



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES





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OUR COLLABORATIVE LONG-TERM DIRECTION

The Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) is charting a collaborative and future-focused path, with member councils working together to address the region's most pressing long-term challenges and opportunities. Through shared planning and strong regional leadership, FNQROC is driving strategic action across critical areas such as resource recovery, water security, environmental sustainability, transport and social infrastructure. Realising the region's full potential depends on enduring partnerships with State and Federal Governments, supported by aligned policy, funding and deliver frameworks. Together we can build an inclusive infrastructure that supports a thriving, connected FNQ for generations to come.

Achieving this vision required coordinated, evidence based strategies that anticipate future climate realities and protect the region's natural and economic assets. A united regional voice must champion the safeguarding of critical infrastructure corridors, the strengthening of biosecurity capacity, and the prioritisation of resilience in the face of intensifying natural hazards. Proactive investment in disaster resilient social infrastructure and the recognition of water as foundational to regional development are key to ensuring that no community is left behind. FNQROC's forward thinking approach embraces both innovation and preparedness, ensuring every FNQ community not only survives but thrives amid the challenges and changes ahead.

VISION

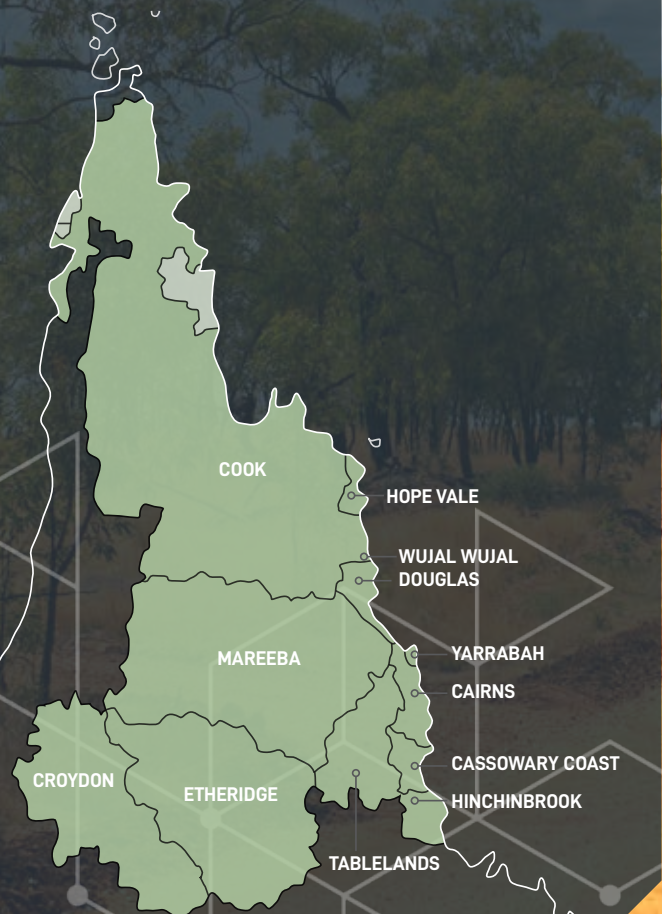
Prosperous, sustainable and connected councils in Far North Queensland – where councils collaborate, and communities thrive.

PURPOSE

Advocate on behalf of, and foster cooperation and resource sharing between FNQROC member Councils.

OUR TAGLINE

United Councils, connected communities, Stronger Region.



SUMMARY OF OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



STRENGTHENING LIVEABILITY AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Far North Queensland (FNQ) is defined by its vibrant communities, rich culture diversity, and outstanding environment. However, persistent housing stress, entrenched disadvantage, systemic underinvestment and increasing climate vulnerability are placing unprecedented pressure on liveability.



RESILIENT TRANSPORT

Transport is the backbone of Far North Queensland's (FNQ) economy and essential for community wellbeing. The region's vast distances, rugged terrain, and seasonal weather extremes demand a transport network that is resilient, reliable and future-ready. Strategic investment in transport infrastructure is crucial to ensure continued access between rural and remote areas, Cairns, and the wider domestic and international markets. Long term planning must prioritise all-weather connectivity, public transport expansion, freight efficiency, and the protection of critical transport corridors.



NATURAL ASSETS AND ENVIRONMENT

Far North Queensland's natural assets, including agricultural land, the Wet Tropics rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef, underpin the region's economic strength and global reputation. Ensuring their long-term sustainability requires a proactive, integrated approach that balances the needs of the environment with production and economic growth. Councils recognise that resilient ecosystems are crucial for long-term prosperity and that degradation of these assets' risks diminishing public appreciation of green spaces, tourism and regional economic growth.



WATER SECURITY

Water security is central to Far North Queensland's (FNQ) long-term sustainability and economic prosperity. The region must move toward an integrated, climate-resilient water management approach that supports urban growth, agriculture, tourism, recreation, and the environment. FNQROC is positioned to lead this shift by advocating for cohesive policy response and investment aligned with regional priorities.



WASTE

Far North Queensland (FNQ) is on a long-term pathway to waste minimisation and managing waste in a way that delivers lasting environmental, economic, and community benefits.

FNQROC STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



STRENGTHENING LIVEABILITY AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN FNQ

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Far North Queensland (FNQ) is defined by its vibrant communities, rich culture diversity, and outstanding environment. However, persistent housing stress, entrenched disadvantage, systemic underinvestment and increasing climate vulnerability are placing unprecedented pressure on liveability.

This strategic priority focuses on advocating for stronger social infrastructure, more liveable communities, and climate resilience. A critical component is the need to build disaster-resilient and adaptive urban and rural environments. Strengthening the region's collective capacity to withstand and recover from extreme events, while planning for sustainable growth, will ensure FNQ remains vibrant, inclusive, and future ready.



REGIONAL DIVERSITY AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

FNQ's challenges are complex and deeply interrelated, especially across remote, rural and First Nations communities. Regional disparities, fragmented service systems and legacy infrastructure exacerbate vulnerabilities.

Key challenges include:

- **Cost-shifting:** increasing transfer of service delivery responsibilities (housing, aged care, safety, homelessness, health) to local government without appropriate funding undermines councils' capacity to deliver core infrastructure.
- **Regional inequity:** Unequal access to base service like Centrelink and Medicare in rural and remote areas, impacting social wellbeing and resilience.
- **Housing stress:** affecting overcrowding, affordability, homelessness rates, and workforce attraction.
- **Climate vulnerability:** FNQ regularly experiences natural disasters – droughts, floods, bushfires, cyclones, and future climate projections point to more extreme heat, rainfall variability, and sea-level rise. These conditions threaten infrastructure, communities and regional development.
- **Underfunded and fragmented health and human services across FNQ**
- **Climate vulnerability:** need to integrate resilience against urban heat, disasters, and environmental risks into planning.
- **First Nations disadvantage,** including extreme housing overcrowding and limited home ownership pathways.

Without strong regional advocacy, these challenges threaten FNQ's social and economic future.

NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

FNQROC and its member councils are not service providers, but we are critical regional conveners and advocates. Together, we need to drive coordinated, long-term action to address regional inequities, climate challenges, and liveability pressures.

Key priorities include:

- Advocate for fair funding and policy solutions that address liveability, infrastructure renewal and disaster resilience.
- Promote region wide resilience planning, especially in hazard-prone growth areas and across ageing infrastructure systems.
- Enhancing disaster preparedness through adaptive urban design, risk based land use planning and community capacity building.

The need to foster resilient growth patterns is urgent. Recent events such as Cyclone Jasper (2023), Cyclone Kirrily (2024) and the 2025 North Queensland Flooding have reinforced the region's vulnerability and the importance of hazard informed planning.

FNQ must continue to embed climate adaptation and resilience into the DNA of social infrastructure investment.

STRATEGIC ADVOCACY AREAS

Address Cost Shifting

- Advocate to State and Federal governments to reverse cost-shifting trends which forces councils to absorb the burden of service delivery – undermining their ability to invest in critical infrastructure and resilience.

First nations Housing

- Urgent action to reduce overcrowding and homelessness, in Indigenous communities
- Advocate for culturally appropriate housing and increased homeownership pathways in discrete communities.

Social and Affordable Housing

- Increase investment in diverse housing options - social, affordable, emergency, and workforce housing across all communities
- Ensure housing policy supports resilience, especially in climate exposed areas, by embedding hazard mitigation into location, design, and infrastructure servicing.

Strengthen Climate Resilience

- Prioritise disaster resilient infrastructure in all new developments.



A COLLABORATIVE, LONG-TERM DIRECTION

Ensuring equitable, disaster resilient social infrastructure is fundamental to FNQ's liveability, economic prosperity, and long-term security. The region must proactively address both chronic stresses (e.g. housing inequality) and acute shocks (e.g. cyclones, floods) with coordinated regional leadership and sustained advocacy.

The Queensland 2023 State Disaster Risk Report highlights tropical cyclones, flooding, bushfires and severe thunderstorms as priority hazards for FNQ. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of these events. FNQROC recognises that resilience is not only about recovery, but also about foresight, preparation and equitable investment.

Together we will ensure every FNQ community has the opportunity not just to survive, but to thrive in the face of uncertainty.



RESILIENT TRANSPORT

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Transport is the backbone of Far North Queensland's (FNQ) economy and essential for community wellbeing. The region's vast distances, rugged terrain, and seasonal weather extremes demand a transport network that is resilient, reliable and future-ready. Strategic investment in transport infrastructure is crucial to ensure continued access between rural and remote areas, Cairns, and the wider domestic and international markets. Long term planning must prioritise all-weather connectivity, public transport expansion, freight efficiency, and the protection of critical transport corridors.



REGIONAL DIVERSITY AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

FNQ is geographically dispersed and topographically complex region with unique transport challenges:

- Dependence on private vehicles due to limited public and inter-regional transport options outside of Cairns
- Frequent road closures from weather events and accidents affecting key transport routes, especially to inland and remote communities.
- Seasonal isolation of communities during cyclones or flooding, with major highway closures disrupting freight and evacuations.
- Emerging commuter patterns, with towns like Mareeba, Innisfail, Atherton and Port Douglas increasingly reliant on access to and from Cairns
- Vulnerable freight networks that impact supply chain reliability, including food and fuel distribution during crises.

These challenges threaten regional liveability, economic competitiveness, and emergency response capacity.



NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The region requires urgent and sustained investment to strengthen and expand its transport systems:

- Resilient and safe road infrastructure to maintain year-round access for residents, freight, and emergency services.
- Public and inter-regional transport options to reduce car dependency, especially as rural towns grow as commuter suburbs.
- Upgraded freight corridors, including bypasses and inland connections to support regional exports
- Protected and future-proofed transport corridors, including those for the Cairns Transit Network and bypass projects.
- Multi-modal transport integration, leveraging proximity between roads, ports, rail, and airports to boost efficiency.
- Forward-thinking infrastructure to address population and economic growth

There is also a critical opportunity to support FNQ's goal of becoming a net food exporter by strengthening transport reliability and connectivity.



A COLLABORATIVE, LONG-TERM DIRECTION

FNQ's transport future depends on coordinated action across all levels of government and industry. A collaborative approach must:

- Safeguard and invest in critical infrastructure corridors before they are compromised by encroaching development or climate impacts.
- Prioritise resilience and redundancy to ensure communities are not cut off during emergencies

Together, these efforts will ensure FNQ has a robust, adaptive and inclusive transport system that supports a thriving and connected regional future.

STRATEGIC ADVOCACY AREAS

Road Network Resilience

- Continue sealing key inland regional links (Peninsula Developmental Road, Burke Developmental Road to Chillagoe and Gulf Developmental Road)
- Future proof highways (Bruce, Kennedy, Palmerston and Captain Cook)
- Invest in flood-prone sections and bypasses

Public Transport and Urban Mobility

- Implement the Cairns Transit Network, including dedicated bus lanes
- Explore future light rail and regional bus routes connecting commuter towns to Cairns.

Freight and Supply Chains

- Progress development of the Mourilyan Transport Hub (port, airport, rail)
- Continue growth in Cairns as the regional freight and export hub, with growing support in Mareeba and Tully
- Protect and enhance freight corridors

Multi-Modal Integration

- Strengthen connections between road, rail, airport and port infrastructure.
- Continue to invest in regional airports, to ensure crucial community connectivity.
- Improve access to and performance of the North Coast Line and support freight rail services.

Emergency and Climate Resilience

- Design transport assets to withstand severe weather events
- Incorporate evacuation and emergency access planning in corridor development.



NATURAL ASSETS AND ENVIRONMENT

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Far North Queensland's natural assets, including agricultural land, the Wet Tropics rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef, underpin the region's economic strength and global reputation. Ensuring their long-term sustainability requires a proactive, integrated approach that balances the needs of the environment with production and economic growth. Councils recognise that resilient ecosystems are crucial for long-term prosperity and that degradation of these assets' risks diminishing public appreciation of green spaces, tourism and regional economic growth.

REGIONAL DIVERSITY AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

Each council faces individual challenges in navigating the balance between development, production and infrastructure management alongside the outstanding natural environment which forms the mainstay of our tourism and agricultural economies.

At a regional scale there are the coexisting pressures of increased visitation; renewable energy development; water security; mineral development; reef regulation; domestic animal management and biosecurity risks. In combination these apply additional challenges to the already limited resources and expanding jurisdiction of local governments.



NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Far North Queensland's globally significant natural assets—including the Wet Tropics rainforests and Great Barrier Reef—are key drivers of its economy. This natural wealth supports industries such as tourism (valued at over \$3.2 billion), primary production, education, health, marine, and aviation. Maturing industries such as destination mountain biking and other nature-based tourism ventures can provide new opportunities for the region but will require comprehensive support from other levels of government to realise their potential. However, maintaining these assets comes with high infrastructure and resource costs for local communities.

As a northern gateway to Australia, FNQ is particularly vulnerable to biosecurity incursions, including plant and animal diseases, invasive species, marine pests, and disease vectors, which threaten economic viability, ecological health and community wellbeing. Local governments play a frontline role in managing biosecurity risks and response yet face jurisdictional complexity and limited resourcing.

Climate change, land use impacts, and invasive species pose major threats to FNQ's environment, particularly to the Great Barrier Reef. Biosecurity breaches, including the spread of invasive pests and diseases, could compromise primary industry production, marine health and tourism access. Domestic animal management is a frequent community concern, yet many issues stem from deeper social and economic factors that current methods overlook. Shifting to a collaborative approach can drive positive behavioural change and support responsible pet ownership.

Collaboration between local, state, and federal governments, as well as industry, is essential for safeguarding FNQ's environmental and economic future. The region is well-placed to develop emerging industries that integrate natural assets, indigenous knowledge, agriculture and renewable energy. Sustainable management strategies will support ecosystem health and help protect the estimated 69,000 jobs reliant on FNQ's waters. This requires investment in cross-border biosecurity readiness, community-based early detection, and the integration of traditional ecological knowledge to manage and mitigate biological threats.

STRATEGIC ADVOCACY AREAS

Far North Queensland's natural assets drive economic success but require careful management to balance conservation and communities' needs with development. Councils face unique challenges in maintaining infrastructure, supporting tourism and agriculture, and protecting the regions unique and globally significant ecosystems.

KEY PRIORITIES:

Biosecurity preparedness and resilience:

- Enhance regional biosecurity coordination, surveillance systems, and emergency response capacity to manage biosecurity threats that could impact ecosystems, primary industries, human health, and trade.

Collaborative governance:

- Strengthen cooperation between councils, governments, First Nations and industries to address regional challenges effectively.

Integrated domestic animal management:

- Transform domestic animal management into integrated animal management programs aligned to social and health initiatives to address root-causes of animal care issues.

Support ongoing development of outdoor recreation and tourism:

- Promote and facilitate Tropical North Queensland as a sustainable world-class mountain biking destination for locals and visitors.

Climate and ecological resilience:

- Improve water quality, control invasive species, and implement climate adaptation strategies to protect FNQ's ecosystems.

Innovation and sustainability:

- Invest in renewable energy, environmental management, nature-based solutions and emerging industries that leverage FNQ's unique assets, tropical expertise and knowledge.

Regulatory and resource efficiency:

- Streamline approval processes, reduce bureaucratic obstacles, and improve access to funding and expertise to accelerate sustainable development, environmental initiatives, and innovation in FNQ.

Integrated land use planning:

- Develop and implement clear regional planning frameworks and land use protections that manage the conflicts between high quality agricultural land, urban expansion, extractive industries and ad hoc reforestation efforts.

An integrated and inclusive approach that strengthens coordination and engages the community is needed to secure a resilient and sustainable future for FNQ. By resolving regulatory barriers, investing in innovation, and leveraging regional expertise, FNQ can accelerate sustainable development while preserving its natural and economic assets and assisting our communities to thrive.

A COLLABORATIVE, LONG-TERM DIRECTION

By implementing these strategies, FNQ will position itself as a leader in sustainable environmental management while maintaining economic growth. A forward-thinking, collaborative approach will ensure the resilience of the region's natural assets for generations to come.

Strengthening biosecurity capacity is critical to resilience, protecting the region's biodiversity and economic lifeblood from emerging environmental and ecological threats.



WATER SECURITY

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Water security is central to Far North Queensland's (FNQ) long-term sustainability and economic prosperity. The region must move toward an integrated, climate-resilient water management approach that supports urban growth, agriculture, tourism, recreation, and the environment. FNQROC is positioned to lead this shift by advocating for cohesive policy response and investment aligned with regional priorities.



REGIONAL DIVERSITY AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

FNQ's water security challenges are shaped by its diverse landscapes and communities – from coastal urban centres to remote agricultural zones. Population growth, increasing regulation and regulatory uncertainty (particularly climate variability, and seasonal over-and under supply place pressure on ageing infrastructure, much of which was built in the 1950's and 60's. Smaller local governments face compounded difficulties due to limited capacity to fund, maintain, or replace long-distance reticulation networks. Disaster funding mechanisms, such as those under NEMA, often fail to recognise local government owned water infrastructure as core, community-critical infrastructure in regional areas, treating it instead as a business function – an unrealistic classification in this context.

NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Meeting future water demand will require a mix of strategies:

- Infrastructure renewal and resilience planning
- Demand management, recycling and efficacy measures, and
- Development of new storage infrastructure (e.g. dams, weirs)

Emerging opportunities include expansion projects in Lakeland and the Gilbert River agricultural precinct, which could unlock large-scale irrigation potential and economic growth if supported by appropriate infrastructure. CSIRO assessments point to major untapped potential in areas such as the Mitchell River catchment, offering transformational opportunities comparable to the Ord River Development. Urban demand is also increasing with an estimated need for 34,000 new dwellings by 2046, highlighting the urgency of sustainable planning.

Without investment in additional water storage, the region will face growing pressure to reallocate water from agricultural allocations to meet residential needs. This would result in reduced water availability for farming, potentially undermining agricultural production, limited economic diversification, and threatening regional food security. Such reallocation may also disincentivise private sector investment in agricultural innovation and infrastructure, ultimately weakening the economic resilience for the region.



STRATEGIC ADVOCACY AREAS

To address the region's complex and interconnected water challenges, advocacy efforts should prioritise:

- A regional water infrastructure funding pool to support smaller councils in preparing robust business cases
- Reform of disaster recovery funding eligibility to recognise water and sewerage as core infrastructure
- Increased state and federal investment in long term, multi-use water infrastructure (e.g. Dams, hydroelectric projects)
- Climate resilient planning frameworks including risk mitigation for intense rainfall events and debris blockages

Addressing competing water use priorities must be central to regional planning. Infrastructure that supports both urban growth and agricultural productivity, such as dual purpose or staged development dams will help avoid zero sum outcomes where gains in one sector come at the expense of another. Deliberate planning now will prevent future economic trade-offs and ensure the region maximises the productivity of water assets.

Investment in bulk water storage will not only address supply limitations but also deliver co-benefits such as hydroelectric power, agricultural expansion, lifestyle improvements, and greater community resilience.

A COLLABORATIVE, LONG-TERM DIRECTION

Ensuring reliable, sustainable and equitable access to water across FNQ requires a united regional voice and cross-sector coordination. FNQROC should champion a long term, evidence-based water security strategy that addresses legacy infrastructure, supports new development and anticipates future climate realities. This includes recognising water as foundational to economic resilience and regional development, not just a utility.

Water is wealth and security
it for FNQ's future means
investing today in the
infrastructure, governance,
and partnerships needed for
tomorrow – before increasing
urban demand forces
economically damaging
decisions about reallocation
from productive agricultural
uses.





TRANSFORMING RESOURCE RECOVERY IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Far North Queensland (FNQ) is on a long-term pathway to waste minimisation and managing waste in a way that delivers lasting environmental, economic, and community benefits. This strategic direction is guided by the shared commitment of FNQ's 12 member councils to enhance resource recovery, reduce landfill dependency, and build more resilient and sustainable systems across the region.

Improved resource recovery is not only a regional environmental imperative – it is an opportunity to strengthen local industries, support communities, protect national parks, and contribute to a thriving FNQ economy.



REGIONAL DIVERSITY AND SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

The FNQROC region spans more than 250,000 km² and encompasses a wide range of communities, landscapes, and local economies. Each council faces distinct challenges in waste and resource management, including:

- Long transport distances and vulnerable supply routes.
- Low economies of scale for waste processing.
- Limited access to secondary markets and recycling industries.
- Tourism-related waste pressures.
- Ageing or undersized infrastructure.
- Funding limitations, particularly in low-rate or no-rate base communities.
- Increasing regulation and regulatory uncertainty, particularly in relation to PFAS.

These systemic issues mean that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. A regionally coordinated but locally responsive strategy is essential.





Cairns material Recovery Facility, Design and Construction by RDT.

NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Most of the region's current waste infrastructure is designed around waste disposal rather than resource recovery. While landfills, transfer stations, and recovery facilities operate across the region, many require significant upgrades or replacement to align with State government targets.

STRATEGIC ADVOCACY AREAS

Delivering this transformation is not economically feasible for most councils without sustained external support. The high capital and operational costs associated with new infrastructure, transport, planning and service reform cannot be met within existing council budgets – particularly for indigenous councils and low-population areas.

State and Federal governments have a critical role to play in enabling progress. Substantial and sustained investment is required to:

- Fund planning, design, construction, and operation
- Support innovative, fit-for-purpose solutions for remote and rural communities
- Minimise costs passed onto households and ratepayers
- Address transport and logistic barriers unique to FNQ

In parallel, clear and supportive regulatory settings are needed to enable regional approaches and local flexibility.

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In parallel, clear and supportive regulatory settings are needed to enable regional approaches and local flexibility.

Together, we can build a modern, circular resource recovery system for FNQ – one that meets local needs, supports environmental goals, and benefits the region for decades to come.







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