

Our natural assets

Regional strategic framework



Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils

Version 1.6, December 2018



Version 1.6, adopted by FNQROC Board, December 10, 2018

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Vision

Far North Queensland's natural assets are managed to ensure positive economic, environmental, and social outcomes.

Executive summary

The natural assets of Far North Queensland are central to our culture, well-being and prosperity. They form the mainstay of our region's economy and productivity and provide for us a tropical lifestyle which is as unique as it is diverse.

The combined role of governance, operations, policy and strategy mean local governments are well placed to bring to bear positive influence and support for our communities in respecting and managing our natural assets and environment. The FNQROC's foundation of regional advocacy, resource sharing and collaboration across councils provide an established platform which enables unique opportunities for joint learnings, innovation, leadership, technical excellence and partnerships with our collective community.

'Our natural assets' is presented as a strategic framework which builds on the legacy of three iterations of the *FNQ Regional Pest Management Strategy* spanning from 2004 to present. This iteration of the partnership marks the evolution from a pest management strategy to a whole-of-system natural asset approach which considers environmental, social and economic elements simultaneously. This big picture approach is captured across the four core themes of biosecurity, community, economy and natural systems. The themes outline the unique attributes, opportunities and risks we seek to address which are in turn supported by key strategies identified as the most effective pathways to achieve the outcomes.

The framework sets a 10 year timeframe and maps the desired outcomes which will assist in achieving the strategic vision. 'Our natural assets' aims to enable a project and product (output) focused delivery which provides sound pathways to understanding and achieving outcomes. As a strategy it is based from the ground-up on fundamental principles which seek to identify and build on local government and community's key strengths and seek to redress or make opportunities where we are lacking.

Importantly the framework is guided by a monitoring and evaluation plan which builds on a foundation of learning by doing and assists to ensure the design, delivery and communication maintains a line of sight to achieving the desired outcomes.

Fundamental principles

The regional strategic framework is underpinned by three fundamental principles which guide the design and delivery of programs and projects. These are in turn guided by the strategic priorities established in individual council Corporate Plans and the FNQROC Strategic Economic Priorities.

Strategic

The framework is guided by the 'strategy triangle' (page 14) which is a conceptual underpinning of planning/doing within the domain of the public-sector. It considers the essential interaction between the principles of public value, operational capacity and legitimacy & support (Moore 1995) as the building blocks of a strategic course of action which is able to deliver public value.

Key criteria

- Public value - Solving this problem or delivering this product/project would bring significant value to the region or the community.
- Legitimacy and support - There is significant support to work towards the solution or delivering this product/project.
- Operational capacity- We have the capacity and resources to work on the problem or product.

Culturally aware

Beyond the technical considerations, respecting and managing our natural assets and environment is about people and place. This is ultimately reflected in the culture (ideas, customs and social behaviour) of our region. By embracing our regional culture we acknowledge the ancient and ongoing connection to country of First Nations people; as well as the diverse and evolving culture of our contemporary communities.

Key criteria

- How does it engage and support Traditional Owner groups and organisations in shared learning, knowledge and joint management?
- How does it listen and learn from the cultural landscape, community experience, perspectives and aspirations?

Climate ready

The regional climate, especially temperature and extreme events, affects the safety and prosperity of our region. *"There is strong scientific consensus about climate change and it is critical to understand the implications of this when planning how we manage the landscape."* Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country. (www.wettropicsplan.org.au)

Key criteria

- How does it build capacity, knowledge and systems to enable adaptation and resilience of our communities to changing or evolving natural asset management needs and risks?

Vision	<i>Far North Queensland's natural assets are managed to ensure positive economic, environmental and social outcomes.</i>	
Program logic		
<p>Long term outcomes (10+ years)</p> <p>Changes and achievements we can quantify</p>	<p>The diverse natural, cultural and social values of our natural assets are maintained and are resilient to the future risks they might face.</p>	<p>Councils have the operational and institutional capacity to work with our communities to manage our natural assets sustainably.</p>
<p>Intermediate outcomes (5+ years)</p> <p>Indicators we can measure</p>	<p>Our natural assets The extent and condition of our natural assets are maintained and improved.</p>	
	<p>Our knowledge Councils and communities understand the risks and required responses to protect and manage our natural assets.</p>	
	<p>Our capacity Councils and communities can demonstrate an enhanced capacity and adoption of sustainable management of natural assets.</p>	
	<p>Our leadership and partnerships. Councils and communities can demonstrate an improved level of partnership and integration.</p>	
Key Strategies		
<p>Short –term outcomes (1-2 years)</p> <p>The key strategies, activities and products which are required to achieve the regional vision.</p>	<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review and rebuild current information delivery communication approaches with more informed community engagement approaches. ○ Engage more directly with future generations. ○ Provide clear evidence-based guidance to executive for targeted and informed advocacy. ○ Evolve from an information biased approach to engagement to ground solution based approaches. 	
	<p>Capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to develop and improve regional partnerships. ○ Establish clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities across levels of government. ○ Acknowledge, reward and incentivise positive investment and promote and support community, industry and governance champions. ○ Lead by example through informed integration and communication across departments and areas of operation. ○ Enable innovative solutions and approaches in communities and councils. 	
	<p>Risk awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish our monitoring and evaluation capability to inform and guide management investment, regional advocacy and community engagement. ○ Utilise risk assessment and analysis approaches in the design and prioritisation of projects and programs. 	
	<p>Informed decision making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish clear line-of-sight investments to deliver measurable outcomes. ○ Incorporate short, intermediate and long term considerations into the planning, implementation and review of programs and projects. ○ Develop indicators and measures which are trackable and transparent to guide the implementation and review of programs and projects. 	

Core themes

The scope of 'our natural assets' strategic framework is defined by four core themes. These themes map the key assets and areas for investment and provide an outline of the theme itself, why it is important, and how it relates to natural assets.



Action statements introduce each of the four core themes and their unique challenges and opportunities. The key elements of the action statements and their intended purpose are outlined below.



Our current strengths describe where we are meeting goals and have solid foundations on which to work into the future; these are the things we are doing well and the capacities we already have.



Our current weaknesses and risks describe the shortcomings we seek to address or the vulnerabilities we need to consider when planning for the future.



Outcomes and targets define where we would like to be in 5-10 years. These are mapped in the program logic.



Measures and methods we can use to monitor and evaluate progress towards targets and outcomes. These are determined at the design stage of a project or program and mapped in more detail in the monitoring and evaluation plan.



Policy and advocacy messages relating to the theme are outlined to guide and inspire communication, consultation and program/project design.



Supporting materials outlines the current tools and capacity we have at hand as well as the future tools and capacity we would like to develop to achieve the outcomes.

Biosecurity

What is biosecurity? Risks to our natural assets are posed in many different forms and guises from the familiar such as pest animals and weeds, to increasingly broad impacts from new risks ranging from pathogens (e.g.- Panama disease) to invertebrates (e.g.- tramps ants). An increasingly connected world and changing climatic conditions are global trends beyond our immediate control but will continue to increase our exposure to risk and place pressure on our capacity to respond. Many of these pressures are likely to be in addition to those we are currently managing. Biosecurity is the steps and measures we take to respond to and protect us from these risks.

Why is biosecurity important? Biosecurity risks have a direct impact on our natural assets, economy and lifestyle. In addition to the immediate damage they do they can also significantly increase routine management costs, draw continuing complaints from community and pressure councils to direct management resources to reactive rather than proactive investment. It is important to address biosecurity risks in a balanced investment which acknowledges the often significant and established issues we already have; while responding quickly to new and emerging issue before they become established.

Investment areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Invasive plants and animals (pests and weeds). ○ Other biosecurity risks (diseases, pathogens, invertebrates).
Where are we now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⚠ Strong and well established regional partnerships and networks. ⚠ Well established joint planning processes, communication tools and approaches. ⚠ Comprehensive knowledge of distribution of most priority weeds. <p>🌀 The bottom line (economic, social, environmental, cultural) impacts of biosecurity issues are unsustainable.</p> <p>🌀 Our current exposure to risk is too high and continues to increase.</p> <p>🌀 Responsibility and risk are not shared across all players.</p>
Where do we want to be in 5-10 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🎯 Responsibility for action and investment in management is shared across all relevant parties. 🎯 The impacts of biosecurity risks are understood and responded to. 🎯 Our exposure to risk is minimised (to an acceptable, can-live-with level). 🎯 Collaborative, effective and integrated operations are enabled across council/s.
What measures can we use to report & map progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📊 Quantitative impacts of biosecurity issues -hectares infested, catchments impacted, loss in production, resources directed to management actions, coast avoided. 📊 Qualitative impacts of biosecurity issues – liveability, customer satisfaction, level of awareness and engagement, access for cultural and recreational purposes, diversity and health of key native species and communities.

<p>What are the key policy and advocacy messages?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 Biosecurity requires an ongoing commitment and a long-term governance outlook. 📌 Prevention and early intervention are the most cost-effective investments. 📌 Risk and exposure is increasing due to factors out of our control or influence. 📌 Resources required include non-monetary investment – we need to diversify our resource base to share the responsibility. 📌 Knowledge, partnerships and detailed community engagement are essential building blocks of our response.
<p>Supporting materials</p>	
<p>Current tools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔑 Local Area Biosecurity Plans and advisory groups. 🔑 Regional Taskforce MOU. 🔑 Weed spread prevention codes and practice and guidelines
<p>Tools we would like to develop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔑 Qualitative and quantitative biosecurity Indicators - to assess condition, establish baseline and map progress in management. 🔑 Survey approaches to establish and benchmark community experience, expectations, investment and engagement in biosecurity. 🔑 Marketing tools and products.

Community

Who are our communities?

The Far North has a diverse range of communities from regional cities and service centres to local settlements, rural villages, indigenous communities, remote communities and rangelands. *"Our communities place high value on the health and resilience of our natural resources and the services they provide to our social, economic and cultural wellbeing"*. Wet Tropics Plan for People and Country. (www.wettropicsplan.org.au)

Why are our communities important to our natural assets? Our communities are the key to sustaining our natural assets. Well informed approaches to engagement which build real solutions and partnerships with people and places are the key to transforming local governments role in respecting and managing our natural assets and environment.

Investment areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Urban and peri-urban people and places. ○ Rural, remote and regional people and places. ○ Current and future generations.
Where are we now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▤ There are many well established community led groups, programs and partnerships conducting on ground work in the restoration and protection of our natural assets. ▤ We have a well-represented and engaged agricultural community particularly regarding water quality and productivity improvement. ▤ There is a diverse range of community based planning and consultation products and approaches already developed across local government and NRM groups. 🌀 Gaps in community awareness and knowledge of what can be done and what needs to be done. 🌀 Current communication and engagement strategies are not always effective or inclusive of community perspectives and values. 🌀 Approaches and tools we are using are not always well informed or resourced; local governments have technical expertise in operational work but often lack the community engagement and behaviour change skills which may be required. 🌀 Sometimes challenged by poor strategic outcomes and challenges in balancing parochial and global perspectives.
Where do we want to be in 5-10 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⦿ Community have awareness, capacity and ownership to fulfil their obligations and aspirations in sustaining and managing our natural assets. ⦿ Sustainable/ sustained resourcing is accessible. ⦿ Councils have an improved understanding of importance of natural assets across all communities. ⦿ Communities and councils can demonstrate improved

	stewardship outcomes.
What measures can we use to report & map progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Quantitative measures of participation, ground based targets, trends and service delivery, diversification of resources.  Qualitative measures of community engagement, participation and stewardship.
What are the key policy and advocacy messages?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Local government has a changing role in the management and protection of our natural assets and is a key partner along with the community.  Better understanding of the constraints and incentives to community/council engagement and participation in natural asset management will improve the design of programs and projects.
Supporting materials	
Current tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Corporate plans (Community plans, planning scheme strategic framework).  Customer service and request systems.  Plans, tools, approaches and resources housed with partner groups.
Tools we would like to develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Qualitative and quantitative Indicators - to assess condition, establish baseline and map progress in management.  Alternative economic approaches to incentivise/enable participation.  Survey approaches to establish and benchmark community experience, expectations, investment and engagement in natural asset management.  Marketing tools and products.

Economy

How does our economy relate to our natural assets?

Increasingly our economy is also measured in non-monetary terms, often described as natural assets or ecosystem services. The concept of natural assets applies an economic or service (social, cultural) value to either components (soil, air, water) or systems (habitat, climate) from the natural world. Much like built assets, natural assets measure the natural world as physical or monetary units, but also by the measure of the services or resources they can sustain. The benefits which flow from natural systems, such as quality of life, are often framed as ecosystem services. Ecosystem services considers the interdependencies between the built and natural world and the considerable and irreplaceable value of the essential building blocks of clean air and water, shelter, food and fibre without which we could not survive.

Why is our economy important to our natural assets? In the FNQ region a significant portion of our economy is derived either directly or indirectly from the productivity and diversity of our natural assets across reef, rainforest and rangeland ecosystems.

Investment areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture. • Tourism. • Industry. • Ecosystem services and non-monetary economy.
Where are we now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # Our monetary economy is fuelled by our unique tropical environment and productivity. # Our industry and agricultural sectors are engaged, organised and well informed of productivity and sustainability of their business. # There is a diverse range of community based planning and consultation products and approaches already developed across local government and NRM groups. ~ Our natural assets are exposed to significant risk and transformative impacts which may alter their capacity to support our future economy and livelihoods. ~ Our natural assets are currently exposed to significant /increasing and accumulative economic costs and impacts. ~ Contradictory investments and competing interests challenge the sustainability of our natural economy.
Where do we want to be in 5-10 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊙ Increased re-investment in supporting the health and resilience of our natural assets and environment. ⊙ Improved stewardship and development/diversification of alternative economic and resourcing of natural asset management. ⊙ More comprehensive understanding of our current and future risk and the key strategies to mitigate or adapt. ⊙ Natural assets included in mainstream asset management plans.

<p>What measures can we use to report & map progress?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Linked economic health indicators to environmental health indicators (e.g. other score cards).  Qualitative measures of the benefits of the development and adoption of improved practices and governance.  Qualitative and quantitative measures of participation, engagement and investment in sustaining our natural assets.
<p>What are the key policy and advocacy messages?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Our natural assets are integral to the health of our regional economy, productivity and lifestyle.  There are many emerging and unrealised opportunities to create stronger reinvestment in our natural assets.  The value of our natural assets has the opportunity to appreciate and increase over time as population and demand for resources increase.  Compound stressors and threats to our natural assets may create instability and uncertainty to all sectors.
<p>Supporting materials</p>	
<p>Current tools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Corporate plans and economic development plans.  Sector based plans, tools, approaches and resources.  Socio-economic research, reports and products.
<p>Tools we would like to develop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Qualitative and quantitative Indicators - to assess condition, establish baseline and map progress in management.  Alternative economic approaches to incentivise/enable participation.  Survey approaches to establish and benchmark community experience, expectations, investment and engagement in natural asset management.  Natural asset management plans for local government owned and managed natural assets.

Natural systems

What are our natural systems? Natural systems include all terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats right down to the air we breathe. The environmental integrity of natural systems are often categorised in relation to their pre-European condition. Many of our natural systems are highly modified or repurposed as a result of denser settlement, agriculture and infrastructure. Our region is also unique in its global recognition of both the Wet Tropics and adjoining Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Areas. Regardless of their condition or current use, all natural systems have an intrinsic value (the individual worth of their component parts) as well as an overarching value (the contribution made by products and services to the essential components of life).

Why are our natural systems important? Our natural systems underpin the fabric of our society, culture and economy. Much of our lifestyle and well-being is dependent on the choices and opportunities available to us through our natural systems. They face pressures from historical and legacy issues like land clearing and soil erosion as well as future trends and current threats such as climate change and invasive species.

Investment areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coasts and marine. ○ Waterways and catchments. ○ Landscapes and vegetation. ○ Wildlife and habitat.
Where are we now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▤ Many of our natural assets are included in protected areas such as National Parks and World Heritage Areas. ▤ The community values our natural assets, tropical lifestyle and diverse environment. ▤ Our Corporate plans acknowledge the importance of our natural assets and a healthy environment. ▤ Our natural assets draw international and Australian visitors to the region. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Stressed or degraded systems have reduced resilience to recover from current stressors. ☞ Increasingly complex pressures on individual species, habitat and systems make them vulnerable to irreversible change. ☞ We have many knowledge and implementation gaps concerning the management of natural systems. ☞ The resilience or future sustainability of our natural systems is often compromised or not known (not future proof). ☞ Natural systems often have an unquantified value which reduces opportunities across all sectors.
Where do we want to be in 5-10 years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◎ Understanding of when and what management interventions can improve health and resilience of natural systems. ◎ Understanding of likely trajectories and future states of natural assets to enable future transitions/adaptation and change. ◎ System health indicators developed and established (stable/improving).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🎯 Values for natural systems established 🎯 Improved stewardship outcomes, local government and community uptake, participation and innovation.
What measures can we use to report & map progress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📏 Existing or new Indicators (Reef reporting, water quality, biosecurity plans). 📏 Level of integration. 📏 Report cards. 📏 Community and visitor values of natural systems. 📏 Levels of engagement and adoption of stewardship initiatives. 📏 Progress against objectives and visions of corporate plans.
What are the key policy and advocacy messages?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📣 Local government is well placed to champion the importance of our natural systems and the contributions they make to our well-being. 📣 There are opportunities for benefits to be delivered by improved systems, practices and integration within the service delivery and operation of councils. 📣 The community places great importance on the health of and benefits they derive from healthy natural systems.
Supporting materials	
Current tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔑 Corporate plans (Community plans, Planning scheme/ strategic frameworks). 🔑 Plans, tools, approaches and resources housed with partner groups.
Tools we would like to develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🔑 Qualitative and quantitative Indicators - to assess condition, establish baseline and map progress in management. 🔑 Alternative economic approaches to incentivise/enable participation. 🔑 Survey approaches to establish and benchmark community experience, expectations, investment and engagement in natural asset management. 🔑 Marketing tools and products.

Supporting plans and tools

The following existing and planned supporting materials, products and partnerships are integral to respecting and managing our natural assets. They are grouped under each of the core themes of the strategy. Solid coloured captions represent resources we already have; outlined captions are resources we need to develop.

Biosecurity (page 5)

- 🔑 Local Area Biosecurity Plans
- 🔑 Local advisory groups
- 🔑 Regional taskforce MOU
- 🔑 Codes of practice & guidelines

Biosecurity (page 5)

- 🔑 Baseline indicators
- 🔑 Qualitative surveys
- 🔑 Marketing tools
- 🔑 Regional weed spread prevention network
- 🔑 Compliance tools

Natural systems (page 11)

- 🔑 Corporate plans
- 🔑 Planning scheme strategic framework
- 🔑 Socioeconomic reports and products
- 🔑 Reef 2050 plans and resources
- 🔑 Water Quality Improvement Plan
- 🔑 Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Report Card

Natural systems (page 11)

- 🔑 Baseline indicators
- 🔑 Qualitative surveys
- 🔑 Marketing tools and products
- 🔑 Natural asset management plans
- 🔑 Alternative economic and resourcing approaches
- 🔑 Regional GBR action plan

Community (page 7)

- 🔑 Corporate plans
- 🔑 Community plans
- 🔑 Planning scheme strategic framework
- 🔑 Customer service & CR systems
- 🔑 Plans, tools and resources housed with partner groups
- 🔑 Animal Management & Wildlife Stewardship Policy framework.

Community (page 7)

- 🔑 Baseline indicators
- 🔑 Qualitative surveys
- 🔑 Marketing tools
- 🔑 Alternative economic and resourcing approaches
- 🔑 Compliance tools

Economy (page 9)

- 🔑 Corporate plans
- 🔑 Economic development plans
- 🔑 Sector-based plans and resources
- 🔑 Socioeconomic reports and

Economy (page 9)

- 🔑 Baseline indicators
- 🔑 Qualitative surveys
- 🔑 Marketing tools and products
- 🔑 Natural asset management plans
- 🔑 Alternative economic and resourcing approaches

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