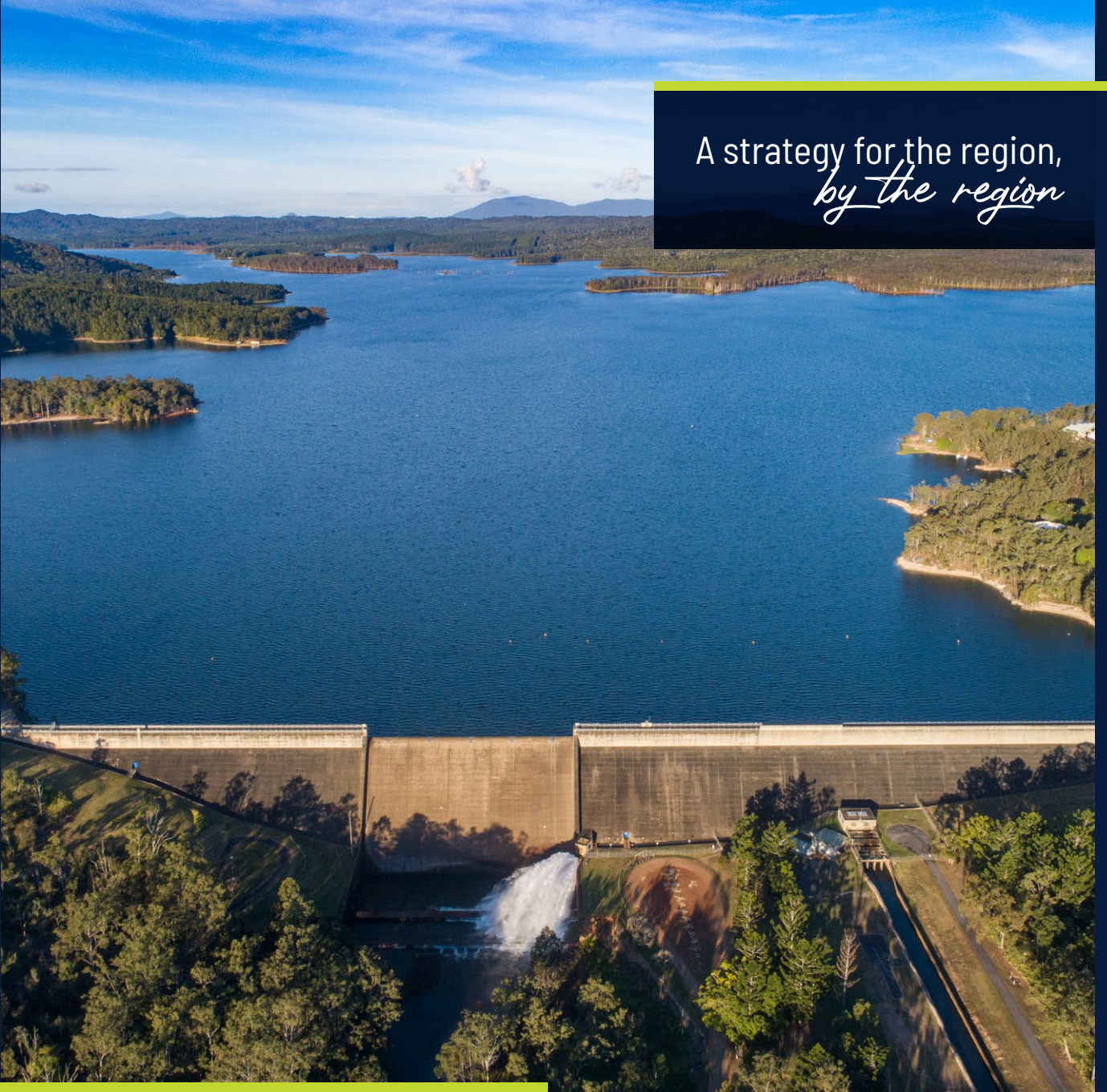
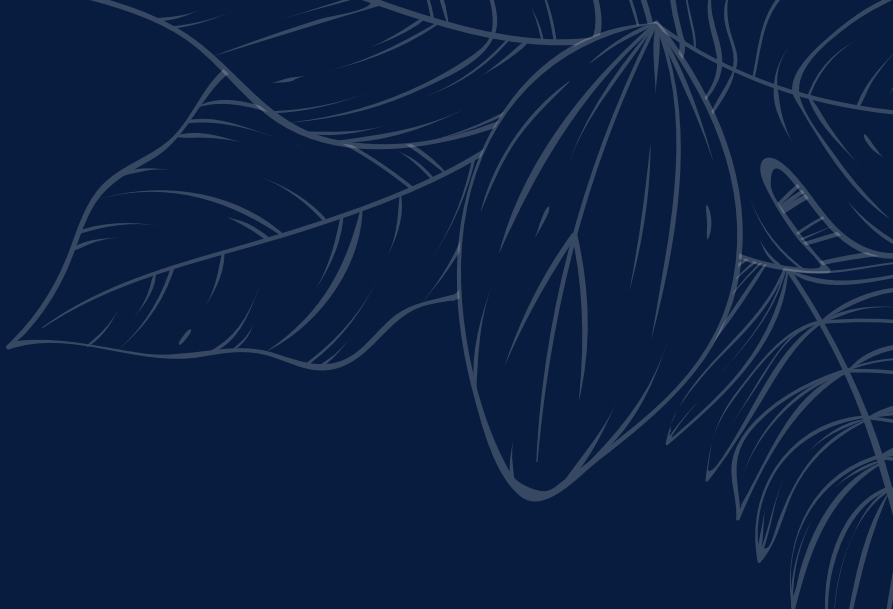


An aerial photograph of a large concrete dam with three main sections. Water is cascading over the central spillway, creating a white waterfall. The reservoir behind the dam is a deep blue, surrounded by lush green forested hills and islands. In the distance, more forested mountains are visible under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. A road and some infrastructure are visible on the right side of the dam.

A strategy for the region,
by the region

TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-2029 v2.1



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Evidence and methodology note

TEDS is an evidence-informed regional strategy developed using publicly available statistical and economic data, published government and industry sources, regional economic modelling, existing plans and strategies, and place-based intelligence provided by regional stakeholders. The most recent available data has been used where practicable; however, reporting periods, geographic boundaries and update cycles vary between sources.

As part of the TEDS update, selected indicators, evidence and contextual information have been refreshed where newer information is available. Some baseline measures remain unchanged where no comparable updated dataset has been released. Third-party modelling and stakeholder-provided information reflect the methodologies and information available from the original source and have not been independently audited by RDA Tropical North.

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Contact us

Prepared by RDA Tropical North

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Foreword



**Professor Hurriyet
Babacan AM**

Chair – Regional Development
Australia Tropical North



Tropical North Queensland is a region defined by its diversity, resilience and opportunity. Stretching from Cardwell in the south to the Torres Strait in the north and west to the Gulf, our region connects communities, industries and cultures across one of Australia's most significant and dynamic parts of the nation.

The **Tropical North Queensland Economic Development Strategy (TEDS)** provides a shared regional direction for economic development, investment attraction and long-term prosperity. This revised digital edition represents the **second iteration of the strategy**, building on the original regional plan developed through extensive consultation with government, industry, community and First Nations partners across Tropical North Queensland.

Since its initial release, TEDS has helped articulate a clear regional narrative for Far North Queensland – identifying key economic enablers, infrastructure priorities and emerging industry opportunities that support sustainable regional growth. The strategy has also strengthened the region's ability to engage with Australian and Queensland Government policy frameworks and inform place-based investment decisions.

The development and continued evolution of TEDS reflects the importance of regional collaboration. **Regional Development Australia Tropical North has worked closely with partners across the economic development ecosystem, including the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) and the Torres Cape Indigenous Councils Alliance (TCICA), alongside industry, research institutions and community organisations.** These partnerships remain fundamental to shaping a shared regional vision and ensuring the strategy reflects the diverse priorities of communities across the region.

TEDS sets out a clear regional vision – **a thriving, diverse and sustainable powerhouse of Northern Australia, linking the nation to the Indo-Pacific.** Achieving this vision requires coordinated effort across sectors and levels of government, as well as strong collaboration across our region.

Six transformational goals guide the region's priorities. Together they focus on strengthening productivity, enhancing liveability, building resilience, improving connectivity, enabling economic transition and fostering deeper regional collaboration. These goals recognise that sustainable economic development in Tropical North Queensland must balance economic opportunity with environmental stewardship, cultural integrity and social inclusion.

Importantly, this updated digital strategy reflects the need for **adaptive regional planning.** Economic conditions, policy environments and global trends continue to evolve, particularly in Northern Australia and the Indo-Pacific. Maintaining TEDS as a living document enables Regional Development Australia Tropical North and our regional partners to update priorities, track progress and respond to new opportunities for investment, trade and regional growth.

Regional success depends on strong partnerships. Regional Development Australia Tropical North will continue to work closely with **local governments, FNQROC, TCICA, industry leaders, community organisations, research institutions and all levels of government** to convene conversations, align priorities and advocate for the investments needed to support sustainable regional development.

Together, we have the opportunity to strengthen Tropical North Queensland's position as a key economic and cultural hub for Northern Australia – one that connects Australia with our neighbours across the Pacific and Indo-Pacific region.

On behalf of Regional Development Australia Tropical North, I thank the many organisations and individuals who continue to contribute their expertise, insight and leadership to this important regional strategy.

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ABOUT THE TNQ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-2029

Regional Development Australia (RDA) is a network of 50 Committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and the community to support economic development of their regions. Under their Charter, RDA Committees have an active role in facilitating economic development that harnesses local competitive and comparative advantages, attracts trade and investment and seizes opportunities to create jobs and local procurement. The Charter also includes the development of a Strategic Regional Plan to inform Australian government investment and policy decisions.

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

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

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



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

The primary objectives of the TEDS are to:



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

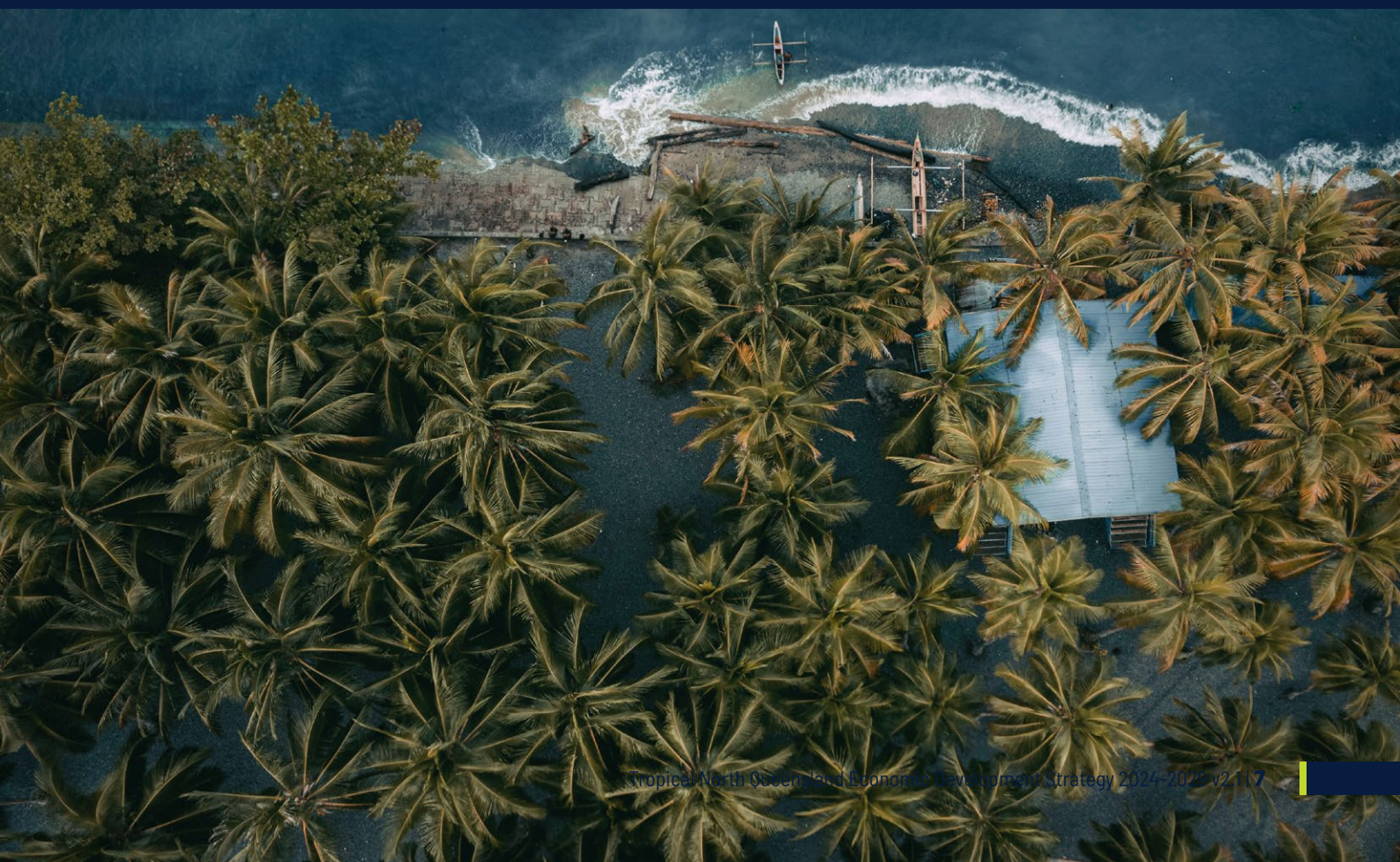


2Inform Australian government place-based investment and policy decisions.



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

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



What makes the TEDS work?

Engagement with the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC), industry peak bodies, economic development agencies, State government and community ensures that the plan was developed by, and for, our region. A full list of entities involved in the TNQ economic development ecosystem can be found in Appendix A.

As part of this ecosystem, RDA Tropical North plays a crucial function in co-ordinating, collaborating, informing, supporting, engaging, facilitating and delivering initiatives that drive sustainable development in line with the TEDS.

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

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

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

How will the TEDS be monitored and evaluated?

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

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

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



THE TEDS AT A GLANCE



Unlocking TNQ's Potential for Sustainable Growth

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



Population: Attracting Talent and Families

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



Participation: Empowering Youth Engagement

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



Productivity: Boosting Regional Prosperity

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

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

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



Indigenous led economic development

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

TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND TODAY

AT A GLANCE



273,000m² land area

~16% of Queensland's Land Mass



303,102¹ residents

Estimated Population (2024)



21

Local Governments

DEMOGRAPHICS



~14-15%²

of the population identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander



higher proportion compared to the rest of Queensland



~18-21%³

of the population born overseas

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

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

POPULATION

10%

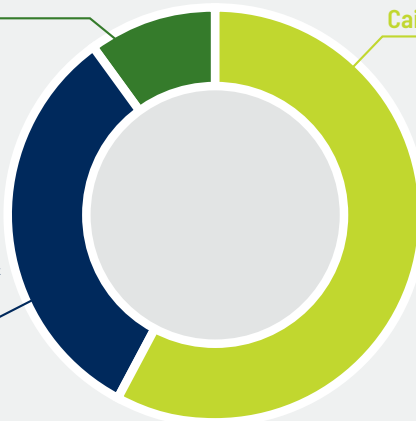
Gulf, Cape and Torres Area

58%

Cairns Urban Area

32%

Douglas/Cassowary Coast & Tablelands/Mareeba Area



2018

+1.4%⁴

2021

2036

expected to grow to over 358,000⁵

2041

projected population ~378,000⁶

¹ 303,102 population – Estimated Resident Population, Far North Queensland region, June 2024 (ABS / QGSO).

² ~14-15% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population – ABS Census 2021.

³ More than 18% overseas-born population – ABS Census of Population 2021 / regional profiles.

⁴ ~1.4% annual population growth – Estimated population growth 2023-2024.

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

⁶ Projected population ~378,000 by 2041 – Queensland Government regional projections.

EMPLOYMENT



CAIRNS EMPLOYMENT REGION
UNEMPLOYMENT SITS AT

4.6%



Increase since 2022

1.5%



Participation rate

67.2%

* Modelled regional labour force – Cairns SA4, July 2026; Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, released 20 August 2026

KEY INDUSTRIES



Tourism



Agriculture & Fisheries



Healthcare & Social Services



Construction



Mining & Resources



Defence



Marine Services



Aviation Services



Business Services



International Education



Arts & Culture

TOURISM



DOMESTIC OVERNIGHT VISITOR EXPENDITURE

\$2.84 billion

(up 23.1% compared to same period in 2025)



TOTAL DOMESTIC VISITOR EXPENDITURE
(INCLUDING DAY TRIPS)

\$3.2 billion



INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

\$1.2 billion

International Visitor Expenditure

637,000 visitors

up 14.3% from 2025, stayed 6.2 million nights

* Tourism – TTNQ, March 2026_IVS_NVS Fact Sheet

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT (GRP)



Estimated at

\$19.964 billion⁷

(4.4% of gross state product)



26,654 businesses⁸

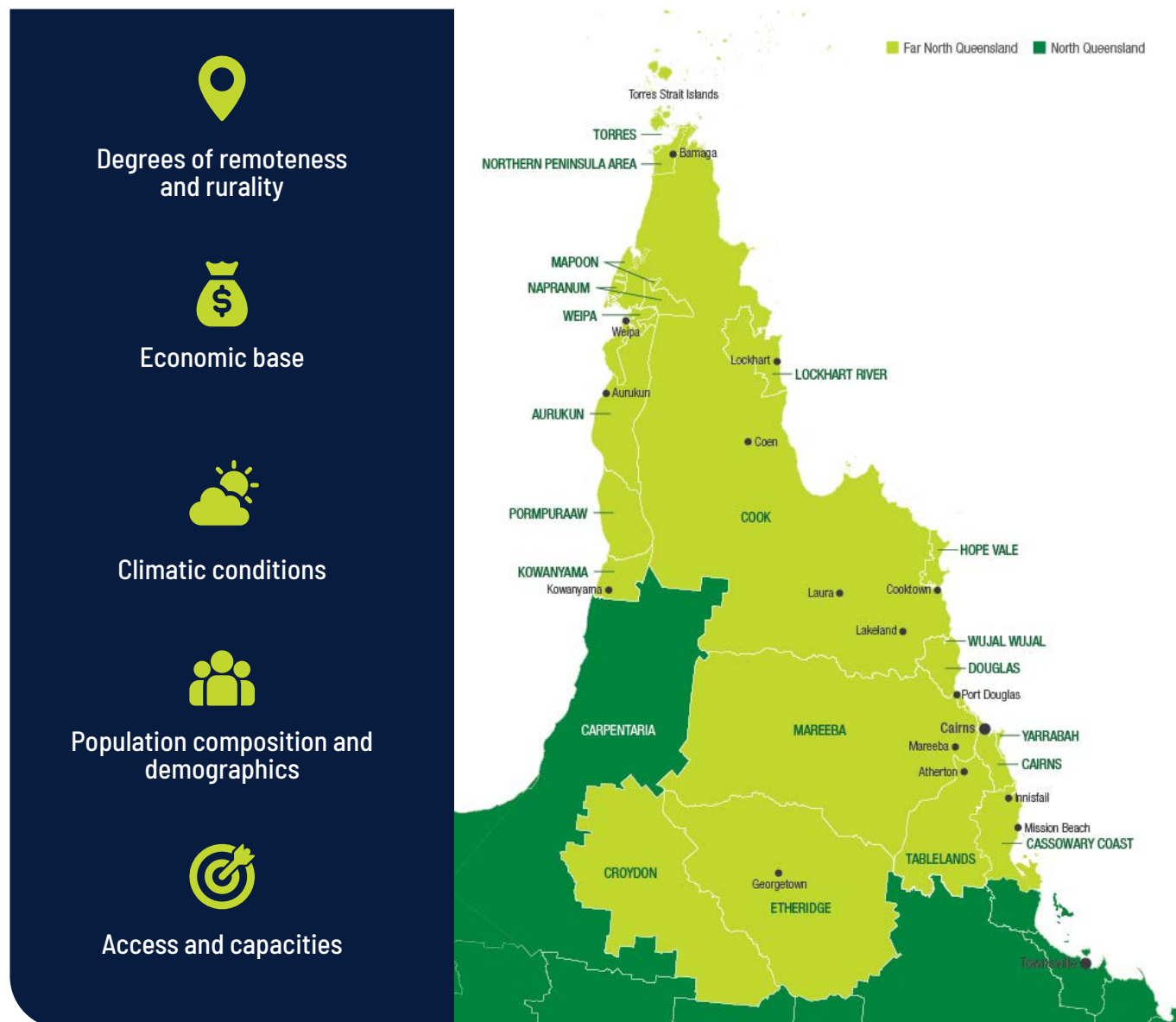
737 medium size companies and 21 large size companies with the bulk being small business at 97 percent

⁷ Estimated \$19billion, NIEIR, June 2025

⁸ 26,654 businesses, ABS 2024

Our Local Government Areas

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



Our Regional Context

OUR INDO-PACIFIC NEIGHBOURS

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

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

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

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

SWOT Analysis of Survey Responses Cairns and Far North Region

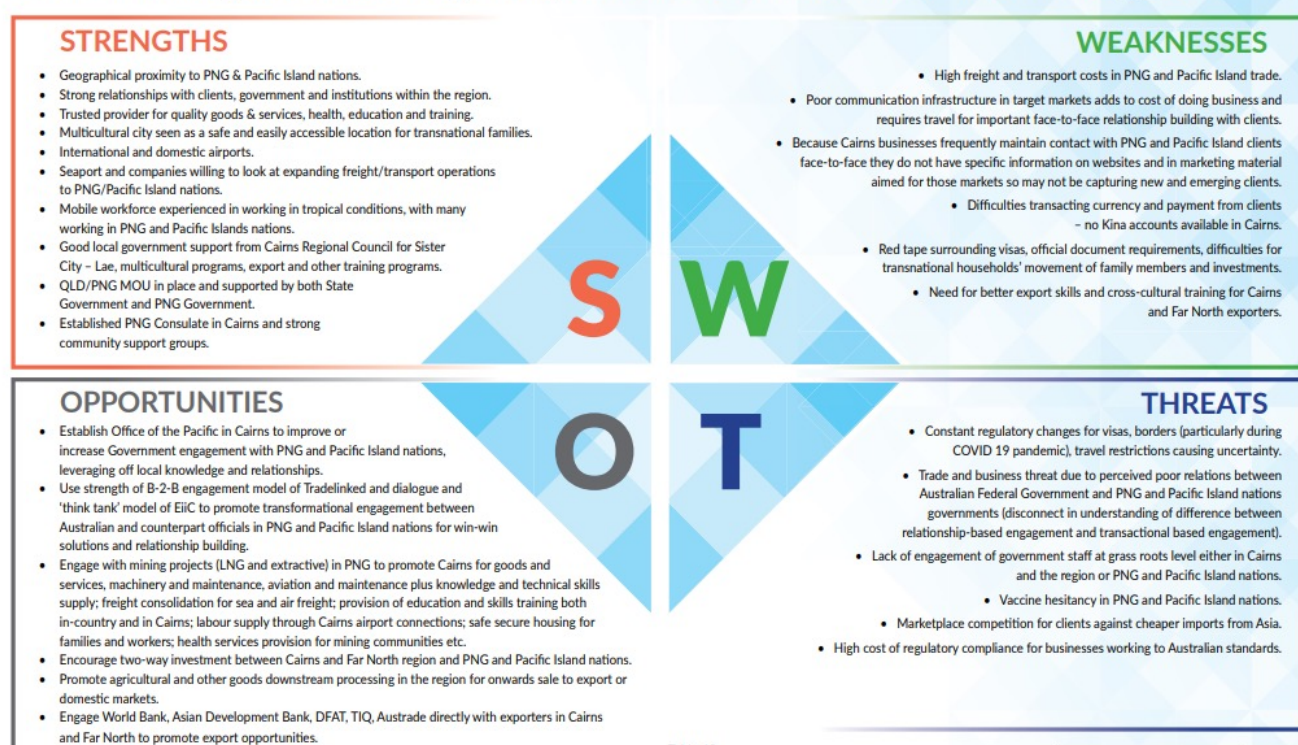
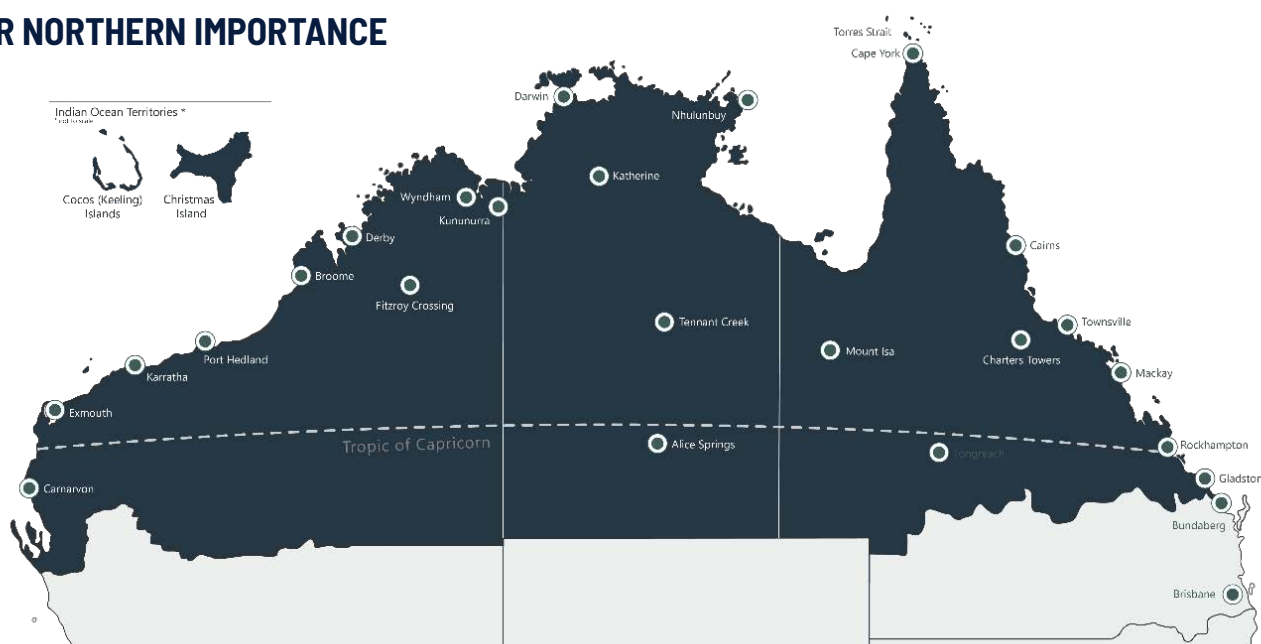


Table 43

OUR NORTHERN IMPORTANCE



Map courtesy of the Office of Northern Australia

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 2: Cummings Economics from Australian Bureau of Statistics

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

Cairns' growth stems from external earnings, not mining or government, driven by natural resources, expanding primary industries, and tourism. It's a significant FIFO hub for mining on Groote Eylandt. Historically connected to Asia through various airlines, whilst significant efforts post- COVID-19 have been and continue to be made to restore routes and expand them for tourism, business travel, and associated freight connectivity, the recovery is still in progress, rather than fully complete.

THE NORTHERN AUSTRALIA WHITE PAPER

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

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

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



A refresh of the White Paper will address past criticisms by placing First Nations outcomes at the forefront and establishing

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

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

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

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

Focus areas for the new Northern Australia Action Plan

The Northern Australia Action Plan will cover 14 priorities.

Cross-cutting Priorities

1. Engagement with First Nations People: provisions for co-design practice to deliver meaningful long-term economic, social and cultural benefit to First Nations communities.
2. Transformational and complex projects: projects that have the potential to have a fundamental and lasting impact involving multiple stakeholders, significant coordination and reform.

1

Priority area 1: Human Capital

3. Housing availability.
4. Workforce skills and training development.
5. Migration and mobility.
6. Delivering amenity.
7. Justice reinvestment.

2

Priority area 2: Enabling Infrastructure

8. Digital connectivity.
9. Water.
10. Enabling roads, rail and ports.
11. Common user infrastructure.

3

Priority area 3: Economic Development and Diversification

12. Agriculture and bio-security.
13. Diversification that responds to climate change (adaptation and mitigation).
14. Data to support decision making and investment.

Drivers of the Tropical North Queensland Economy

TOURISM



11,811 people

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



11%

of the region's total industry workforce.

53.1%

full-time

47.2%

part-time or were away from work

*Economy ID, RDA Tropical North Tourism Workforce

AGRICULTURE & AQUACULTURE



\$4.4billion

gross value (agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries)



Aquaculture is supported by the largest fishing fleet across the north

700

commercial ships

\$121million

contribution to regional economy

*NIEIR, 2023

CONSTRUCTION



TNQ's construction sector generates

11,000 JOBS



\$9.1billion

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

*NIEIR, 2023

MINING & RESOURCES



Accounting for

12%

of the region's exports



Gold, copper, silica, zinc and bauxite deposits.

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

*NIEIR, 2023

HEALTHCARE & SOCIAL SERVICES



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

22,500 jobs

in 2021/22.



17%

of total jobs

*NIEIR, 2023

EDUCATION & RESEARCH



35

secondary schools

6

TAFE campuses

2

world class research universities



International Education contribution in direct expenditure

\$130million⁹



20%¹⁰

of Queensland's international student numbers

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

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

DEFENCE & MARITIME



HMAS Cairns

A \$250m upgrade, including a new 212m wharf, will support next-generation Navy vessels and strengthen northern maritime security.



Weipa Port

A deep-water bauxite export gateway with established mining infrastructure and potential for diversified trade, logistics and export growth.



RAAF Base Scherger

A strategic Cape York base designed for rapid activation, supporting future exercises, operations and northern air capability.

ARTS & CULTURE



\$158million

annual sector output (Cairns)

Supporting some

1,000 jobs & 347 businesses



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

*NIEIR, 2023

⁹ International Education contribution \$130million, Cummings Economics, RDATN Development of Strategic Regional Plan Working Paper, June 2021

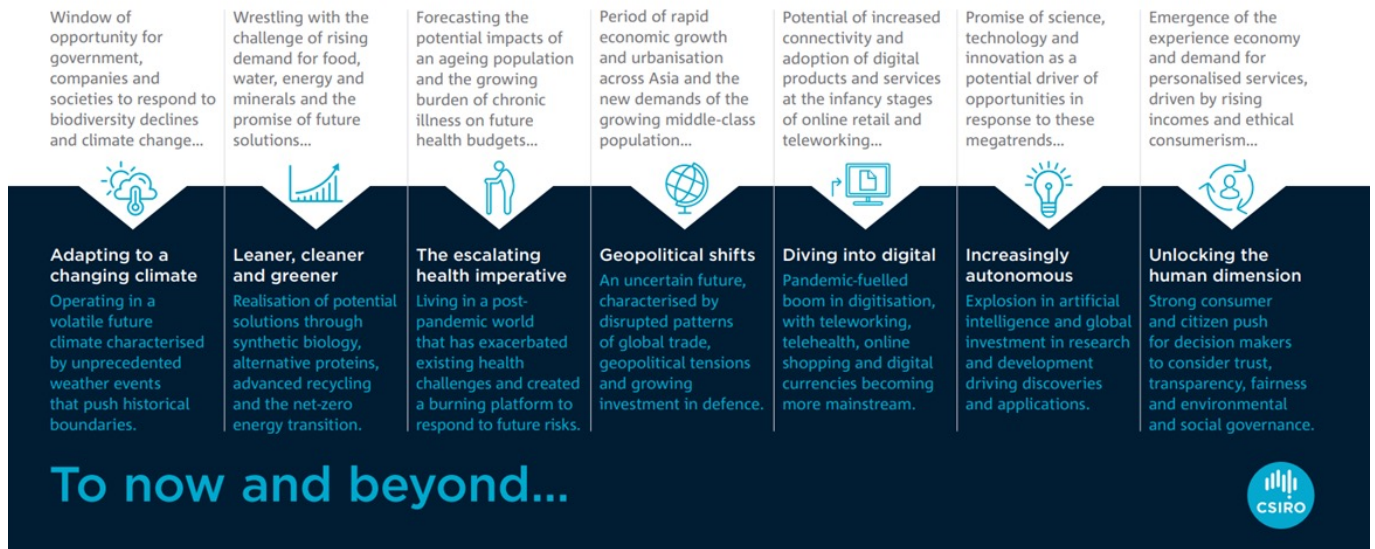
¹⁰ 20% of Queensland's international student numbers, Study Cairns, Fact Sheet, September 2023

Current Macro Environment

GLOBAL

Our future world; seven global megatrends

From 2012



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

Space: The Final Frontier

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

Great Barrier Reef

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

NATIONAL

Regional Investment Framework

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

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

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS

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

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



Investing in People

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

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



Investing in Places

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

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



Investing in Services

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

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



Investing in Industries and Local Economies

Ensuring regional industries and economies are positioned for sustainable growth.

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

Moving to More

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

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

The Conscious Traveller

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

Indigenous tourism is an emerging opportunity for Australia, offering authentic experiences rooted in the land, culture, language, and philosophy of the country's first people. There is potential to tap into this demand, particularly when paired with appealing experiences that align with Australia's natural environment, wildlife, coastal attractions, and agritourism.

STATE

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

Brisbane Olympics 2032

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games are expected to bring \$8.1 billion in benefits to Queensland, including a \$4.6 billion economic boost from tourism and trade and \$3.5 billion in social improvements. TNQ should seize this opportunity to leverage the Games and create a lasting legacy through strengthened regional infrastructure, enhanced tourism experiences, and long-term economic pathways that elevate the region well beyond 2032

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

Queensland Energy Roadmap

The state government has introduced a new five-year Energy Roadmap, prioritising energy affordability, reliability, and sustainability. Key initiatives include extending the life of existing coal-fired power stations, investing in gas infrastructure, and supporting select renewable projects. This approach aims to balance economic growth with environmental considerations.

Queensland Waste Strategy 2025-2035

The Queensland Government has released its Waste Strategy [Less Landfill, More Recycling 2035](#), focusing on reducing landfill, increasing recycling rates, and stimulating economic growth through waste management. The strategy emphasizes practical measures to boost recycling and reduce environmental impacts without imposing additional costs on businesses and residents. Its target is to reach 65% of overall recycling rate.

25-Year Blueprint for Primary Industries

The government has released the 25-year blueprint Primary Industries [Prosper 2050](#) aimed at growing Queensland's primary industries. The plan seeks to increase the sector's value to \$30 billion by 2030, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and regional development.

Sovereign Industry Development Fund

The Queensland Government has launched the \$180.6 million Sovereign Industry Development Fund, designed to support strategic and catalytic investment partnerships that accelerate development in priority sectors—Defence, Biomedical, and Biofuels—by backing investment ready projects that establish or expand sovereign manufacturing or service capabilities across the state.

Housing and Home Ownership

Home Ownership Support Initiatives

Boost to Buy Shared Equity Scheme

The [“Boost to Buy”](#) program is a \$165 million initiative designed to assist first-home buyers in entering the property market with a minimal deposit. Eligible applicants can purchase a home with as little as a 2% deposit, with the government contributing up to 30% equity for new homes and 25% for existing homes, on properties valued up to \$1 million.

Stamp Duty Concessions for First-Home Buyers

Effective from May 1, 2025, the Queensland Government has abolished [stamp duty](#) for eligible first-home buyers purchasing or building new homes. This policy change can result in significant savings, reducing upfront costs for new homeowners. For existing homes, concessions apply to properties valued up to \$800,000, with full exemptions for homes under \$700,000.

First Home Owner Grant

The [First Home Owner Grant](#) offers \$30,000 to eligible first-home buyers purchasing or building new homes for contracts signed from 1 July 2026 onwards. This grant aims to further alleviate the financial burden on new homeowners and encourage housing development.

Water Policy and Infrastructure Initiatives

Watertight: Queensland's Water Security Plan

The [“Watertight”](#) policy outlines a comprehensive strategy to bolster Queensland's water security through new infrastructure and improved management. Key commitments include:

- Conducting a comprehensive review of all 23 regional water plans to identify unallocated water resources that can boost agricultural productivity and reduce costs for families.
- Excluding recycled water and desalination plants from future water supply strategies, focusing instead on enhancing water storage capacity.

Statewide Water Resource Plan Reviews

The Queensland Government is undertaking a statewide review of water resource plans to better align with current and future water demands, climate variability and community expectations. This review will affect five (5) Plans in the TNQ region, namely Wet Tropics, Barron, Mitchell, Cape York and Gulf Water Plans.

Strategic Water Infrastructure Planning in Far North Queensland

The Queensland Government's [Strategic Water Infrastructure Plan](#) (SWIP) outlines a long-term vision to guide investment and policy in bulk water infrastructure over the next 10 to 15 years. While it is a statewide framework, it includes components directly relevant to Far North Queensland (FNQ), where water security and infrastructure resilience are vital to supporting economic development, community wellbeing, and environmental sustainability.

Reallocation of Treaty Funds to Indigenous Water Projects

Following the discontinuation of the Path to Treaty process, the government has redirected \$19 million to fund water and education projects in Indigenous communities. This includes \$8 million each for improving water supply in Aurukun and Kowanyama.

Destination 2045: Queensland's 20-Year Tourism Strategy

Launched in June 2025, [Destination 2045](#) outlines a visionary roadmap to double Queensland's annual visitor expenditure to \$84 billion by 2045 and increase direct tourism employment by 25%. The strategy focuses on six key priorities:

- 1. Ecotourism Development (45X45 Initiative):** Delivering 45 new ecotourism experiences by 2045, including projects like the Wangetti Trail north of Cairns
- 2. Events Capital:** Positioning Queensland as Australia's events capital by attracting world-class sports, cultural, and entertainment events through a dedicated events fund
- 3. Connectivity Enhancement:** Improving access to Queensland by establishing the "Connecting Queensland" aviation fund to attract new direct flights, particularly targeting emerging markets like India, and enhancing regional connectivity
- 4. Experience Expansion:** Investing in the rejuvenation of existing attractions, such as the Great Barrier Reef islands, and developing new tourism products to enrich visitor experiences
- 5. Brand Promotion:** Launching global marketing campaigns to reinforce Queensland's identity as the "Home of the Holiday" and to attract a diverse range of visitors
- 6. Industry Support:** Streamlining regulations and providing targeted support to empower tourism businesses, particularly small enterprises, to innovate and thrive.

The Queensland Government has committed over \$1 billion over four years to support the implementation of Destination 2045, including allocations for product development, aviation attraction, and event hosting.



REGIONAL

Smart Green Economy

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

Regional Resource Recovery Plan

The FNQROC [Regional Resource Recovery Plan](#) (RRR Plan), prepared by Arup and released in April 2023, presents a strategic roadmap to improve waste management and resource recovery across 11 FNQ Councils. The plan responds to significant regional challenges such as remote locations, limited infrastructure, and rising landfill costs. It outlines eight key actions including enhancing community engagement, upgrading transfer stations, improving kerbside collection, and developing organic waste processing and alternative residual waste solutions. The plan targets a regional municipal waste diversion rate of 87% by 2050, emphasising environmental sustainability, economic development, and waste policy goals. It stresses the need for ongoing State and Federal funding, as well as policy reforms, to help the region transition toward a circular economy and achieve long-term waste reduction targets.

TNQ 2045: Destination Management Plan

The Plan outlines the region's vision to lift the value of the visitor economy to \$10B per annum by 2045. Aligned with the State Tourism Strategy, the plan focuses on attracting conscious travellers, promoting year-round tourism, leading in sustainable and regenerative tourism, and aligning growth with community values. Key priorities include securing new aviation routes, expanding events and Indigenous experiences, boosting investment, and strengthening workforce and housing support.

Advance Cairns Roadmap 2035

The [Advance Cairns Roadmap 2035](#) outlines a strategic framework to drive economic resilience, connectivity, and liveability across Far North Queensland (FNQ) by 2035. Developed in collaboration with regional stakeholders, the plan identifies key priorities across four pillars: a modernised economy, connected region, liveable communities, and natural asset leadership. It advocates for targeted investment in infrastructure, defence, health, education, tourism, agriculture, and renewable energy, while also supporting First Nations economic empowerment and regional self-determination. The roadmap positions FNQ as a gateway to the Indo-Pacific and a leader in sustainable regional development.

First Nations Food Production

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



WATER PLANS

In FNQ, the SWIP is complemented by two key regional strategies:

- The Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan (FNQIP), now incorporated in the 2025 FNQ Regional Plan, identifies regionally significant infrastructure priorities across water, transport, energy, and digital sectors to support future growth, particularly in areas with expanding agriculture, tourism, and population.
- The [Far North Queensland Regional Water Capability Plan](#), developed by FNQROC with funding from Jobs Queensland, and the State government, addresses critical skills, workforce, and operational capacity issues facing local water and wastewater service providers. It provides a roadmap for strengthening the capability and resilience of councils across the region through collaboration, training, and targeted investment.

Together, these integrated planning efforts ensure that FNQ's unique challenges—such as dispersed communities, aging infrastructure, and seasonal variability—are incorporated into broader state-level decision-making for water infrastructure investment.

TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy

The [regional strategy](#) guides the collaboration, partnerships and initiatives required to continue the development of the region as a world class mountain biking destination. It recognises the rich mountain biking history and culture of the region while providing guidance for future growth and development.

Torres Strait and Cape York, Gulf Hinterland and Wet Tropics Drought Resilience Plans

Are comprehensive strategies developed collaborative by FNQROC, Gulf Savannah NRM, Terrain NRM, Cape York NRM and James Cook University and other stakeholders to address the region's exposure to drought and build long-term resilience. The plan outlines a locally-led, evidence-based, and community-informed approach to drought resilience. The plan outlines strategic pathways and actions across six areas to improve water security, infrastructure, mental and physical health, agriculture, tourism, and environmental management.

Hinterland to Gulf and Wet Tropics Regional Resilience Strategies

These are collaborative plans developed to strengthen disaster resilience in the [Hinterland, Gulf](#) and [Wet Tropics](#) region. It acknowledges the region's global environmental significance, complex landscape, and vulnerability to natural hazards such as cyclones, floods, heatwaves, and bushfires. The strategy aims to reduce the impacts of disasters, build long-term reliance, and align local needs with state, national and international policy frameworks. It promotes a locally-led, regionally coordinated, and state-facilitated approach, identifying key resilience needs in infrastructure, community cohesion, environmental stewardship, and economic diversification. The strategy outlines pathways for proactive planning, community empowerment, and sustained investment to ensure the region can adapt and thrive despite increasing climate and disaster risks.

Rivers to Reef Climate Alliance Action Plan

The [Rivers to Reef Climate Resilient Alliance Action Plan](#) is a collaborative initiative facilitated by FNQROC and funded by the Queensland Government. The Alliance aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, transition to a low-carbon economy, and build resilience to climate risks across diverse communities and ecosystems connected to the Great Barrier Reef. The plan outlines strategic actions in mitigation, adaptation, and transition, with projects ranging from renewable energy deployment and electric vehicle infrastructure to community heatwave preparedness and climate-resilient urban design.

Regional Roads Investment Strategy

The FNQROC [Regional Roads Investment Strategy](#) outlines a comprehensive, evidence-based plan to improve the road network across 13 local councils covering 17% of Queensland. Developed in partnership with Jacobs Engineering, the strategy identifies key deficiencies and prioritises upgrades needed to support economic development, community access, freight efficiency, and tourism. It highlights the region's reliance on roads for agriculture, mining, and tourism, and documents significant issues with road quality, safety, flood resilience, and access for high-productivity vehicles. The strategy uses a rigorous prioritisation framework to guide funding allocation and ensure maximum regional benefit, supporting long-term economic growth and liveability in FNQ.

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



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

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

The economic development ecosystem in our region is vibrant and abundant. The main entities, external to government agencies and departments, have distinct roles, including, but not limited to:



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

Other relevant organisations include:

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

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

ECONOMIC ENABLERS

Regionally Significant Sectors: TNQ is home to a diverse mix of established and emerging industries that are essential to driving regional economic growth. Key sectors include marine, aerospace, health, knowledge industries, defence, sustainable energy, resource recovery, agriculture, sports and recreation, tourism mining and the bioeconomy. These industries form the foundation of TNQ's economic resilience and future prosperity.

Appendix F highlights specific sectors that are experiencing growth or have strong potential at the regional, State or National level. These sectors are expected to continue expanding and will play a vital role in diversifying the regional economy, creating jobs, and building a skilled workforce.

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



Infrastructure

TNQ boasts strategic infrastructure, serving Northern Australia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Key hubs include Cairns, Thursday Island, Weipa, and the Gulf. Infrastructure includes Cairns International Airport (and other strategic airports and aerodromes across the region), [Cairns, Mourilyan](#) and Weipa ports together with marinas such as Port Douglas, trade centres, industrial zones, and cultural venues. While some roads need improvement, major centres have transport options. The transport network in TNQ is the backbone of the region's economy. It goes beyond moving freights and passengers – it underpins the productivity and connectivity of diverse industries across the region. While Cairns is the central hub, many sub-regions rely on the road network for connection to services, markets and export facilities with limited access to air and rail transport. Reliable and efficient transport links are vital for the movement of goods, people, and services across TNQ's remote and regional communities. Public transport is also required across the region to support access to employment and services.

Digital connectivity covers fibre, fixed wireless, and satellite, with plans for fibre upgrades.

Substantial investment in a strategic approach to water security includes water projects like Tinaroo Dam, [Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme](#) and the [Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct](#) which address urban and agricultural needs. Other investments by State and Australian governments include the Regional Water Assessments, Regional Water Plan Reviews and Cairns water security project.



Education and Workforce Development

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



The Business Ecosystem

Industry and Business Clusters: TNQ's robust business community includes Chambers of Commerce and networking groups like Trading Mates, F4BG, and Tradelinked, facilitating information exchange and collaboration. An influential advocacy network supports economic development efforts. Cluster development, dating back 25 years, began with the Cairns Regional Development Corporation (CREDC) to diversify the local economy and enhance export performance. Clusters like TTNQ, Super Yacht Group, and Study Cairns contributed significantly to the region's economy. Emerging clusters encompass [food and agribusiness](#), and [circular economy](#) initiatives. While clusters are still forming in sectors such as biofuels (including renewable diesel and liquid renewables), there is strong connection to the region's cane industry, where growers are integral to this cluster's future.

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

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

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



Healthcare and Social Services

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

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

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

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



Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship

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

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

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND IMPEDIMENTS

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

Population

At 30 June 2025, children aged 0–14 accounted for 18.0% of the estimated population across TNQ's 21 local government areas, compared with 17.4% in the Rest of Queensland. Residents aged 65 and over accounted for 18.5% of TNQ's population, compared with 20.0% in the Rest of Queensland. Both populations are ageing: between 2006 and 2025, the share of residents aged 65 and over rose from 10.1% to 18.5% in TNQ and from 13.1% to 20.0% in the Rest of Queensland.¹¹

These changes reinforce the importance of attracting and retaining families and working-age residents through access to housing, schooling, childcare, recreational facilities and career opportunities, while planning for the needs of a growing older population.



higher proportion
of children (under 18)

lower proportion
of individuals aged 60 or older

Participation

Workforce participation in the Cairns region is not dissimilar to the rest of Queensland (67.2% compared to 66.9% for Queensland as at August 2026)¹². Of concern, however, is the rate of disengagement by 15 to 24-year-olds – either disengaged with employment or education (14.8 percent in the TNQ compared to 10.6 percent in regional Queensland)¹³. This correlates with the percentage of people on JobSeeker or other income support payments (9% percent Cairns compared to 5.9 percent Queensland)¹⁴ and the youth unemployment rate of 11.4% percent compared to 9.3% for Queensland¹⁵. Participation rates are noticeably lower in Indigenous communities across the region. The challenge for TNQ is to leverage the latent talent of our youth and provide education pathways and learning models, with guaranteed jobs at the end.



67.2%

workforce participation¹²



14.8%

rate of disengagement¹³



9%

of people on JobSeeker (or other) income support payments¹⁴

¹¹ Queensland Government Statistician's Office, *Queensland Regional Profiles: Time Series Profile for RDA Tropical North region, Table 2*, generated 28 September 2026 for the 21 selected TNQ LGAs and Rest of Queensland. Source data: ABS, *Regional population by age and sex, 2025*. Figures are estimated resident population, not Census counts.

¹² ABS, *Labour Force Survey, June 2023/ July 2026*

¹³ ABS, *Census of Population and Housing, 2021*

¹⁴ Department of Social Services, *JobSeeker and Youth Allowance (other) payment recipients, November 2025*; ABS *Labour Force Survey, MRM2, 3-month average, November 2025*.

¹⁵ Modelled regional youth unemployment, August 2026. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia*, released 24 September 2026

Productivity

From a national productivity perspective, productivity growth has been on a long-term slowing trend, averaging 1.1 percent annual growth in labour productivity in the 10 years to 2020 (and was the slowest in 60 years)¹⁶. The 2026 IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook ranked Australia 45th out of 70 countries for workforce productivity, while ranking 17th overall¹⁷.

In TNQ, electricity, gas, water and waste services had the highest productivity by industry, generating \$334,361 per worker in 2021/22¹⁸. In 2021/22, when compared to Queensland, total worker productivity for the region was \$104,879 (compared to Queensland at \$122,025) and \$4,079 less than 2016/17 figures¹⁹.

The inherent challenge for the TNQ region will be to embrace new technologies, foster innovation, ensure a well-educated and skilled workforce and all other aspects of productivity, to lift productivity rates well into the future – the provision of region shaping, catalytic infrastructure is a key component of this productivity lift

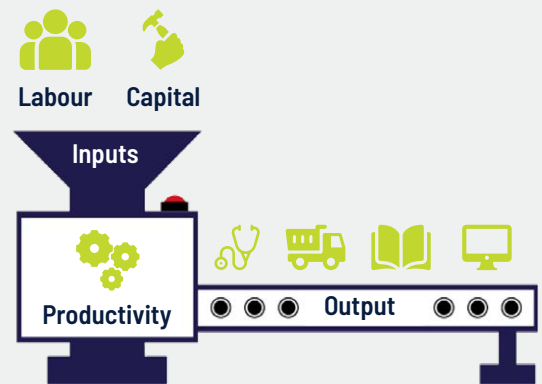
¹⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/our-productivity-problem-may-not-be-as-bad-as-it-looks-20230706-p5dm6h.html>

¹⁷ https://cedakenticomedia.blob.core.windows.net/cedamediatest/kentico/media/research-team/2026_imd_aust.pdf

¹⁸ NEIR, 2022

¹⁹ Ibid

Labour Productivity



Infrastructure for Connecting Our Region

The TNQ region is one of Australia's largest and most geographically dispersed areas which faces unique challenges due to its remoteness and widely scattered communities and industries. Cairns, the region's primary hub, has seen a decentralisation of large corporate logistical operations with logistical services increasingly supporting surrounding localities such as Mourilyan, Tully and Mareeba connecting to southern markets. Ensuring resilient and efficient transport routes between these hubs and Cairns - particularly the critical link between Cairns and Mareeba/Tablelands, is essential for the region's connectivity and economic growth and resilience.

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

To diversify the region's economy and bolster traditional industries, there is a need for focused investment in port, defence, and transport infrastructure, as well as improved digital connectivity. These efforts will address supply chain issues, especially for the Tablelands/Mareeba, Cape York, and Torres Strait Islands, while also supporting population growth and economic productivity objectives. Through the TEDS, a regional infrastructure package is sought in collaboration with State and Federal governments and can be found in Regional Outcome 5.1. A full list of region-shaping infrastructure can be found in Appendix G.

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

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

The recent Australian government announcement to shift the infrastructure contribution arrangement with States and Territories from an 80:20 split to a 50:50 ratio is likely to have significant implications for the TNQ region. While the change may signal a more equitable sharing of financial responsibilities between the federal government and the states, it could impact the funding available for crucial infrastructure projects in the region. Reframing advocacy for the continuation of an 80:20 split against a backdrop of substantial cost disparities for infrastructure delivery in Northern Australia, is a potential way forward.

Responding to Climate Change

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

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

There is a strong economic imperative to build a disaster resilient and adaptable regional economy in TNQ. Strengthening resilience helps safeguard critical infrastructure, maintain business continuity, and enable faster recovery from natural disasters. Recent events including Tropical Cyclones Jasper and Kirralee (late 2023 early 2024) and the tropical low of early 2025 highlight the vulnerability of the region's infrastructure and the need for targeting investment in resilience planning. Protecting TNQ's industries, workforce, and supply chains requires a proactive approach to hazard risk reduction, supported by robust infrastructure, informed decision making, and adaptive business strategies.

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

De-risking Investment

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

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

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

Water Access and Security

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

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

Transitioning Weipa's Economy

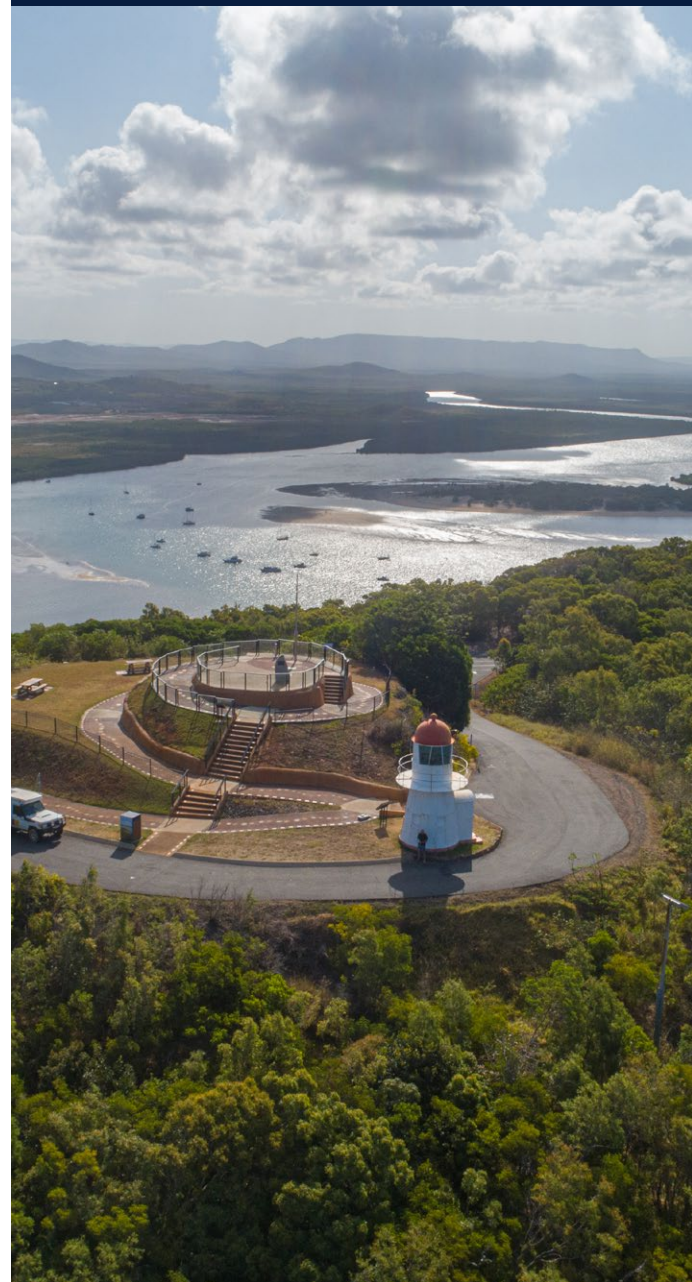
Integral to the entire Cape York Peninsula, Torres Strait and Gulf regions, Weipa is a key economic driver for the TNQ region. Weipa Town Authority (WTA) is governed through the Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation Pty Limited Agreement Act 1957 (Qld) (Comalco Act) and is therefore not governed through the Local Government Act (Qld). This excludes WTA from accessing local government grant funding available through the DSDILGP. Rio Tinto, who operate multiple bauxite mines in the Weipa vicinity (originally opened by Comalco), are due to close the East Weipa mine and Andoom mine in 2027. They are in the later stages of studies to increase production capacity at the Amrun bauxite mine, this is an important step toward securing the long-term future of Rio's operations at Cape York²⁰. Without this, the closures would have ramifications for the 4,000 strong population of this mining town. Weipa has the potential to be a major regional centre with a hub for recycling and waste, defence, space (satellite and rocket launches) and agriculture.

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



Peter Scott
Mayor Cook Shire (2008-2024)



²⁰ Rio Tinto to start early works and final studies to increase Amrun mine's bauxite production on Queensland's Cape York Peninsula | Global

Land and Sea Livelihoods

While we value the wilderness of TNQ, it is critical that sustainable approaches are taken to ensure livelihoods for Traditional Owners. Purely regulatory approaches to securing these values, however, have restricted opportunities for livelihoods in Indigenous communities. The tendency to protect Country through National Parks, results in protected estates now owned and jointly managed by Indigenous corporations and the Wet Tropics Management Authority and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Protection Agency. While a positive step, devolution of full responsibility for management of these areas, to rest with Aboriginal Land and Sea corporations must occur, to enable access to investors outside of government. This, supported by land tenure reform, will support the creation of an effective ecosystem services economy to lift Indigenous workforce participation rates.

Export Challenges

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

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

Workforce

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

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

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

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



Liveability Constraints



HOUSING

Housing shortages across the TNQ region are caused by various reasons including increased population, land availability restrictions, stock assigned to short-term stay accommodation, to name a few. Affordability issues, both for rent and purchase, hinder workforce attraction and retention.

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

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



COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

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

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



MOVEMENT OF GOODS

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



HEALTHCARE, SOCIAL SERVICES AND REMOTE SERVICE DELIVERY

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

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

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

Opportunities

While there are key industries that act as economic drivers for the region (see Our Regional Context section), several emerging opportunities exist for the TNQ region over the next five (5) years. These can be found in greater detail in Appendix F, many of which are also included in the FNQ Regional Plan. TNQ has several strategies to leverage its strengths and foster collaboration:

- Indo-Pacific Relationships: Capitalise on Cairns' strengths and the Regional Trade Distribution Centre to establish it as an international gateway to the Indo-Pacific. Strengthen exchanges with the Indo-Pacific by developing long-term relational ties with the pan-region, focusing on sports investment and facility upgrades for rugby, tennis, hockey, and swimming, workforce mobility to address workforce shortages, building capacity across agriculture, aviation and training and education sectors.
- Northern Australia Collaboration: TNQ, Northern Territory, and Kimberley regions aim to improve First Nations workforce participation, enterprise startups, healthcare, education, and income standards. Collaboration with northern-focused agencies like ONA, CRCNA, NAIF, and Infrastructure Australia is vital. Developing East West connectivity and addressing enabling infrastructure challenges will enable provide significant opportunities across TNQ.

Prominent Sectors (as identified in Appendix F):

- Marine
- Aviation
- Health
- Knowledge, Education and Training (including International Education)
- Defence
- Agriculture (including Biofuels, Biodiesel)
- Sport/Recreation/Events (including Film and Entertainment Industry)
- Tourism (including Indigenous Cultural Experiences)
- Renewable Energy
- Mining
- Environmental Markets (including resource recovery such as plastics recycling)

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



REGIONAL VISION

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



TRANSFORMATIONAL GOALS



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

Renewable Energy in TNQ:

TNQ is a leader in renewable energy and has significant potential and active renewable projects thanks to abundant sunlight and wind resources. Initiatives like the Far North Queensland Renewable Energy Zone (FNQREZ) and the Energy and Jobs Plan aim to enhance construction, advanced manufacturing, and electricity generation. Future developments in renewable energy must prioritise community well-being and environmental sustainability (i.e. Daintree Microgrid).

TNQ's economy is shifting towards sustainability and renewable energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve carbon neutrality. Hydro power projects may emerge from initiatives like the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme, Etheridge Agricultural and Irrigation Precinct, and Koombooloomba Hydro. TNQ is also becoming a hub for biofuels and biodiesel, capitalising on its climate, resources, and proximity to aviation and marine hubs, contributing to global emission reduction efforts.

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG):

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

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



1.1. Regional Outcome – Achieve Net Zero Targets

Achieve net zero and decarbonisation targets set by governments.



Regional Pathways

- 1.1.1. Leverage Cairns Regional Council's Smart Green Economy project (TNQ Region-focused) through regional collaboration and develop a TNQ Clean Energy Transition Strategy
- 1.1.2. Regional collaboration in delivery of the FNQREZ
- 1.1.3. Support development of biofuel and biodiesel feedstock sector within the region
- 1.1.4. Regional collaboration on establishment of a plastics recycling industry in TNQ



RDATN Next Steps

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



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



Marc Jackson

Director Enviroplas Recycling

1.2. Regional Outcome – Skilled Workforce for Net Zero Transition

A workforce to support the transition to Net Zero.



Regional Pathways

- 1.2.1. Leverage Regional Australia Institute's Move to More campaign
- 1.2.2. Incorporate initiatives within the Regional Workforce Strategy that supports unskilled workers to enter labour intensive recycling sector jobs



RDATN Next Steps

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

1.3. Regional Outcome – ESG Investment

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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



Goal 2: Northern Australia's most productive region

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

2.1. Regional Outcome – Increased Productivity

Lift total worker productivity to above the Queensland average.



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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



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

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



Brad Grogan

Chief Executive Officer, Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation

2.2. Regional Outcome – Economic Development Areas

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



Regional Pathways

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

Masterplan implementation

- Yarrabah (for Australia's largest Indigenous community)

Industry Innovation Precincts

- Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct (link to Weipa)
- Cairns University Hospital Re-development
- TNQ Resource Recovery and Recycling Precinct (potentially a 'hub and spoke' model including Cairns, Mareeba/Tablelands, Cassowary Coast and Mossman)
- General Aviation Precinct
- Central Queensland University City Campus

Potential Hub and Spoke model (or other appropriate models)

- Cape York Innovation Precinct (Weipa, Mapoon, Aurukun, Northern Peninsula Area, Napranum) (to address East Weipa mine closure and positioning of various economic diversification initiatives)
- Cooktown Knowledge Precinct (Cooktown, Hopevale, Wujal Wujal)

Priority Agricultural Areas

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

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

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

- 2.2.4. Positioning of the region to pilot bio-regional development approvals processes to de-risk investment (e.g. Etheridge Ag and Irrigation Precinct Proposal as a case study)

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



RDATN Next Steps

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



2.3. Regional Outcome – Economically Sustainable Emerging Industries

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



Regional Pathways

- 2.3.1. Form industry clusters and/or innovation precincts to drive investment, research and development
- 2.3.2. Input emerging industry workforce, education and training needs into the regional workforce strategy
- 2.3.3. Regional collaboration on an overarching investment strategy and investment facilitation model (as developed by Cairns Regional Council and linked to ESG Investment Strategy)
- 2.3.4. Creating opportunities for access to First Nations environmental market initiatives (and other Indigenous-led economic development)
- 2.3.5. Implementation of the TNQ First Nations Tourism Action Plan led by TTNQ



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting the conditions needed for industries to grow and diversify by coordinating regional roundtables to identify industry cluster opportunities and potential precincts
- B. Investment to help activate economic and industry growth by supporting project proponents in the development of innovation precincts, through partnership brokerage, funding identification and data provision

2.4. Regional Outcome – Better Performing Foundation Industries

Impediments to full industry functionality are removed.



Regional Pathways

- 2.4.1. Build on the Advance Cairns Export 2030 report and secure funding to raise awareness of export opportunities for the agricultural and fisheries sectors, and deliver a demand analysis for use in aviation industry advocacy, to increase the number of wide-bodied aircrafts
- 2.4.2. Delivery of actions related to cycling, hiking and walking trails (for the Conscious Traveller segment) as identified in the TNQ Destination Tourism Plan and TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy to support eco-tourism and First Nations tourism development
- 2.4.3. Re-think the current funding, investment and ownership model for energy generation and transmission to enable energy affordability
- 2.4.4. Collaboration between industry and government to build efficiency in existing port facilities through common user infrastructure (or similar) to negate impacts of the Sustainable Ports Development Act 2015
- 2.4.5. Delivery of a TNQ Regional Water Strategy, linked to a wider Northern Australia water strategy that identifies existing water infrastructure, unused water allocations, water efficiency options to secure reliable water for economic development and business resilience
- 2.4.6. Deliver a region-wide insurance survey to inform the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) Insurance Monitoring reports for the Cyclone Reinsurance Pool-if premiums have not reduced to CPI-adjusted pre-2011 (Cyclone Yasi) rates, advocate for changes to the Pool's architecture
- 2.4.7. Deliver a regional workforce strategy that incorporates alternative youth education pathways and investigates alternative models for incentivizing employment (to address long-term unemployed job security concerns)



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting the agricultural and fisheries sectors to increase exports through collaboration with Trade and Investment Queensland (TIQ) and the Cairns Airport by facilitating necessary relationships at the Federal government level, if needed
- B. Working with the Northern RDA Alliance, secure through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum funding to undertake a Northern Australia water strategy
- C. Deliver annual insurance survey to inform ACCC Monitoring Reports



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

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

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

Building a disaster-resilient economy in Far North Queensland (FNQ) is essential to protect critical infrastructure, ensure business continuity, and support rapid recovery from natural disasters. Events like Tropical Cyclone Jasper and Kirralee (2023) and the 2025 tropical low highlight the economic risks posed by FNQ's exposure to cyclones, floods, bushfires, and other hazards. Climate change is amplifying these threats, impacting key sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and transport. To maintain regional stability and growth, FNQ must adopt risk-informed, adaptive infrastructure and economic planning, aligned with national efforts to strengthen disaster resilience.

Between 2013 and 2022, over 531 betterment projects worth \$434 million have been approved across 70 Queensland LGAs, strengthening community resilience. Of the 423 projects later impacted by disasters, 79% sustained no or minor damage. A \$174 million investment is estimated to have avoided \$397.5 million in reconstruction costs (QRA, July 2023).

Betterment planning delivers long-term value by identifying resilient infrastructure solutions, minimising service disruption, reducing repeat damage, and enabling faster recovery. It also supports government decision-making on cost-effective investments while promoting economic and community stability, protecting businesses, essential services, and critical access routes in disaster-prone areas.



For both the French Ambassadorial visit and the Migration QLD

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

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



Cr Rod Marti

*Mayor Tablelands Regional Council
(2020-2026)*



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



Cr Trevor Pickering

Mayor Croydon Shire Council

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

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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

3.2. Regional Outcome – Climate Adapted Region

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Supporting sustainable and liveable regions by facilitating sub-regional partnerships and elevating this coordination at a TNQ level
- B. Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed by supporting Croydon Shire Council to secure funds for a feasibility study/business case for a Doppler Radar Station
- C. Supporting climate resilience regional planning e.g. regional drought plan implementation through the Cape York and Torres Strait, Wet Tropics and Gulf Savannah plans
- D. Support skills development to ensure workforce associated with industries involved in meeting Net Zero targets are 'ready and able'

3.3. Regional Outcome – Sustainable Water Flows

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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

3.4. Regional Outcome – Strong Biosecurity

A region protected from invasive species, pests and diseases.



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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

3.5. Regional Outcome – Stronger Fisheries Protection

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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

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

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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



Goal 4: The North's most liveable region

Liveable communities are essential for a high quality of life, well-being, and productivity. Key elements include affordable housing, education, healthcare, green spaces, necessities, transportation, cultural and recreational activities, and inclusivity. Challenges persist in remote Gulf, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander communities, notably in access to clean drinking water. The Local Fare Scheme subsidises airfares to remote areas, vital for health, education, and cultural connections, however despite the recent \$64million Queensland government freight subsidy commitment freight costs are still resulting in significantly higher goods prices than metropolitan areas, and more than residents can afford. Housing shortages, especially affordable housing, hinder worker attraction and retention, requiring expanded development without harming agriculture. Indigenous communities face overcrowding due to limited investment in social housing and low home ownership, necessitating land tenure and social housing solutions. Collaboration is needed among government departments to address housing and workforce issues, reducing FIFO practices.

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



4.1. Regional Outcome – Affordable and Suitable Housing

Homelessness and overcrowding rates below the national average.



Regional Pathways

- 4.1.1. Regional Collaboration on an overarching investment strategy
- 4.1.2. Investigate alternative models of housing construction to expedite reductions in overcrowding, and to shift homeless people into housing
- 4.1.3. Regional input into the Queensland government's review of the FNQ Regional Plan
- 4.1.4. Build capacity of real estate and housing support services to work with diverse communities
- 4.1.5. Investigate the use of Housing Trusts operated by councils, in remote areas
- 4.1.6. Multi-year funding for specialised case workers to support migrants and refugees navigate housing services



RDATN Next Steps

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



The biggest barrier to addressing overcrowding in our communities is the lack of funding for social housing; it has always been a challenge. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) (2008-2018) was a good 10 year commitment, that provided Lockhart River with 35 social houses, however we've seen nothing since. That funding meant that a family of five who were living in one bedroom in their parent's house, were able to move out and have their own home. NPARIH also gave the community the ability to design the houses, to ensure houses were environmentally suitable, while also providing employment opportunities. There is massive support for moving back to country; houses on country provide healthier lives - it's healthier on country. To make this happen, we need Federal investment in homeland movement.



Cr Wayne Butcher

Mayor Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council

4.2. Regional Outcome – Social Services Transformation

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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

4.3. Regional Outcome – Cultural Vitality

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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



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



Jody Payne

President South Cairns Gymnastics Club

4.4. Regional Outcome – Access to Drinking Water

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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

4.5. Regional Outcome – Local Fare Scheme

Continuation of local fare scheme.



Regional Pathways

- 4.5.1. Regional advocacy for continuation of the Local Fare Scheme



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Support TCICA in advocacy for continuation of the Local Fare Scheme

4.6. Regional Outcome – Enhanced Public Transport

A public transport system that enables increased workforce participation.



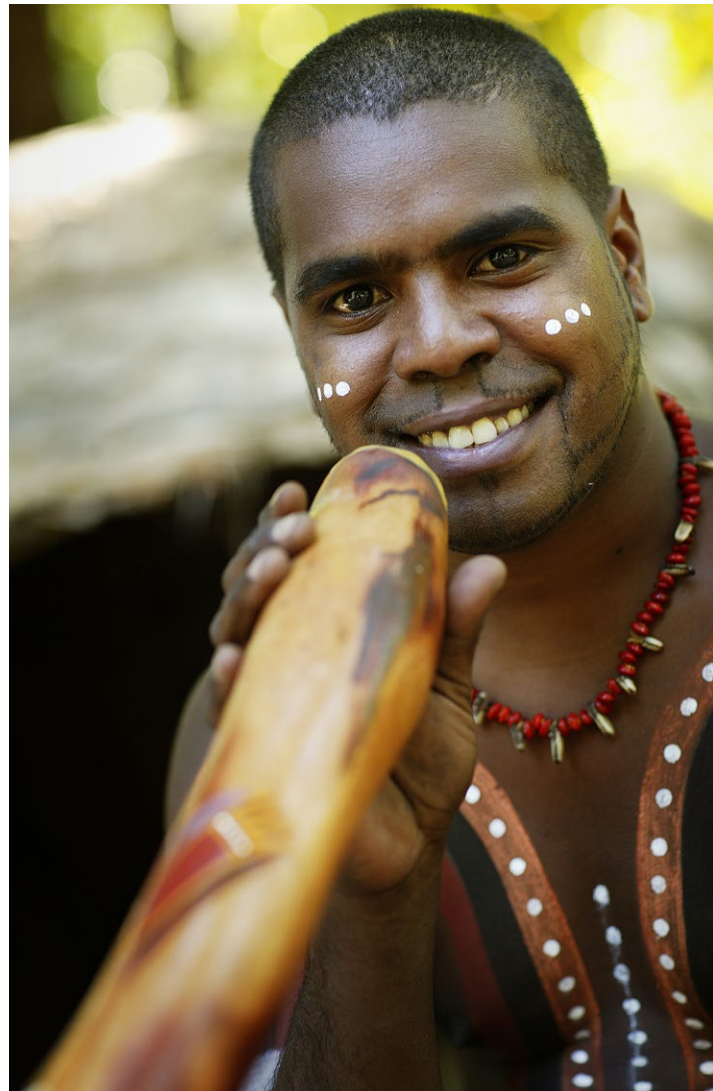
Regional Pathways

- 4.6.1. Regional collaboration with and advocacy to, Queensland government to address gaps in public transport across the region.



RDATN Next Steps

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





Goal 5: A safe, effective and connected region

Addressing infrastructure lags is crucial for TNQ's strategic location and economic opportunities, especially with its proximity to Asia, PNG, and the Pacific. Resilient road, port, airport, and digital infrastructure are needed to support supply chains, communities and economic growth. Airstrips in regional and remote areas play a vital role in community access to essential services. Continued funding for airstrip upgrades under the Regional Aviation Access Program is critical for passenger movements. The Federal and State governments' commitments to upgrading the Bruce Highway is vitally important to address safety concerns, however, will have further benefits for disaster resilience and efficient freight carriage.

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

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

The methodology commonly used in business cases creates an inherent disadvantage for regional areas. Unlike metropolitan centres, regional communities often lack the population base and existing infrastructure (sunk infrastructure) with many being 'greenfield' growth areas rather than building on established assets. As a result, funding tends to favour metropolitan projects such as those which reduce commuter times, raise existing dam walls, or enhance urban liveability through facilities like stadiums and cycle highways while regional infrastructure needs remain underfunded and overlooked.

5.1. Regional Outcome – Infrastructure for Connecting Our Region

Fully funded regional infrastructure package.



Regional Pathways

- 5.1.1. Regional advocacy for \$22million for a Preliminary Evaluation and Business Case for the Cairns to Mareeba/ Tablelands access corridor (Kuranda Range Road)
- 5.1.2. Continuation of the Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI) program, and advocate for additional funds to enable the full efficiency of outcomes for High Productivity Vehicles (HPV), including:
 - Burke Developmental Road (3.5km left to seal)
 - Gulf Developmental Road including Gilbert River Bridge upgrade (23-30km left to seal)
 - Kennedy Developmental Road (Hann Highway) (10km left to seal)
 - Ootann Road (72.6km left to seal)
 - Richmond to Croydon Road (connecting Gulf Developmental Road to Flinders Highway)
 - Upgrade low level single lane bridges
- 5.1.3. Secure funding for Stages 3 and 4 of the Cape York Regional Package (Peninsula Developmental Road sealing to Weipa)
- 5.1.4. Regional advocacy for continued support for the Cairns University Hospital Redevelopment
- 5.1.5. Regional advocacy for continued support of the Cairns Marine Precinct and [Ports North Master Plan](#) (considering the Defence Strategic Review and emerging potential for ship building) and further development of marine industries in areas such as Cassowary, Douglas and Cook.
- 5.1.6. Commitment to the continued dredging of Weipa bulk port
- 5.1.7. Commitment to continuation of funding for a further four years, towards the Australian government's Regional Aviation Access Program and quarantine a portion of funds for projects in Northern Australia
- 5.1.8. Explore opportunities for inter-modal distribution and logistics nodes across the region



Regional Pathways

- 5.1.9. Regional advocacy to establish a program similar to the Regional Aviation Access program to support investment in marine access infrastructure to communities serviced by sea
- 5.1.10. Development and implementation of a strategic digital infrastructure investment plan for the Cape York, Torres Strait and Gulf sub-regions
- 5.1.11. Maintain a watching brief on Telstra to ensure the organisation continues to upgrade its infrastructure in Cape York and the Gulf region, so that it meets acceptable standards of reliability and addresses critical safety issues
- 5.1.12. Support State water resource plan reviews by providing data, insights to inform demand
- 5.1.13. Maintain a watching brief on the Tablelands Regional Water Assessment, to ensure the best outcome for community
- 5.1.14. Engagement with the National Water Grid Authority and the Queensland government to review the figure used to determine the economic life of dams within Benefit-Cost Ratios, and other return on investment calculations
- 5.1.15. Regional advocacy to include the Lakeland Irrigation Areas Scheme bulk water requirements within the Mitchell Catchment Water Resource Plan review
- 5.1.16. Regional advocacy to continue the Regional Tech Hub and increase awareness of its services to TNQ communities
- 5.1.17. Secure funding to upgrade the electricity network infrastructure from Mareeba to Cooktown via Lakeland from 132kV to 275kV



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed by coordinating collation of evidence and data, to support Australian government investment decisions as part of the budgetary cycle for the TNQ region and more broadly, as part of the east-west connectivity package through the northern RDA Alliance and ONA relationship (Northern Australia Action Plan)
- B. Supporting the conditions needed for industries to diversify and grow by brokering funding for Stages 3 and 4 of the Cape York Regional Package
- C. Supporting the Queensland government during Water Resource Plan reviews and Regional Water Assessments by providing data and insights to inform future demand
- D. Continue to support Cook Shire Council and Etheridge Shire Council in their respective irrigation and agricultural precinct projects, through advocacy, investment brokerage and governance services, where needed
- E. Support TCICA and other stakeholders in advocating for better digital connectivity infrastructure, affordable plans and digital skills development in the TNQ region



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



Cr Barry Hughes
Mayor Etheridge Shire Council



Goal 6: A strong collaborative, integrated region

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

Voluntary regionalism is crucial, where entities willingly cooperate for mutual benefit, based on shared interests and geographical proximity. The State government's FNQ Regional Leadership Network is a strong example of all three levels of government working collaboratively, for the benefit of the region. TNQ has widened its voluntary regionalism through RDATN, by sharing objectives, working collectively and taking a place-based approach with initiatives such as the Northern RDA Alliance, North Queensland RDA Bloc, Queensland RDA Network and Queensland RDA Regional and Rural Collective. Other examples include the Queensland-wide NRM Alliance and ROCs.

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

6.1. Regional Outcome – Better Local Decision Making

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



Regional Pathways

- 6.1.1. Regional advocacy for a North Queensland Coordinator-General based in region, to support decision making for large projects and to coordinate cross-portfolio responses to barriers
- 6.1.2. Assess the feasibility of multi-function government offices, where existing staff are encouraged to relocate to the region for lifestyle or career reasons and work remotely
- 6.1.3. Deliver TNQ-Indo-Pacific Strategy to create long-term relational ties with the pan-region for cultural, capacity building, trade and investment purposes



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Listening to local voices and partnering with communities to elevate evidence to inform Australian and State government policies, research and programs, by facilitating various community and industry roundtables
- B. Secure funding to deliver the TNQ-Indo-Pacific Engagement Strategy
- C. Continued collaboration with Northern Australia departments and agencies to elevate local investment opportunities and barriers to development

“

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



Bill Shannon

Mayor Cassowary Coast Regional Council (2008-2016)



6.2. Regional Outcome – Solid Regional Leadership

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



Regional Pathways

6.2.1. Regional conversation about State and Federal recognition that Strategic Plans represent the priority directions of communities within Local Government Areas (self-determined), and that joint active implementation is required (financial and resources) to deliver identified priorities 'on ground'.



RDATN Next Steps

- A. Putting people at the forefront of growth, with local voices influencing decision making.
- B. Lead the development of and advocacy for capacity building for place-based leadership.
- C. Initiate strategic leadership partnership across key issues with diverse stakeholders.



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



Fraser Nai

21st Century Leader from the Torres Strait



6.3. Regional Outcome – Better Indo-Pacific Relations

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



Regional Pathways

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



RDATN Next Steps

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



Building on the 50 year flight connection between Cairns and

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

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

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



Tony Sheehan

*President Tradelinked
Cairns-PNG-Pacific*

ROADMAP

MOBILISATION

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



Pre-feasibility / data / evidence

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



NET ZERO

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



WORKFORCE

- Regional Workforce Summit
- Scoping to support skills development for workforce associated with industries involved in meeting Net Zero targets



PRODUCTIVITY

- Scoping for TNQ Productivity Research
- Industry Cluster Roundtables



WATER

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



TRADE & INVESTMENT

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



REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

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



ENVIRONMENT

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



LIVEABILITY

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



HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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



INFRASTRUCTURE

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



FUNDING SOURCED/ CONTINUED COMMITMENT

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



IMPLEMENTATION



NET ZERO

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



WORKFORCE

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



PRODUCTIVITY

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



WATER

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



TRADE & INVESTMENT

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



REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

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



ENVIRONMENT

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



LIVEABILITY

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



HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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



INFRASTRUCTURE

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

APPENDIX A – TNQ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE

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

FIRST NATIONS LED DEVELOPMENT

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

EDUCATION

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

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

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

INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

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

ADVOCACY AND NETWORKING

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

SOCIAL SERVICES AND HEALTH

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

LIVEABILITY

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

WORKFORCE AND SKILLS

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

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

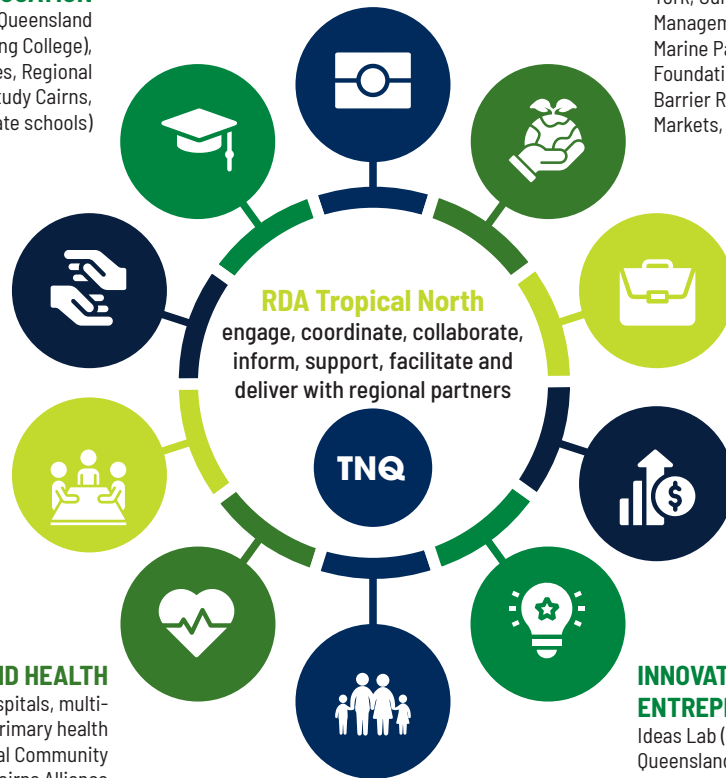
Trade and Investment Qld, FNQ Trade & Investment Group, Regional Trade Distribution Centre, Cairns Regional Council (Investment Strategy), Advance Cairns

INNOVATION, RESEARCH AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

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



APPENDIX B – LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OVERVIEW

The Cairns Region is the largest of the local government areas, with a population of over 178,000 people²¹, however the numbers increase significantly due to tourism (approx. 1,200 international visitors daily and 3,100 domestic visitors²²). The region includes the city of Cairns, which is the major hub for tourism in the region, as well as the surrounding suburbs and rural areas. The population of Cairns is diverse, with a mix of Indigenous Australians, people from other parts of Australia, and international visitors.

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

The Tablelands Regional Council area is located inland from Cairns and includes the towns of Atherton, Malanda, Yungaburra, Mt Garnet and Herberton. The region has a population of around 27,600 people²³ and is known for its farming and mining industries. Livestock farming including beef and dairy cattle, is also prominent in the region. Tourism plays an important role in the community with natural attractions such as Lake Eacham, many waterfalls and caves, the Historic Village Herberton and the Atherton Herberton Historic Railway.

The Mareeba Shire Council area is located west of Cairns with a population of approximately 24,000 people²⁴. The demographics of the Mareeba Shire are diverse, with a mix of Indigenous Australians, Europeans, and other ethnic groups making up the population. The main industries in Mareeba are agriculture and tourism. The area is known for its production of coffee, mangoes, avocados, and other tropical fruits, as well as beef production. Mareeba is also a popular tourist destination, with attractions such as the Mareeba Heritage Museum, Mareeba Wetlands, Music festivals such as Savannah In the Round and the annual Mareeba Rodeo drawing visitors from all over Australia and beyond.

The Douglas Shire is located to the north of Cairns and includes the towns of Port Douglas and Mossman. The region has a population of around 13,000 people²⁵ and is known for its tourism industry, including easy access to the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree Rainforest. Port Douglas is primarily a tourist-oriented town with substantial short-term accommodation, tour operators and tourist attractions. Mossman's economy is primarily driven by agriculture, with sugar cane farming being the dominant industry. The Mossman Sugar Mill was the largest employer in the area and processes the harvested sugar cane into raw sugar for export, and value adds through creation of cane by-products. With the Mills closure, the DPI is coordinating strategies to support and transition the industry. Other agricultural industries in the region include tropical fruit and vegetable farming, as well as cattle grazing. Tourism also plays an important role for the Traditional Owners the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people who own and operate the Mossman Gorge Cultural Centre, which is the gateway to Mossman Gorge.

Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council is located some 45-minute drive from Cairns situated on Cape Grafton. The published population of Yarrabah, acknowledged as Australia's largest discrete Aboriginal community is 2,500 people, however estimates place the actual population at 4,500. Yarrabah has a relatively young population, with a median age of around 25 years old²⁶. The main industries in Yarrabah include fishing, tourism, government administration, healthcare and the arts.

Cook Shire covers an area of approximately 108,000 square kilometres and occupies 80 percent of Cape York Peninsula. It is located to the north of Cairns and includes the towns of Cooktown, Laura, Lakeland, Coen, Ayton and Bloomfield, Portland Roads, Port Stewart, Rossville and Helenvale. The population of Cook Shire is around 4,500 people²⁷, with a mix of Indigenous Australians, people from other parts of Australia, and international visitors. Approximately 21 percent of the population identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander²⁸, which is significantly higher than the state average. The main industries in Cook Shire are agriculture, fishing, mining and tourism. Cooktown as the main population centre is best known for Captain Cook's

²¹ <https://profile.id.com.au/fnqroc/population-estimate?WebID=100>

²² <https://economy.id.com.au/cairns/tourism-visitors-nights?Tourismtype=2>

²³ Estimated Resident Population (ERP) | Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils | Community profile

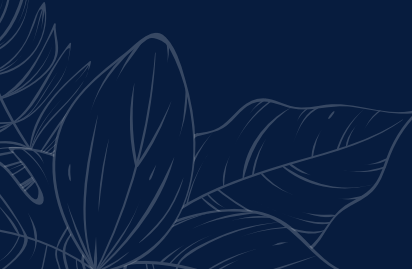
²⁴ Estimated Resident Population (ERP) | Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils | Community profile

²⁵ Estimated Resident Population (ERP) | Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils | Community profile

²⁶ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA37600>

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

²⁸ Ibid



landing in 1770 which was the first meaningful contact and reconciliation with local Aboriginal people. Lakeland further south, is a growing agricultural hub producing some \$95million in farm gate value annually²⁹.

Cape York Peninsula is located to the north of Mossman, extends to the tip of the Peninsula and encompasses the Cook Shire Council area. The Peninsula is home to nine Indigenous local government areas, including Aurukun, Hopevale, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Napranum, Northern Peninsula Area, Pormpuraaw and Wujal Wujal. Weipa township while not a local government authority, is its own community built upon the resources sector. Each community ranges in size from a few hundred people through to 4,000 in Weipa³⁰. The region has a high proportion of Indigenous Australians with the main industries being mining, tourism, fishing, government administration, and 'care for country' practices such as carbon farming and feral pig management.

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

The Etheridge Shire Council area is located approximately 300km west of Cairns and is home to 714 people³¹. The area has a diverse demographic with a mix of Indigenous Australians and people of European descent. The main industries in the region include mining, agriculture, and tourism. The mining sector is particularly significant, with the region being home to several large mining operations. The agricultural industry focuses mainly on cattle grazing

and some cropping, with pockets of horticulture starting over the past decade. Cotton, sorghum and legumes are fast becoming crops of interest in the Shire. The tourism industry is also important, with the region attracting visitors for its natural beauty, including the spectacular Undara lava tubes and the rugged Australian outback landscape. The Savannah Way a 3,700km route, is Australia's longest nationally recognised tourist route and is a crucial link from east to west coasts of Australia. The Savannah Way meanders through the council area creating jobs and tourist spending opportunities.

Croydon Shire Council is the TNQ region's furthest west local government area, some 500km west of Cairns. Like Etheridge Shire, the Croydon area is in the Gulf Savannah region and benefits from the Savannah Way tourist route. The population of the shire is 266 people³², with most residents residing in the town of Croydon. The demographics of the area are diverse, with a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents. The main industries in the shire include pastoralism, mining, and tourism. Cattle grazing and mining have been the traditional sources of income for the region, with the recent growth of tourism providing additional opportunities for economic development. The shire is known for its rich history and heritage, with many historical landmarks and attractions drawing visitors to the area.

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

²⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics – Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced (Cook Shire) – 2020-21

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

APPENDIX C(i) – TOTAL EMPLOYMENT NUMBERS BY INDUSTRY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX D – GLOBAL MEGATRENDS

Adapting to a Changing Climate

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

Leaner, Cleaner and Greener

The global push to reach net zero and beyond, protect biodiversity and use resources efficiently. There will be escalating pressures on finite food, water, mineral and energy resources. This megatrend explores the opportunities pushing us towards a more sustainable horizon and the importance of science, technology and innovation in helping organisations to operate within much tighter envelopes.

The Escalating Health Imperative

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

Geopolitical Shifts

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

Diving Into Digital

The rapidly growing digital and data economy. The rapid adoption of digital and data technologies in recent times has meant that many sectors and organisations have experienced years' worth of digital transformation in the space of months. While this progress has been significant, experts predict that this is just the tip of the iceberg, with the vast majority of digitisation yet to occur. This megatrend

details the next wave of digitization for organisations and the opportunities enabled by digital and data technologies. A downside of the pace of this change is a widening gap between industry needs, and training and equipment. The education sector faces a lag especially in regional and rural contexts with local businesses using next generation equipment that are at levels beyond what is in schools and TAFE.

Increasingly Anonymous

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

Unlocking the Human Dimension

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

More from Less

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

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

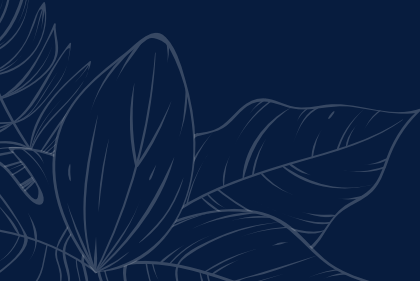
APPENDIX E – TEDS ALIGNMENT WITH THE REGIONAL INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

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

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



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



RIF Alignment	Regional Outcome	RDATN Next Step
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Investing in Industries and Local Economies

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

APPENDIX F – REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Pacific Relationship

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

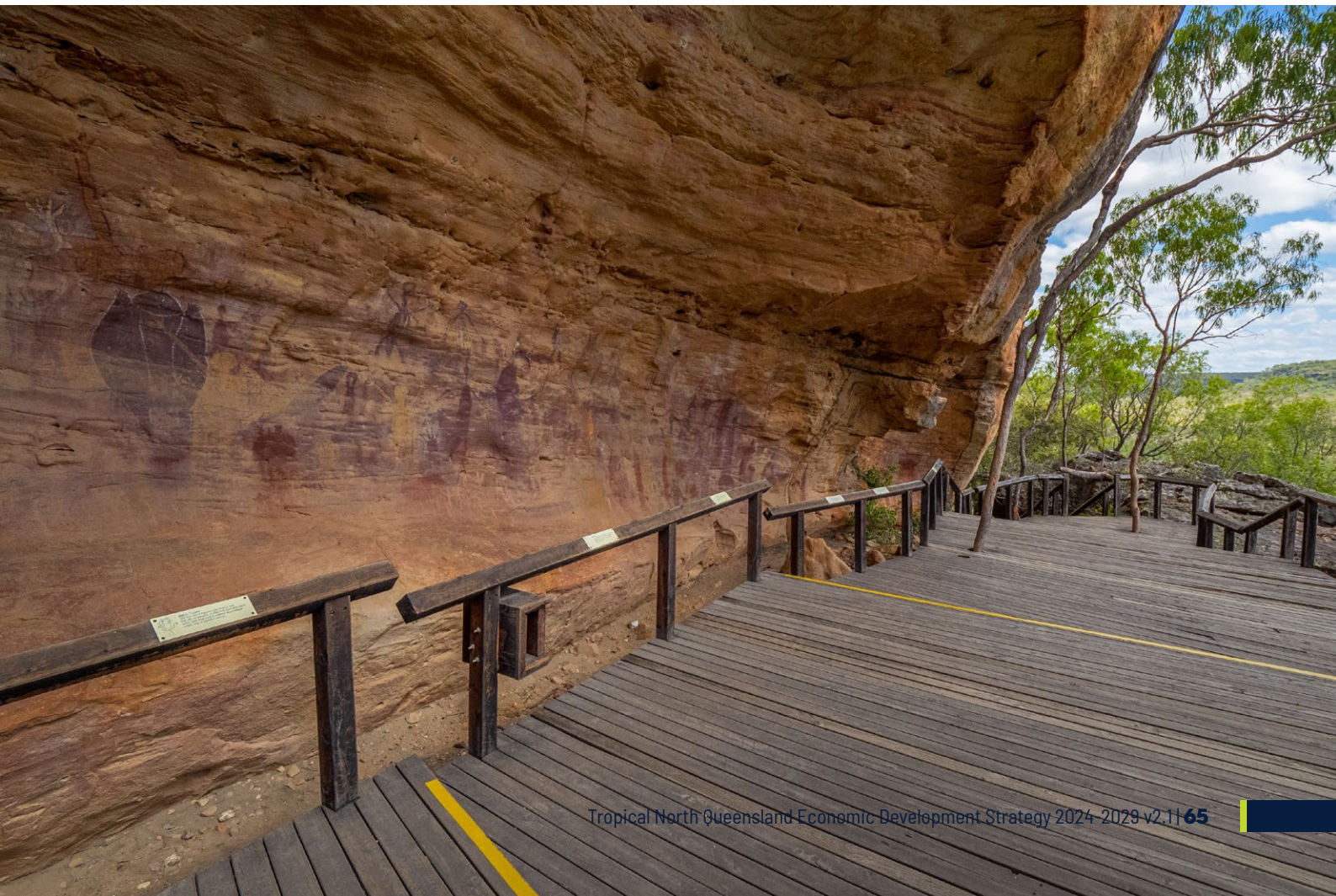
Northern Australia Collaboration

TNQ along with the Northern Territory and Kimberley region is at the forefront and well positioned to meet the challenge

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

TCICA Cape, Torres and Gulf Opportunities Plan

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



Sectors That Hold Promise

Net Zero, Environmental Markets, Circular and Regenerative Economy

Renewable Energy: Tropical North Queensland has significant potential for renewable energy generation. The region's abundant sunlight and wind has been harnessed for solar and wind power projects. According to the Queensland Department of Energy and Public Works, the Barron River Hydro Scheme was the first of its kind in Australia while the TNQ region is second only to Denmark in its use of renewable energy (74% of energy use is from renewables (based on Annual Share of 'Variable' Renewables). The FNQ Renewable Energy Zone (FNQREZ) and Queensland government's Energy and Jobs Plan³³, will drive growth in construction, manufacturing, and electricity generation. An example of recent renewable energy investment is the Kaban Green Power Hub. It includes a 157-megawatt wind farm and is located within the FNQREZ. The project is expected to be operational in 2023, and publicly-owned CleanCo has agreed to purchase all of the energy generated from the project. The region is also home to many of Energy Queensland's isolated networks—microgrids that supply energy to remote communities. Future developments of renewable energy will need to ensure positive outcomes for the community and support biodiversity in the region.

Biofuels and Biodiesel

Biofuels and biodiesel are essential components of the global effort to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and transition towards a more sustainable energy future. Produced from renewable resources such as waste materials, agricultural residues, and oil-rich crops, these fuels can significantly cut carbon emissions compared to conventional petroleum-based products. The production and use of biofuels and biodiesel present major opportunities to decarbonise transport, agriculture, marine, and industrial sectors, while fostering regional energy independence. As global demand for low-carbon fuels grows, regions with strong agricultural and biomass potential will be well-positioned to supply both domestic and export markets.

Tropical North Queensland has the potential to become a national leader in biofuel and biodiesel production. The region's favourable climate and abundant natural resources make it ideal for cultivating and processing feedstocks

such as sugarcane, oilseeds, and tropical energy crops. Significant biomass resources—including agricultural waste, forestry residues, and by-products from the sugar industry—can be converted into advanced biofuels. TNQ's strategic location, with access to domestic distribution networks and export pathways to Asia and the Pacific, further enhances its competitive advantage. Developing a strong biofuels and biodiesel industry in the region would deliver substantial economic benefits, create new regional jobs, and contribute to Australia's net zero targets by providing cleaner, renewable fuel options across multiple sectors.

Plastics Recycling

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

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

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

³³ <https://www.epw.qld.gov.au/energyandjobsplan>

Environmental Markets

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

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

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

Aerospace

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

Indigenous Cultural Experiences

Tropical North Queensland has a unique opportunity to significantly expand Indigenous cultural tourism in the lead-up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, leveraging global attention and increased visitation to Queensland. The region already offers a strong base of Indigenous tourism experiences and is the only place in Australia where the two distinct First Nations cultures—Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander—meet, creating an unparalleled cultural offering. Building on Tourism Tropical North Queensland's First Nations Action Plan and Destination Marketing Plan, both of which place Indigenous culture at the heart of the region's tourism identity, there is scope to develop new, authentic, and immersive experiences in partnership with Traditional Owners. This aligns closely with the Queensland Government's Destination 2045 Plan, which identifies Indigenous cultural tourism as a key pillar for sustainable growth. By investing in product development, skills training, and targeted marketing, the region can showcase its rich cultural heritage, create new employment and business opportunities for First Nations communities, and deliver world-class experiences that strengthen TNQ's position as Australia's leading Indigenous tourism destination.

Film and Entertainment Industry

Tropical North Queensland is emerging as a dynamic location for the film and entertainment industry, offering a unique combination of diverse natural landscapes, tropical climate, and skilled local crews. The recent opening of Screen Queensland Studios, Cairns—a 6,500 m² purpose-built production facility located at the former Bunnings site in Portsmith—provides state-of-the-art spaces including a 1,070 m² sound stage, production offices, editing suites, a sound recording studio, wardrobe and carpentry workshops, and event spaces. This facility adds significant capacity to host large-scale productions and attract both domestic and international projects. The region has already seen a growing list of television series and feature films shot in iconic locations such as Mission Beach, Port Douglas, and the Atherton Tablelands. With competitive production incentives, strong industry networks, and the ability to double for a wide range of international settings, TNQ is well positioned to capture more screen productions, creating new jobs, boosting local supply chains, and showcasing the region's natural and cultural assets to global audiences.

Aviation and Maritime/Marine Maintenance, Repairs and Overhaul (MRO)

Aviation MRO Sector – Cairns Airport General Aviation Precinct

Cairns Airport's General Aviation Precinct is a vital economic engine for the region, hosting over 100 businesses and employing more than 3,500 skilled workers in sectors including maintenance, avionics, engineering, training, charter operations, and rescue services. However, the sector is experiencing capacity constraints—Advance Cairns estimates that roughly AUD 15 million in MRO business was turned away in 2022-23 due to limited infrastructure. To address this, Cairns Airport is developing an Eastern Aviation Precinct featuring a state of the art common use MRO hangar designed to accommodate both fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. This hangar promises to unlock critical MRO capacity, create hundreds of jobs, enhance regional resilience, and position Cairns as a national leader in general aviation services. Construction of aeronautical stands is expected to be completed by 2027, with further phased development to follow.

Marine MRO Sector – Cairns Marine Precinct (CMP)

The Ports North 30 Year Two Port Master Plan—covering both the Ports of Cairns and Mourilyan—sets an overarching, integrated framework for future land use, infrastructure, and operational strategy across both ports. It explicitly identifies the Cairns Marine Precinct as a key growth opportunity, aligning with broader regional economic development and diversity objectives. The Master Plan designates dedicated precincts for marine, defence, cargo, and tourism activities at the Port of Cairns, ensuring that future MRO growth is planned in tandem with tourism and general cargo operations. This strategic direction supports Cairns's positioning as a major marine and maritime and MRO hub with the built in flexibility to respond to evolving demand and emerging opportunities in defence and commercial servicing across Northern Australia.

Responding to surging demand, the Queensland and Australian governments are working towards developing a Common User Facility (CUF) to include a 5,000 tonne shiplift capable of servicing vessels up to 120 metres, three hardstand areas, climate controlled blasting and painting sheds, wet berths, and a Self Propelled Modular Transporter (SPMT) for moving vessels around the site. Complementary

upgrades, including two new wharves, a 1.2 km road and 30 m bridge for shipyard access, as well as shipyard modernisation, are also underway. The CMP supports some 4,600 jobs directly and indirectly, with anticipated immediate construction roles and long-term gains across maritime supply chains. The completed facility will significantly boost Cairns's capacity to capture larger defence and commercial contracts, strengthen its strategic Indo Pacific importance, and further diversify the regional economy.

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

As well as Defence vessels, there are several commercial vessels that could also be manufactured in Cairns, including tourism and cargo vessels. The Defence and commercial sectors together could provide workload for a continuous pipeline that would enable a greater underlying level of business, leading to an increase in private investment in the region.

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

This coordinated momentum sets the stage for Cairns to become a more resilient, diversified regional economy with world-class aviation and marine maintenance, repair, and overhaul capacities.

International Education

International education is Queensland's largest service export creating some 16,700 jobs in 2022 and contributing more than \$3.2 billion to the Queensland economy³⁴. There are 25 CRICOS approved international education providers in Cairns with 348 CRICOS approved courses.

In 2022, international education contributed more than \$57.4 million (gross value added) to the TNQ region, with student numbers accounting for around 1.5 percent of Queensland's total international student numbers³⁵. TNQ is one of Australia's most popular Edutourism destinations with more than 33,000 students visiting annually³⁶. The region also hosts over 5,000 homestays annually. These figures are significant as the Edutourism visa categories are not included in the student visa numbers.

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

Sport, Recreation and Events

The region is rapidly emerging as a powerhouse in sport, recreation, and events—driven by strategic investments, high-profile sporting tenants, and elevated infrastructure. A pivotal development is the commitment to establish a Community, Development and High Performance Centre at

West Barlow Park, backed by a \$15 million federal pledge. This facility will become the permanent headquarters and training base for the North Queensland Cowboys NRLW team and the Northern Pride, enhancing elite women's pathways, boosting local jobs, and amplifying Cairns's profile as a hub for women's sport. Simultaneously, the Cairns Regional Council's Major Events Precinct plan will evolve the Cairns Showgrounds and Barlow Park into a premier regional sports and events precinct, supported by master planning and federal grant funding through the regional Precincts and Partnerships Program. These upgrades are complemented by the Queensland Government's \$91 million Barlow Park redevelopment in the lead-up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which will deliver improved facilities, lighting, and spectator amenities by 2028.

These investments, alongside existing flagship events such as IRONMAN Cairns and Crankworx Cairns, position TNQ to host more national and international competitions across a broader range of sports. Enhanced venues, modern amenities, and dedicated event precincts will enable Cairns to attract larger-scale tournaments and festivals, increasing the number and length of visitor stays. This will deliver significant economic returns through higher visitor spending on accommodation, hospitality, transport, and tourism experiences, while strengthening the region's brand as Australia's leading tropical sports destination. The combination of elite sport, community engagement, and major event capability ensures the sector is well-placed for rapid growth over the coming decade.

³⁴ TIQ, *International Education & Training Snapshot: Qld 2022, September 2023*

³⁵ TIQ, *International Education & Training Snapshot: Cairns 2022, September 2023*

³⁶ *Study Cairns, FactSheet, September 2023*



Regionally Significant Sectors	Facility/location	Key Components
Marine	Cairns	• Bulk cargo wharves • Common user facility (maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services) • Cairns Cruise Liner Terminal • Reef Terminal • Cairns Marlin Marina • GBR International Marine College • Northern Fisheries Centre • Redden St Research Facility
	Mourilyan	• Deep water Port • Berth • Industrial land
Aviation	Cairns	• International Terminal • Domestic Terminal • Regional Trade Distribution Centre Cairns • General Aviation • MRO • Emergency Services Precinct • Commercial and Logistics Development • Renewable Energy Hub – Biofuel/Biodiesel Facility • CQU Aviation Training
	Mareeba	• Mareeba Airport Aviation Industrial Park
	Cooktown	• Cooktown Airport and industrial park
	Mundoo (Mourilyan)	• Mundoo Airport
	Atherton	• Atherton Aerodrome
Health	Cairns	• Cairns Hospital • Cairns Private Hospital • FNQ Health and Innovation Precinct – old CHIC (CHIC) • JCU Cairns Tropical Enterprise Centre (CTEC)
	Mareeba	• Mareeba Hospital
	Atherton	• Atherton Hospital
	Cooktown	• Cooktown Multipurpose Health Service
	Innisfail	• Innisfail Hospital
	Mossman	• Mossman District Hospital
	Herberton	• Herberton Hospital
	Gordonvale	• Gordonvale Memorial Hospital
	Tully	• Tully Hospital

Regionally Significant Sectors	Facility/location	Key Components
Knowledge Education and Training	Cairns	- Central Queensland University - James Cook University, Bada-Jali campus - Reef and Rainforest Research Centre - TAFE Cairns Campus and Manufacturing Hub
	Smithfield	- Indigenous Education and Research Centre - Cairns Institute - JCU Ideas lab - Australian Tropical Herbarium - Eduquarium - Environmental Research Complex - Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine
	Edmonton	Sugar Research
	Innisfail	- Cassowary Coast University Centre - TAFE Innisfail campus - South Johnstone Research Facility
	Tully	Sugar Research Australia
	Daintree	Daintree Rainforest Observatory
	Mareeba	- Mareeba Research Facility - TAFE Mareeba Campus
	Atherton	- TAFE Atherton Campus - Walkamin Research Facility - Tablelands University Centre
	Cooktown	Cooktown university Centre
Defence	Cairns	- Regional Maintenance Centre North East - HMAS Cairns
Agriculture	Cairns Council	
	Cassowary Council	
	Cook Council	
	Douglas Council	
	Etheridge Council	
	Mareeba Council	
	Tablelands Council	

Regionally Significant Sectors	Facility/location	Key Components
Sport/ Recreation/ Events	Cairns	• Cairns Esplanade • Cairns Racecourse • Cairns Convention Centre • Barlow Park multi-sports facility (Brisbane 2032 Venue) • Cairns Showgrounds • Cazalys Stadium • Cairns Art Gallery • Cairns Performing Arts Centre • Bulmba-ja Arts Centre • Cairns Museum • Screen Queensland Studio: Cairns Munro Martin Parkland
	Smithfield	• Smithfield MTB Park
	Atherton	• Atherton MTB Park • Atherton Racecourse (Tolga) • Atherton Showground
	Davies Creek (Mareeba)	• Davies Creek MTB Park • Mareeba Racecourse
	Cardwell	• Cardwell MTB Park
	Arriga	• Springmount Raceway
	Mt Garnet	• Mt Garnet Racecourse
	Cooktown	• Cooktown Racecourse
	Innisfail	• Innisfail Racecourse
	Einasleigh	• Einasleigh Racecourse
	Tinaroo	• Tinaroo Dam
	Forsyth	• Charleston Dam
	Tully	• Tully White Water Rafting • Tully Showgrounds
	Mossman	• Mossman showgrounds
	Malanda	• Malanda showgrounds
	Wondecla	• Wondecla Showgrounds
	Mareeba	• Mareeba Rodeo

Regionally Significant Sectors	Facility/location	Key Components
Tourism	Cairns Council	2023/24 Visitor nights = 15,478,237 or 42,406 people per night plus 7,335 day trippers - Projection is 1 visitor for 2.3 locals by 2050 in Cairns Regional Council - Douglas Shire Council is currently 3 residents to 1 visitor, by 2032 it is expected to be 1 visitor for each local
	Cassowary Council	
	Cook Council	
	Douglas Council	
	Etheridge Council	
	Mareeba Council	
	Tablelands Council	
	Wujal Wujal Council	
	Yarrabah Council	
Renewable Energy	Arriga	Mount Emerald Wind Farm
	Kidston	- Solar Farm - Pumped Hydro - Wind Farm
Mining	Mareeba Shire	
	Tablelands Shire	
	Cassowary Shire	
	Etheridge Shire	
	Cook Shire	

APPENDIX G – REGION-SHAPING INFRASTRUCTURE

Region-shaping infrastructure	Relationship to regional outcomes
Inland Freight Route (second Bruce Highway)	The 1185-kilometre Inland Freight Route proposal is for a viable north-south alternative to the Bruce Highway, forming a critical freight corridor, particularly during extreme weather events. Early works have commenced on the Inland Freight Route and key feeder roads. The Gregory Developmental Road will connect FNQ and the Inland Freight Route.
Burke Developmental Road (Normanton – Dimbulah)	The Burke Developmental Road has been progressively sealed between Almaden and Chillagoe. This improves resilience, reliability and productivity, reduces travel times and improves safety. These works strengthen connections between FNQ and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Planning is due to commence on an upgrade strategy for the Burke Developmental Road which will identify a program of progressive, prioritised upgrades to the link to facilitate future resilience, safety and capacity improvements.
Kennedy Developmental Road (Lynd – Hughenden)	New sealing on the Kennedy Developmental Road between The Lynd and Hughenden improves inter-regional connection between northern Queensland and FNQ. The route is a vital transport link for cattle and tourism.
Gregory Developmental Road (Charters Towers – Lynd)	The Gregory Developmental Road upgrades are improving travelling conditions and flood resilience, particularly heavy vehicles. These works strengthen connections between FNQ, northern Queensland and the Inland Freight Route in collaboration with its primary Kennedy Developmental Road connection.
Gulf Developmental Road (Normanton – Mount Garnett)	The Gulf Developmental Road is the principal freight and tourism route connecting Carpentaria Shire with the Bruce Highway, via the Kennedy Highway. The works will widen single lane sections to two lanes.
Cape York Corridor	This package follows the successful completion of Cape York Regional Package Stage 1 where approximately 173km of the Peninsula Developmental Road (PDR) was sealed. This second stage will progressively seal a further 37.51km of the PDR together with new bridge structures at Musgrave and Archer River. These works will improve connections for communities in Cape York within FNQ while also improving freight connectivity and enhancing tourism opportunities on Cape York and for those in FNQ. An investment strategy to seek funds for future stages is critical to enable completion of the seal which provides reliable and safer travel to Cape York.
Bruce Highway (Ingham to Innisfail): a) Ingham to Innisfail (Gairloch Floodway) b) Future Innisfail bypass c) Future Ingham to Cardwell Range Deviation	The Bruce Highway is a crucial freight and commuter transport route in Queensland, connecting centres between Brisbane and Cairns. These projects help improve safety, improve flood resilience, improve capacity over the long term and provide fauna crossings.
Kennedy Highway, Cairns to Mareeba: a) Two additional lanes between Cairns and Mareeba to enable freight efficiency, increased capacity and safety	The Kennedy Highway is a key freight, commuter and tourism corridor between Cairns and Mareeba, Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Future considerations include: Cairns to northern tablelands additional two lanes to supplement the current Kuranda Range Road to increase safety, efficiency and capacity.
FNQ Principal Cycle Network Plan (FNQPCNP) inclusive of but not limited to: a) Cairns Southern Access Cycleway b) Mossman / Port Douglas Principal cycle network TNQ Mountain Bike Strategy	The Far North Queensland Principal Cycle Network Plan (FNQPCNP) shows core routes needed to get more people cycling more often. TMR's Cycling Infrastructure Policy (CIP) requires all TMR-funded projects on PCN to explicitly provide cycling facilities. The Cairns Southern Access Cycleway is a reinvestment of savings achieved on earlier Bruce Highway upgrade projects. The intent is to create 20km of continuous off-road shared path from Gordonvale to Cairns CBD. Continued implementation of the FNQ Principal Cycle Network Plan within the region.
Cairns Western Arterial Road, Redlynch Connector Road to Captain Cook Highway, duplication	Duplicating the remaining two-lane sections of the Cairns Western Arterial Road, between Redlynch Connector Road and Captain Cook Highway, will reduce traffic congestion and enhance network resilience by providing an alternative to the Captain Cook Highway. It will also deliver new and improved active transport infrastructure.

Region-shaping infrastructure	Relationship to regional outcomes
Cairns Bruce Highway Upgrade Master Plan: a) Deppeler Road interchange b) Bentley Park interchange c) Future Earlville bypass	The Cairns Bruce Highway Upgrade Master Plan provides the long-term upgrade strategy for the Bruce Highway from Wrights Creek, south of Edmonton to Draper Street, near the Cairns city centre for urban growth within the southern corridor over the next 30 years.
Cairns Transit Network	The Cairns Transit Network is a long-term vision for public transport now and into the future. It is the first busway planning project of its kind in regional Queensland. It aims to improve public transport in Cairns by giving buses priority, either in separate bus lanes or on dedicated bus-only lanes (busways).
Captain Cook Highway (Cairns CBD – Smithfield) master plan a) Stage 1 Florence Street and Aeroglen Drive b) Staged future upgrades from Aeroglen Drive to the intersection of the Captain Cook and Kennedy Highways, and Mount Milman Drive in Smithfield c) Staged future cycleway from Arnold Street to the shared pathway on the Smithfield Bypass	Comport and Draper Streets in Cairns CBD to the intersection of the Captain Cook and Kennedy Highways, and Mount Milman Drive in Smithfield (approximately 15.5km) to reduce congestion on a key regional corridor. The master plan is proposed to be staged.
Ecotourism and recreational trails • Wangetti Trail proposed route • Delivery of the TNQ Regional MTB Strategy	Iconic and unique trails foster active and ecologically sustainable tourism. Trails for walking and mountain biking will enhance local recreational opportunities and attract visitors on an international scale.
Bruce Highway, Cairns Southern Access Corridor (Stage 5), Foster Road upgrade intersection	TMR is progressing Stage 5 of the Cairns Bruce Highway Upgrade master plan. Stage 5 involves a grade separation upgrade at the Bruce Highway and Foster Road intersection in Cairns. The \$225M project is jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments.
North/South Road train Corridor – Ootann Road Upgrade	Although a local government road, Ootann Road is an important regional freight link that is mostly unsealed and narrow. Unreliable access for road trains creates lengthy detours across winding mountainous routes, adding over 250 kilometres per trip. This project will progress the upgrade of the road to provide a more efficient, resilient and safer freight system, facilitate economic expansion in the region and significantly reduce travel time. The project will extend existing sealed sections of the road and raise its standard to a nine-metre-wide two-lane seal, enabling better heavy vehicle access and delivering a strategic link between Northern Australian industry and southern markets. This project is divided into two project sections (both local roads), led by Tablelands Regional Council and Mareeba Shire Council in their respective LGAs. Both local governments have received funding from the Australian Government to facilitate the works.
Water storage and allocation in Tablelands	For the region to grow both in population (Cairns and Tablelands) and economy, additional storage and security in allocations is needed. Without a solution urban growth in Cairns will be prioritised over agricultural uses for water causing a decline in exports in the region.
Lakeland Irrigation Scheme	Additional water storage in Lakeland will enable an additional 10,000 hectares of irrigated land thus increasing the population of Lakeland, exports and indirect benefits to service centres, transport and manufacturing industries.
Port of Mourilyan Master Plan	Support growth in bulk commodity trade (i.e Silica) by leveraging existing infrastructure.
Bed leveling of Johnstone River	Facilitating the return of commercial fishing
Bed leveling Cooktown Port.	Facilitating reliable access for cruise ships, Cooktown port as a safe harbour and commercial fishing.
Cairns Eastern Aviation Precinct	Four new aeronautical stands, aeromedical and emergency response facilities, aircraft maintenance and repair common-user hangar, training facilities, and renewable fuel and energy production.
Digital connectivity and telecommunications	Enhance access to services, enables remote work and education and supports innovation across regional industries.
Cairns Marine Precinct Common User Facility	Boosts maritime capability, enabling job creation and industry diversification.
Expand the general aviation Maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) sector	Strengthens FNQ's role as a regional aviation hub, generating skilled employment and supporting economic resilience.



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