voices of the community.

Figure 9: Cairns Festival Engagements





Figure 10: Port Douglas Engagements

Community Consultation Summary

7. Douglas Region – Mossman and Port Douglas

7.1. Overview

The Douglas Region consultations, held in **Mossman** in November 2024 and **Port Douglas** in May 2025, were delivered as part of the **Regional Arts Services Network Tropical North (RASNTN)** community consultations. These engagements aimed to understand community values, participation patterns, and priorities for arts and cultural development across the region.

In Mossman, approximately **25 community members**, including youth, families, and First Nations participants, contributed to discussions at the “**Light Up the Park**” event. In Port Douglas, around **20 participants** took part in a consultation hosted at the **Port Douglas Markets**, representing a mix of full-time and part-time residents, diverse age groups, and cultural backgrounds.

Both events revealed a passionate, engaged, and culturally aware community, with deep respect for First Nations heritage, strong interest in artistic expression, and a shared vision for a more vibrant, inclusive, and creative Douglas Region.



7.2. Key Themes and Insights



Sense of Place and Community Connection

- « Across both sites, participants used words like connection, community, family, and belonging to describe what arts and culture mean to them.
- « Arts were seen as a vital means to foster unity, create shared identity, and support intergenerational knowledge sharing.



Respect for Indigenous Culture and Cultural Safety

- « Yalanji culture was central to feedback in Mossman, with participants emphasising the importance of cultural awareness, storytelling, and respect.
- « In Port Douglas, participants strongly supported greater visibility and leadership for First Nations artists, calling for culturally safe spaces and long-term investment.



Creativity, Expression, and Wellbeing

- « Community members highlighted the role of the arts in self-expression, education, and mental wellbeing, particularly through music, dance, storytelling, and screen-based media.
- « Participants linked artistic engagement to personal identity, enjoyment, and stress relief.



Public Art and Cultural Tourism

- « In both locations, participants expressed strong support for placemaking, murals, interpretive signage, and public art installations that celebrate local stories and environments.
- « Cultural tourism emerged as a shared opportunity to raise the region's creative profile and attract visitors.

7.3. Challenges and Barriers

- « A lack of accessible venues, transport, and visibility of opportunities was identified in both communities.
- « Participants called for more workshops, increased support for Douglas Arts Base (DAB), and the activation of unused spaces such as empty shopfronts.

7.4. Quantitative Findings



How the Community Hears About Arts and Cultural Events

- « **Social media** (24 responses across both sites) and word of mouth (20 responses) were the primary sources.
- « **Traditional media** (12 responses), **noticeboards** (8 responses), and **local publications** (4 responses) were less common.



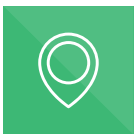
Frequency of Participation

- « The majority of participants attend arts and cultural events once a month (26 responses).
- « A small number participated **weekly or daily** (4 responses).
- « Infrequent participation was rare.



Modes of Participation

- « **Creating art** (24 responses) and **attending in-person events** (18 responses) were the most common forms of engagement.
- « **Volunteering** (18 responses) and **workshop activities** (12 responses) were also notable.
- « Only 6 respondents indicated **online participation**, and 2 identified as **arts teachers**.



Locations for Arts Engagement

- « **Friends' or family homes** (24 responses) were the most common venues for engagement.
 - « Other popular spaces included **community halls** (12), **local libraries** (10), and **events in nearby towns** such as Cairns (16).
 - « Some respondents indicated participation through **work-related activities**, **overseas travel**, (6 responses).
-

7.5. Key Priorities Identified

- 1 Supporting the growth and sustainability of First Nation's artists and projects.**
Invest in programs and partnerships that support First Nations artists and ensure culturally safe environments for expression and leadership (20 mentions).
- 2 Focusing on arts and cultural activities that support health and wellbeing and bring people together to collaborate on projects, ideas and activities.**
Provide inclusive arts opportunities that enhance mental health, belonging, and intergenerational connection (20 mentions).
- 3 Develop and promote public art and placemaking initiatives**
Develop visual and place-based projects such as murals, signage, and trails to celebrate local culture and identity (18 mentions).
- 4 Cultural Tourism initiatives**
Position Douglas as a cultural destination through creative activations and storytelling-based experiences (12 mentions).
- 5 Increasing the number and diversity of workshops, educational programs and professional development programs in the arts**
Expand local workshops in performing, visual, and digital arts to foster skill-building and participation (16 mentions).
- 6 Promotion and Marketing of Local Arts**
Improve outreach and awareness through multilingual and diverse promotional efforts (11 mentions).
- 7 Ensure the Council's arts and cultural services are accessible and inclusive to all members of the community.**
Increase access to creative venues such as through the use of pop-up spaces and revitalisation of underused buildings (10 mentions).

7.6. Additional Community Feedback

- « More sculptures, murals, and public art reflecting cultural stories.
- « Greater support and visibility for **Douglas Arts Base (DAB)**.
- « Live music and performance events in **local halls and informal spaces**.
- « Creative use of **empty shopfronts** and **underused buildings**.
- « Youth engagement through partnerships with First Nations educators.
- « Culturally relevant campaigns (**e.g., Crocwise and safety through arts engagement**).
- « Transport improvements.
- « Support for **native title recognition** and **artefact repatriation**.

7.7. Observations and Recommendations



Observations

- « Both consultations served as welcoming social hubs, encouraging casual and meaningful engagement.
- « Participants demonstrated a pre-existing value for arts and culture, with a high level of enthusiasm for sharing their experiences and ideas.
- « Compared to other Far North Queensland consultations, Douglas Region communities showed a notably high willingness to contribute.

Figure 11: Mossman Engagements



Recommendations

- « **Expand Cultural Tourism**
Develop public art trails, placemaking initiatives and heritage storytelling tours across Mossman and Port Douglas.
- « **Enhance Arts Access**
Establish a regional arts gallery and activate unused spaces for exhibitions, performances, and workshops.
- « **Strengthen First Nations Representation**
Partner with Yalanji leaders and other Indigenous creatives to co-design programs that prioritise cultural safety and storytelling.
- « **Foster Intergenerational and Inclusive Engagement**
Deliver arts programs that bring together all age groups, with a focus on mental health, education, and collaboration.
- « **Address Barriers to Participation**
Improve transport access, ensure affordable and inclusive programming, and increase local promotion and marketing.

7.8. Conclusion

The Mossman and Port Douglas community consultations affirmed the Douglas Region's vibrant and engaged creative community. Residents value the arts not only as a form of personal expression and joy, but also as a vital means of preserving culture, connecting generations, and supporting wellbeing.

Through collaborative partnerships, investment in infrastructure, and culturally safe initiatives, the region can position itself as a **leader in regional arts, First Nations storytelling, and community-led cultural tourism**. The findings of this consultation provide a clear mandate for inclusive, locally grounded, and strategic cultural development across the Douglas Region.

8. Summary of Findings: Arts and Cultural Participation Across all Regions

The summary of findings present a comprehensive look into the arts and cultural engagement patterns across Cairns, Cook, Douglas, Etheridge, and Cape York communities. The data highlights several key themes and regional nuances that offer insight into how arts and culture are experienced, valued, and prioritised throughout the region.

8.1. Communication Channels and Access to Information

The dominance of **social media** as the primary information source reflects a widespread reliance on digital platforms, even in remote and rural communities. This trend underscores the importance of maintaining an active and targeted online presence for arts and cultural organisations. However, **word of mouth** remains a powerful tool, especially in more tight-knit or remote communities like Cape York, indicating the value of grassroots community networks.

Traditional media, such as print, TV, and radio, have a limited role, which may reflect a generational shift or limited regional media reach. **Community noticeboards and local publications** like the Douglas Gazette are still relevant in certain areas but not consistently impactful, suggesting a need for multi-channel communication strategies that balance digital with locally grounded approaches.

8.2. Participation Frequency and Modes of Engagement

Participation data indicates **moderate to strong engagement**, with **monthly involvement** being most common across regions. Notably, more **frequent (weekly)** participation was seen in urban centres like Cairns and Cooktown, suggesting greater access to activities and events or stronger community-driven cultural rhythms.

In-person attendance is the most dominant engagement mode, affirming the importance of physical spaces and live experiences in community arts engagement. The significant presence of **creative participation and volunteering**, particularly in Rossville and Etheridge, suggests that residents in more remote areas value active contribution, not just passive consumption.

However, **online engagement remains limited**, which could reflect digital access barriers, low awareness of virtual programs, or a preference for face-to-face interaction. This highlights an opportunity to develop digital strategies that better serve and reach regional audiences.

8.3. Locations of Engagement and Mobility

The findings highlight a balanced use of both **formal venues** (e.g., community halls, civic centres) and **informal spaces** (e.g. private homes), with **neighbouring townships** being frequent sites of engagement. This reinforces the idea that arts and cultural activity is deeply embedded in local settings and is not confined to institutions or urban hubs.

8.4. Regional Priorities for Arts and Culture

The **priority areas** identified across the regions reflect a strong alignment around key community needs:

- « **Health, wellbeing and collaboration** emerged as the top priority, reinforcing the widely recognised role of the arts in promoting mental health, social connection, and community resilience.
- « The equal importance given to **dedicated arts spaces and educational programs** points to the need for both physical infrastructure and skill-building opportunities that enable sustained engagement and professional development.
- « **Cultural tourism and promotion** were also seen as critical, suggesting that communities are keen to position themselves as creative destinations and boost visibility for local artists.
- « The strong emphasis on **support for First Nations artists, employment, and accessibility** speaks to both a desire for cultural preservation and an understanding of the arts as a lever for **economic and social equity**.

Notably, emerging themes such as **self-guided art trails** and **heritage promotion** highlight a growing interest in storytelling, placemaking, and interactive cultural experiences that blend tradition with contemporary practice.

8.5. Overall Interpretation

Collectively, the findings point to a region where the arts are seen not only as entertainment or aesthetic experiences but as **integral to community identity, social cohesion, and well-being**. There is widespread engagement, but also clear opportunities for development, particularly in strengthening infrastructure, enhancing promotion, and expanding inclusive, locally relevant programming.

A strategic regional approach that is **place-based, culturally responsive, and community-led** will be essential to address the needs identified in this analysis. Empowering local artists, improving communication and access, and supporting the creation of vibrant public and community spaces will be key to realising the full potential of arts and culture across the region.

8.6. Quantitative Findings



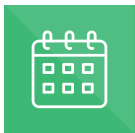
How the Community Hears About Arts and Cultural Events

Across all regions, **social media** emerged as the most dominant channel for event promotion, consistently cited as the primary source for information:

- « Palm Cove, Gordonvale, Babinda, and Cairns: **60 responses overall**
- « Etheridge Shire: **18 responses**
- « Cape York communities (Coen, Mapoon, Napranum, Weipa): **21 responses total**
- « Douglas Region: **32 responses**

Other notable sources include:

- « **Word of mouth**, ranging from 26 responses in the Cairns Region to 10 in Douglas Region and a notable presence in Cape York (23 responses overall).
- « **Traditional media** (newspaper, TV, radio): Limited impact, with 18 responses across Cairns Region, 6 in Douglas, and minimal uptake elsewhere.
- « **Community noticeboards** were more region-specific, with notable use in Etheridge and Cape York but lower usage elsewhere.
- « **Local publications** like Vibrance Magazine or Douglas Gazette had very limited reach.



Frequency of Participation

Participation frequency indicates moderate to high engagement levels:

- « **Monthly participation** is the most common, with 13 responses in Douglas, 24 in Cairns Region, and strong engagement in Mapoon, Napranum, and Weipa.
- « **Weekly engagement** is evident in Cairns Region (15 responses), and Cooktown but remains limited in Etheridge Shire (7 responses).



Modes of Participation

- « **Creating art** (24 responses) and **attending in-person events** (18 responses) were the most common forms of engagement.
- « **Volunteering** (18 responses) and **workshop activities** (12 responses) were also notable.
- « Only 6 respondents indicated **online participation**, and 2 identified as **arts teachers**.



Locations for Arts Engagement

- « **Civic centres and community halls:** Key venues across all regions, with 47 responses in Cairns Region, 6 in Douglas, and regular use in Cape York and Etheridge.
- « **Friends and family homes:** Frequently cited in all regions, particularly in Cape York (25 responses overall) and Douglas (12 responses).
- « **Participation within the individual regions in surrounding townships** was the most common response overall.
- « **Travel to other urban centers** (e.g., Cairns, Townsville, Brisbane) was common in Weipa and Cairns Region but rare elsewhere.

8.7. Key Insights

- 1** Social media and word of mouth are critical channels for event promotion, with traditional media and community notice boards serving as secondary sources.
- 2** Most participants engage monthly or weekly, with a preference for in-person attendance and active participation (e.g. creating, volunteering).
- 3** Engagement is strongly rooted in both informal (homes) and formal (arts and cultural venues, community halls, libraries), with occasional travel for cultural opportunities outside the region.



9. Summary of Key Priorities across all regions

The communities highlighted a range of priorities to enhance arts and cultural activities, with the most frequently cited focus areas across the whole region listed below in order of importance:

Health, Well-being, and Collaboration

The top priority, with **126 responses**, emphasized fostering health and well-being through arts and cultural activities that bring people together to collaborate on projects, ideas, and activities.

Places and Facilities for Arts

Providing dedicated spaces and facilities for arts and cultural activities was identified by **103 respondents** as critical to support community participation and creative expression.

Workshops and Educational Programs

Expanding workshops, educational programs, and professional development opportunities in areas such as grant writing, visual arts, and performing arts was also prioritized by **103 respondents**.

Cultural Tourism Initiatives

97 respondents expressed the importance of arts and cultural activities that attract visitors and position the region as a vibrant cultural destination

Promotion and Marketing

83 respondents stressed the need to effectively promote and market local arts and cultural activities to boost visibility and community engagement.

Promoting Place and Heritage Assets

Showcasing the shire's significant cultural and heritage landmarks was a key focus for **80 respondents**.

Supporting First Nations Artists

78 respondents emphasized the importance of growing and sustaining First Nations artists and projects, reflecting the community's commitment to cultural preservation and empowerment.

Employment Opportunities

77 respondents highlighted the need for arts and cultural activities that generate employment opportunities, supporting the region's economic growth.

Self-Guided Art Trails

Developing self-guided trails featuring public art and culturally significant sites was supported by **67 respondents**, showcasing its potential to enrich both local and visitor experiences.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

The **62 respondents** identified, as a priority, that arts and cultural services are accessible and inclusive to all members of the community.



10. Overall Conclusion

The Regional Arts Services Network – Tropical North (RASNTN) has demonstrated through extensive community consultations that arts and culture are essential to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Far North Queensland. Across diverse communities, from urban centers to remote regions, arts have been identified as a vital tool for fostering community connection, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting mental health and wellbeing.

Despite the vibrant cultural landscape, significant challenges remain. Limited infrastructure, accessibility issues, seasonal engagement and gaps in youth-focused initiatives hinder full participation. First Nations artists, while celebrated, require further support to sustain and share their rich cultural contributions.

The report highlights the immense potential of cultural tourism, inclusive programming, and targeted workshops to address these gaps. Communities across the region have expressed a strong desire for increased investment in accessible arts spaces, professional development, and programs that strengthen the connection between creativity and community wellbeing.

By implementing the key priorities outlined in this report, Far North Queensland can overcome barriers, amplify its unique cultural identity, and foster sustainable growth in the arts sector. Through collaboration, strategic planning, and sustained support, the region has the opportunity to establish itself as a dynamic hub for arts and culture, benefiting residents and visitors alike.



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