



AUGUST 2024 STATE ADVOCACY REQUESTS



Since our last delegation in March 2023, we would like to sincerely thank the State Government for delivering or commencing the delivery of several priorities for the Far North Queensland communities.

We would like to thank you for:

- 1 Completing the Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan.
- 2 Progressing the FNQ Statutory Regional Plan and engaging in extensive consultation.
- 3 Funding Councils to develop their Local Housing Action Plans.
- 4 The efforts by Department of Transport and Main Roads and other agencies to reopen Far North Queensland following Tropical Cyclones Jasper, Kirrily, and the associated flooding.
- 5 The ongoing work on the Peninsula Developmental Road (PDR), which is crucial for improving connectivity and access for remote communities, supporting local economies, and enhancing the overall resilience of the region.
- 6 Additional funding for the Cairns Regional Council Water Security Stage 1 project, which is vital for ensuring a sustainable water supply to support the growing population and economic activities in the area.
- 7 Funding for Douglas Shire Council water security initiatives, which are essential for safeguarding the region's water resources, addressing the impacts of climate change, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of water supply for residents, agriculture, and tourism.

CURRENT REGIONALLY IMPORTANT ISSUES TO US INCLUDE:



Bridges



Housing Shortage



Roads



Digital Infrastructure



Income and Financial Sustainability



Resource Recovery and Waste Management



Regional Plan



Mountain Biking



Water (Agriculture)



Disaster Recovery Betterment



Water (Dams)



Gravel Pits new ILUA requirements



Water (Urban Infrastructure)



BRIDGES

1 REPLACEMENT OF THE KURANDA BARRON BRIDGE

The replacement of the Kuranda Barron Bridge needs to have an expedited process before load limits are decreased further.

This critical infrastructure serves as a vital connection for residents and businesses, and any delay in addressing its structural integrity could have severe economic and social impacts. We urge the State Government to prioritise and fast-track the replacement process to ensure the safety and efficiency of this key transport link.

2 GILBERT RIVER BRIDGE

Per previous requests, there has been a lack of support for developing a business case for upgrading the Gilbert River Bridge from a low-level single-lane bridge.

Department of Transport and Main Roads has not supported this initiative nor discussed whether they would undertake the business case if funding were received. We request confirmation of a business case to be undertaken to understand the long-term view of the Gilbert River Bridge and possible upgrades to ensure the region's infrastructure meets current and future needs.





ROADS

1 BUSINESS CASE FOR RANGE ROAD OR KURANDA RANGE ROAD

The development of a business case for Range Roads or Kuranda Range Road to move forward with an identified solution is crucial.

Despite the allocation of \$210 million from the Federal Government, we still require matching funding from the State Government. Any viable solution will take at least 10 years to implement, significantly impacting economic growth in the interim.

The importance of the Range Roads, including the Kuranda Range Road, extends beyond the Tablelands communities, impacting the entire Cape York and Gulf region. These roads serve as critical arteries for transportation, facilitating the movement of goods, services, access to health care, and people across a vast and economically vital area. Ensuring their reliability and capacity is essential for supporting the economic growth, connectivity, and resilience of not only the local communities but also the broader Cape York and Gulf regions, which rely heavily on these routes for their socio-economic activities.

At a minimum, we request a commitment by the State to work with Local Governments to undertake a preliminary evaluation to define the scope and detailed business case of the preferred solution for the Cairns to Northern Tablelands corridor.

2 PALMERSTON RANGE

Improvements to the Palmerston Range are necessary to make it robust and resilient as the major heavy vehicle route for the region.

The Palmerston Range is the only B-double route between the coast and the Tablelands, Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York. Improvements to the Palmerston Range are necessary to make it robust and resilient as the major heavy vehicle route for the region. The current state of the range poses challenges to accessibility and safety, particularly during adverse weather conditions.

Enhancing the infrastructure will not only improve connectivity but also bolster the region's resilience against natural disasters. We request the State Government to prioritise these improvements to ensure the long-term viability of this critical transport route.





INCOME AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

1 REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS

We propose reducing the amount of competitive grants and increasing the availability of non-competitive grants for very small regional Councils.

Competitive grants often favour larger, more resourced Councils, while smaller Councils struggle to compete. Non-competitive grants tailored for small regional Councils will enable them to focus on essential projects that drive economic growth in regional Queensland.

2 DELAYS IN GRANT PAYMENTS CAUSING COST BLOWOUTS

Significant delays between when Councils are informed of a successful grant application and payments are causing significant cost blowouts for projects.

This issue is exacerbated in Far North Queensland, where the wet and dry seasons dictate construction schedules. Projects often can only be undertaken during the dry season, and delayed payments hinder timely project commencement and completion. We urge the State to expedite grant payments to align with the region's unique climatic conditions, ensuring projects are delivered on time and within budget.





REGIONAL PLAN

It is crucial to promote the Far North Queensland (FNQ) Regional Plan by initiating public consultations prior to the Queensland state election.

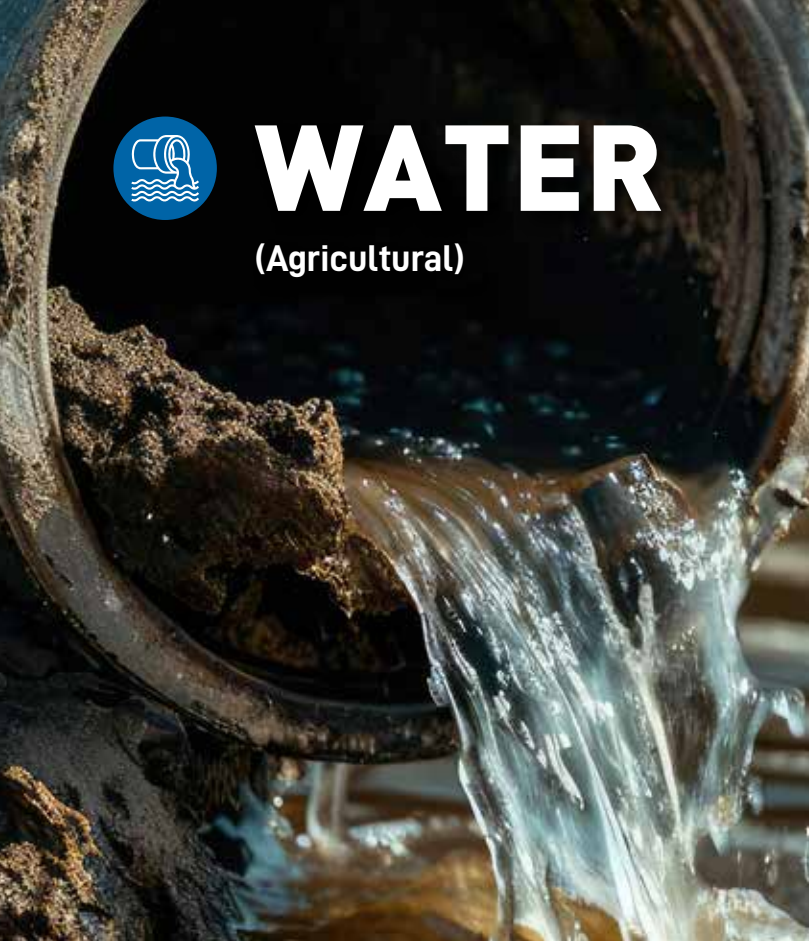
Engaging the community in the consultation process will ensure that the regional plan reflects the needs and aspirations of the local population.

This approach offers a clear economic development trajectory to support investment in the region and inform decision-making.



WATER

(Agricultural)



ETHERIDGE AGRICULTURE PRECINCT

Etheridge Shire Council is seeking to develop a regional agricultural precinct to foster high-value cropping and beef production on dry land and irrigated pastures. The intent is to streamline key issues such as water allocation, vegetation management, native title, land tenure, and the EPBC Act approvals and requirements. An application is currently with the Federal Government to fund a dedicated officer to manage the steps required to develop this precinct.



LAKELAND IRRIGATION AREA SCHEME

This critical project, aimed at providing a reliable water supply to support horticulture and broadacre cropping, continues to progress with significant milestones achieved. The benefits identified for the region include:

Access to Reliable, Adequate, and Affordable Water Supply:

The scheme ensures a dependable water supply capable of supporting diverse agricultural activities, essential for the region's economic growth.

Expansion of Arable Freehold Land:

The scheme will service up to 10,000 hectares of arable freehold land, expanding the capacity to grow higher value and more diverse crops. This will significantly boost agricultural productivity and open new market opportunities.

Economic Prosperity:

Increased agricultural activity will lead to indirect benefits such as population growth and value-added services, contributing to the region's overall prosperity. Supported by the Mareeba and Tablelands Growers' Associations.

Need for a Lead Proponent on Water Management:

To ensure the success of the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme, there is a crucial need for a lead proponent to manage water resources effectively.

We ask that the State:

- Allocate water reserves from the Palmer River to Lakeland as part of the Mitchell River Catchment Water Plan review;
- Work with Cook Shire Council to identify suitable infrastructure and planning framework for development of the Lakeland area;
- Establishment of senior Queensland Government cross-departmental representatives in a Mobilisation Taskforce, to progress preliminary requirements for expanded agriculture in Lakeland, including working alongside Traditional Owners.



WATER

(Dams)

POLICY CHANGE REQUEST FOR 30-YEAR ROI IN BUSINESS CASE EVALUATIONS:

The current policy of using a 30-year return on investment (ROI) framework to assess dam projects in Queensland is inadequate. Dams, with lifespans of 100-150 years, offer benefits far beyond this timeframe, as seen in regions with long-standing dams that have experienced substantial economic growth and resilience.

Key Points:

- 1 Long-Term Economic Benefits:**
Regions with dam investments, like those studied in the report, show significantly stronger long-term economic performance compared to those without such investments. These benefits often become evident decades after the initial investment.
- 2 Lagging Benefits and Market Evolution:**
Benefits from dam infrastructure, such as shifts to high-value crops (e.g., avocados in Atherton Tablelands), typically emerge well beyond the 30-year mark. Evaluations need to account for these delayed yet substantial economic impacts.
- 3 Indirect and Synergistic Benefits:**
Dams spur the development of related infrastructure and industries, creating synergies that amplify their economic impact. Current ROI frameworks often fail to capture these indirect benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Extend the Evaluation Period: Extend the ROI evaluation period to at least 50 years to more accurately reflect the long-term benefits of dam projects.

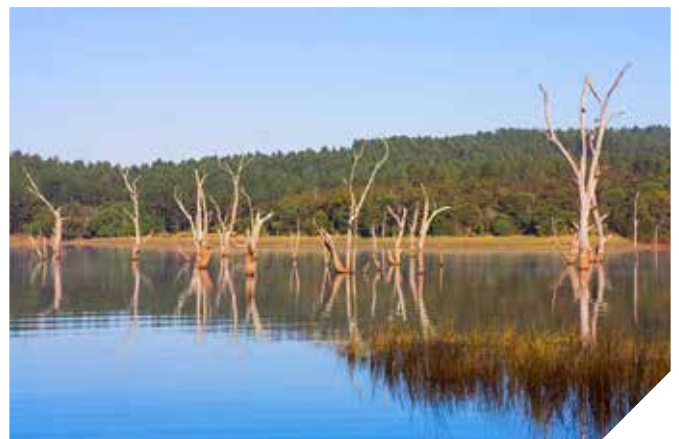
Broader Benefit Metrics:

Include metrics that capture indirect benefits, such as increased agricultural productivity and regional economic resilience.

Long-Term Benefit Realisation Plans:

Implement frameworks for long-term benefit realisation and periodic reviews to systematically track and document extended benefits.

Adopting these recommendations will enable better investment decisions, ensuring long-term prosperity and development for Queensland's regional communities.





WATER

(Urban Infrastructure)

PROPOSAL FOR ANNUAL RENEWAL/UPGRADE FUNDING PROGRAM:

To address the growing demands on trunk infrastructure and the impending renewal needs in water and wastewater reticulation systems, we propose the establishment of an annual renewal/upgrade funding program, similar to the Works for Queensland (W4QLD) and the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme (TIDS). This program will be crucial in supporting the growing population in our regions and ensuring the sustainable management of water and wastewater infrastructure.



Key Points:

- 1 Growing Population and Infrastructure Demand:**
The rapid population growth in our regions has led to increased pressure on existing water and wastewater infrastructure. An annual funding program will help manage this growth by ensuring that trunk infrastructure can meet current and future demands.
- 2 Cliff of Renewals:**
Many Councils face a significant backlog of infrastructure renewals, particularly in water and wastewater systems. A dedicated funding program will provide the necessary financial support to address these renewal needs systematically, preventing failures and ensuring continuity of services.
- 3 Sustainability and Resilience:**
Upgrading and renewing water and wastewater infrastructure is essential for the sustainability and resilience of our communities. This program will ensure that infrastructure is capable of withstanding environmental challenges and continuing to provide reliable services to residents.

We urge the State Government to consider the implementation of this annual renewal/upgrade funding program to support our Councils in managing water and wastewater infrastructure needs effectively. By doing so, we can ensure sustainable growth and development for our communities.



HOUSING SHORTAGE

1 REGIONAL FUNDING TO IMPLEMENT IDENTIFIED ACTIONS

To address the ongoing housing crisis in Far North Queensland, it is imperative to secure regional funding to implement the identified actions from various strategic plans.

These actions are crucial for tackling housing shortages, improving affordability, and ensuring sustainable community growth.

By allocating targeted funding, we can effectively address the specific needs of regional areas, support economic development, and enhance the quality of life for residents.



DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

REQUEST

- More strategic governance of state funding to programs (such as Mobile Black spot Program and Regional Connectivity Program) to meet actual needs of remote people.

Mobile Blackspot Audit

FNQROC has undertaken a mobile blackspot audit on our heavy vehicle and tourism routes within the region. These routes totalled over 5,100km and it was found that 3,550km (~70%) was in a blackspot (3G and 4G). Within capital cities and the surrounds, this would be less than 1%, highlighting the continuing digital divide.

It is recognised that these blackspots will not be eliminated overnight, it is also recognised that a strategic prioritisation plan to reduce these blackspots is also required. To develop this strategic prioritisation plan it would require working with (but not limited to):

- Telco's to understand their future plans.
- Dept. Emergency Services to identify their priority areas for coverage.
- Transport/Agricultural/grazing/mining industries.
- Dept. Transport to understand their future capital projects and incident cluster areas in blackspots.
- Ergon/Powerlink to understand their future capital projects.

It is also understood there are a significant number of microwave tower/transmitter locations across the region, which are at the end of their life. The taxpayer paid for these assets and we are seeking to understand if these could be used to improve mobile communications.

AUSTRALIA'S LEAST DIGITALLY INCLUDED RURAL AREAS ARE NORTH WEST QLD (52.6) COASTAL QLD (55.4).¹

Australian Digital Inclusion Index Scores 2020

	Australia	Rural Australia	Cairns	NWQ
Access	76.3	72.7	72.2	67.7
Affordability	60.9	53.6	52.9	54.0
Digital Ability	52.0	46	45.8	36.1
Overall Digital Inclusion	63.0	57.4	57.3	52.6

¹ https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TLS_ADII_Report-2020_WebU.pdf



RESOURCE RECOVERY AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

MINDFUL OF FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION REQUESTS:

As the FNQROC Resource Recovery Plan progresses to the next phases of implementation, we request that future implementation requirements be considered and supported.

Support from the State in the form of funding, policy alignment, and technical assistance will be crucial to ensure the successful implementation of these phases.



FOR DISCUSSION

STATE TARGETS AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

The State's waste management and resource recovery targets present significant challenges for the Far North Queensland region, which need to be considered when making policy and legislative decisions.

Key challenges include:

1 Low Economies of Scale and Large Transport Distances:

The FNQ region faces inherent difficulties due to its vast geographical area. These factors result in low economies of scale for waste management operations and significant transport distances, which increase costs and complicate logistics. State policies and targets must be adaptable to account for these unique regional characteristics.

2 Regulation of PFAS and PFOS:

The regulation of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) presents additional challenges for the region, particularly in managing green waste and biosolids. These substances can be present in biosolids, which are used in agricultural applications, and in green waste, which is often composted and used to improve soil health. Stringent regulations are hindering Councils ability to process waste.

Addressing these challenges through tailored policy measures, funding support, and flexible regulatory frameworks will be essential for the FNQ region to meet State waste management and resource recovery targets.



MOUNTAIN BIKING



TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE STRATEGY 2024-2034

FNQROC has worked for over 12 months with our regional stakeholders to review the Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy.

The region holds an important place in the history of mountain biking and has a strong standing on the world stage regularly hosting international events as well as providing substantial social and health benefits to our local communities. The updated 2024-2034 Strategy guides the regional vision of Tropical North Queensland as a sustainable world-class mountain biking destination for our local communities and visitors alike. In order to deliver the vision, the region needs to grow its current trail offerings and modernise their management to remain competitive on the world stage and diversify our regional economies.

REQUEST

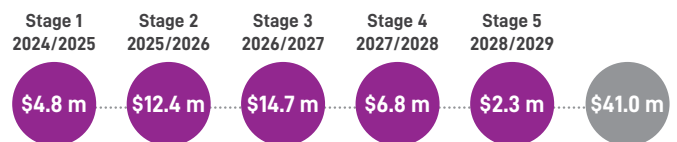
- 1 Invest \$41.0 m in Tropical North Queensland mountain bike trail infrastructure over 5 years to leverage \$70 + m per year return on investment by 2029.

Investing in our tropical trails will allow the region to:

- Upgrade three existing mountain bike parks (Atherton Forest - Tablelands, Davies Creek - Mareeba, Smithfield- Cairns) from regional to national significance standards and construct one new nationally significant mountain bike park (Cardwell - Cassowary Coast) to cement the region as an international ride destination.
- Construct ~285 km of new trail to add to the regions existing 112km (~60 % increase in trail product).
- Establish Tropical North Queensland as Australia's premier winter ride destination for the southern Australian and New Zealand market.
- Attract 30,000 + visiting riders annually for an estimated annual return of \$ 72m to the regional economy².

TROPICAL TRAILS INVESTMENT PLAN

60% GROWTH IN TRAIL OFFERINGS



2 Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report, 2021



DISASTER RECOVERY BETTERMENT



Publication by QRA reports that the 2023 performance data reveals that out of 423 betterment projects subsequently impacted by natural disasters, 79% experienced no damage or only minor damage.

This resilience translates to substantial cost savings; for example, an investment of \$174 million in these projects has resulted in approximately \$397.5 million in avoided costs.

FNQROC Councils would agree with the statement on enhancing community connectivity and resilience in a region's economy that is affected each year with weather events. With this knowledge we are advocating for an increase in the amount of betterment going forward, this will reduce the Council's reliance on DRFA funding into the future.

In order to aid the State and Federal Government; funding to identify priority locations for betterment projects would be an initiative that FNQROC dearly needs and would support.





GRAVEL PITS NEW ILUA REQUIREMENTS

FOR DISCUSSION

The State Government, which manages the hundreds of quarry licenses scattered across the outback, recently changed its interpretation of the Federal Native Title Act 1993.

It means Councils must form Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) with the native title holders for each individual gravel pit. That process can take more than 12 months, but many Councils have been notified that their current permits will expire within months.

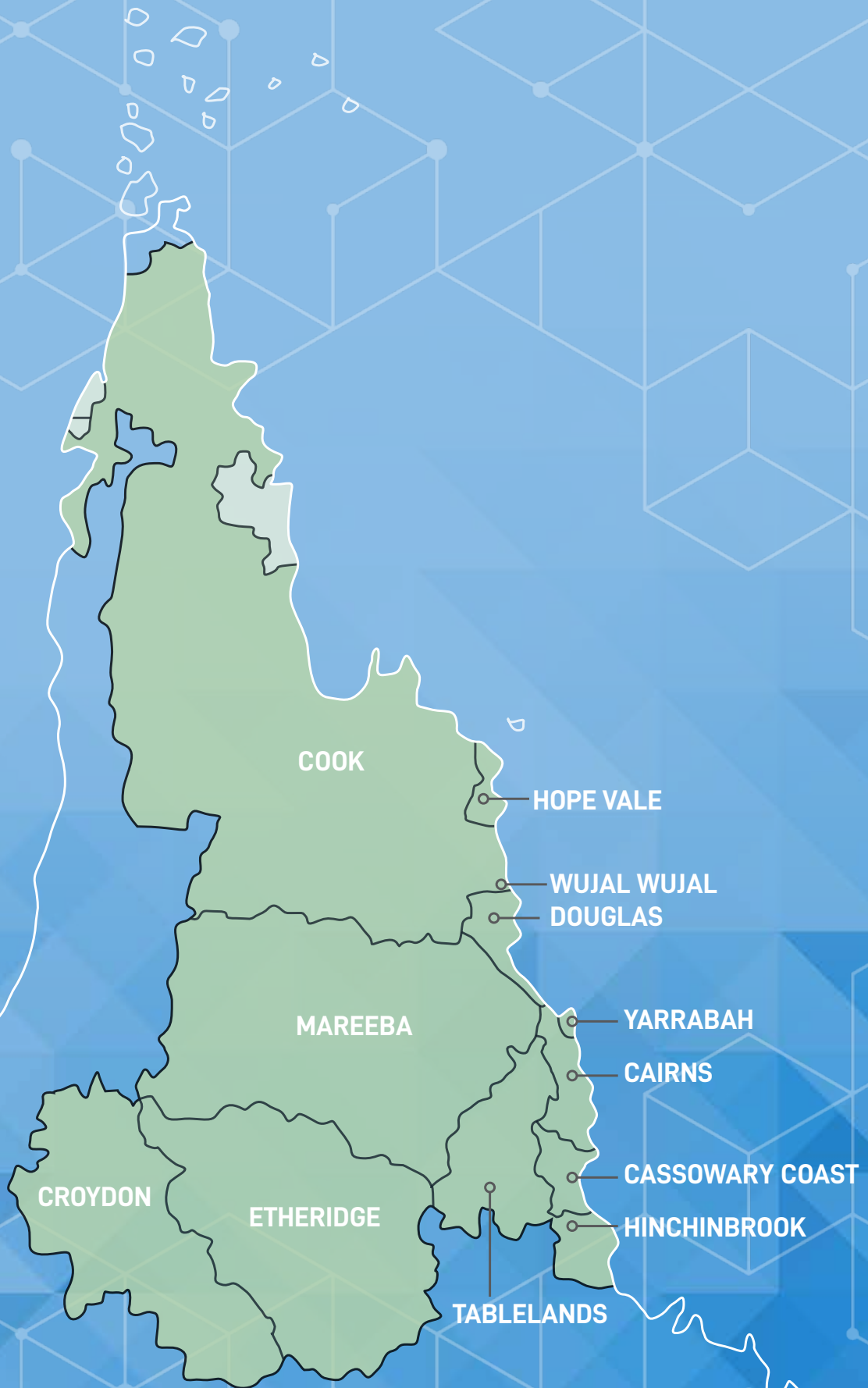
According to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), the change was made in 2020 when native title interests conflicted with the Forestry Act 1959.

REQUEST

We request that the State Government grant an extension for Councils to secure Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) due to recent changes in the interpretation of the federal Native Title Act 1993.

This extension will allow the State to better understand the impact on Councils and develop an appropriate plan for moving forward, ensuring that emergent works after events can continue without disruption.











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