



OCTOBER 2025
FEDERAL
PRIORITIES

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND, NORTHERN AUSTRALIA'S
LARGEST AND FASTEST GROWING REGION.

FOREWORD

United Councils, Connected Communities, Stronger Region.

OUR ORGANISATION

The FNQROC region is the largest and fastest growing region in Northern Australia. It extends over 252,000 square kilometres with a population of approximately 294,194 and gross regional product is \$19.84 billion¹.

FNQROC is charting a collaborative and future-focused path with member councils working together to address the regions most pressing long-term challenges and opportunities.

The FNQROC region can strengthen Australia's resilience by investing now in future needs, reducing long term response costs and positioning food security as a pillar of national stability. With national debt rising, our contribution must be strategic investments that deliver enduring economic, social and security dividends – not just short term infrastructure gains.

¹ <https://economy.id.com.au/fnqroc>

SUMMARY OF 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

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

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.

FNQ at a glance

\$19.84B
GRP
(JUNE 2024)



INCREASE OF
2.9%
ON PREVIOUS YEAR

26,654
LOCAL BUSINESSES

EXPORTS:



\$3B
AGRICULTURE
(2023/24)



\$6.1B
TOURISM SALES
(2023/24)

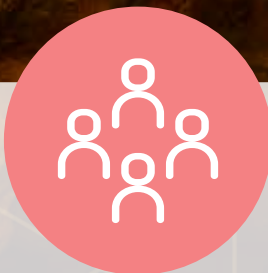


\$674M
MINING



\$1.9B
MANUFACTURING

POPULATION
294,194



SEIFA INDEX OF
DISADVANTAGE
510 to 981
(2021)

41

MEDIAN AGE

11.2%

FIRST NATIONS
POPULATION



**We acknowledge the traditional custodians of where we live and work and throughout Far North Queensland.
We pay respects to elders past, present and emerging, and the enduring connections to Country and culture.**

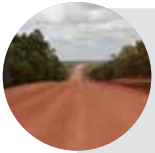
ACKNOWLEDGING FEDERAL INVESTMENT

We gratefully acknowledge the Federal Government's investment in our region, including projects such as:

- **Water Infrastructure for Sustainable and Efficient Regions (WISER):**
 - Mossman River Intake
 - Cassowary Coast Leak Reduction
 - Mareeba Regional Water Security
- **Wujal Wujal Water Infrastructure upgrades \$6 million**
- **Cairns Water Security Stage 1 \$195 million**
- **Barron River Bridge investment \$245mil**
- **Kennedy Developmental Road (Hann) – sealing the last 11km \$70mil**
- **Kuranda Range Road – Safety Upgrades \$210mil**
- **Safer local roads and Infrastructure**
 - Mareeba – Leadingham Road \$4.4 and
 - ecoupling and Heavy Vehicle rest area Koah \$5mil
- **Bruce Highway road safety investment \$7.2billion**
- **Investment of efficiencies realised under the DRFA arrangements – some of which went to:**
 - Daintree Ferry landing \$8.5mil,
 - Georgetown Airstrip and Sandy Creek upgrade \$3mil.
 - Hope Vale Everlina Bridge \$5.43 and
 - Hope Vale Airstrip \$5.13mil
- **DRFA investment into all our essential roads**
- **Progressive investment to double R2R**
- **Housing and NAIF investment of \$140million in Cairns Seniors Community Housing Project.**
- **Barlow Park \$45mil (as part of Olympic Games)**

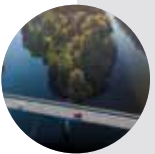


SUMMARY OF OUR ADVOCACY AND STORIES



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Restoring Financial Assistance Grants (FA Grants) to 1 percent is critical to ensuring councils can deliver the services and infrastructure communities rely on. These untied grants enable councils to maintain \$5.4 billion in road assets, \$2.5 billion in water assets, and thousands of hectares of green space across our region. Without restoration, councils face cuts, deferred maintenance, or passing costs to already stretched ratepayers. In the interim, we respectfully request an 80:20 federal-local funding split for small, medium, and remote councils.



ROAD INVESTMENT

The Kuranda Range Road remains a priority, carrying over 11,000 vehicles daily despite not functioning as a reliable two-lane corridor since 2020. We thank the Federal Government for the \$210 million committed and seek clarity on long-term solutions to improve safety, heavy vehicle efficiency, and resilience.



SAFE AND RESILIENT SUPPLY CHAINS

Recent disasters have highlighted vulnerabilities in northern freight routes. We call for a review of National Key Freight Routes and updated supply chain resilience planning to incorporate recent flood and cyclone impacts. Simple measures such as upgrading low-level crossings and expanding cold storage in Indigenous communities would protect food security and reduce isolation during disasters.



NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT NETWORK EXTENSION

We seek the extension of the National Land Transport Network from Smithfield to Mareeba and ultimately the Port of Weipa via the Peninsula Developmental Road. This would formally recognise the corridor's national significance for defence, trade, and remote community access, strengthening the case for future federal investment.



FIRST AND LAST MILE – HEAVY VEHICLE PRODUCTIVITY ROUTES

A dedicated funding program is needed to address local road constraints that limit High Productivity Vehicle (HPV) access. In FNQ, 18 strategic local government roads could enable full HPV journeys.



WATER

Local government-owned water and wastewater assets must be recognised as essential services under DRFA arrangements. Current exclusions force councils to fight for funding despite catastrophic damage, such as \$45 million in repairs in Douglas Shire following Cyclone Jasper. Amending DRFA definitions would ensure fair treatment of councils not operating as commercial business units.



BULK WATER (AGRICULTURE)

Projects such as the Etheridge Agricultural Precinct and Lakeland Irrigation Scheme are progressing and promise expanded high-value cropping, beef production, and long-term regional prosperity.



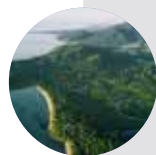
INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS – HOUSING AND STORYTELLING

Overcrowding and homelessness in communities such as Yarrabah, Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale are driving poor health, education, and employment outcomes. Strategic projects are ready, including Yarrabah’s Balamba Neighbourhood and Early Learning Centre expansions. We call for urgent housing investment as the most fundamental step in closing the gap.



CONCEPT – INLAND DEVELOPMENT BELT SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

We propose a Special Economic Zone across inland and northern Australia to address structural disadvantage, attract population, and diversify regional economies. Incentives spanning taxation, housing, professional attraction, and industry development would support growth in renewables, critical minerals, agriculture, and Indigenous-led enterprises, while contributing to national resilience and reducing skills drain ahead of the 2032 Olympics.



STORYTELLING

To highlight opportunities such as the **Port of Mourilyan Master Plan, PALM Scheme,** and **post-disaster restoration progress.**

ADVOCACY AND SHARING OUR STORIES



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE GRANTS

REQUEST

In the interim, it is requested that federal funding for small and medium outer regional, remote and very remote councils follow an 80:20 split as these local governments struggle to contribute significantly to large scale projects.

Restoring Financial Assistance Grants (FA Grants) to 1 percent is essential. This untied grant funding is a vital tool for local governments providing the flexibility to allocate resources where communities need them most. While our responsibilities have grown, the funding has not kept pace.

As the level of government closest to the people, local councils are expected to respond quickly, effectively and equitably but this is increasingly tying up more and more of our rates based (where one even exists).

In our region alone, councils manage an extensive and costly portfolio of community assets and services that underpin both liveability and economic productivity.

These include:

Over
\$5.4billion
of road assets

including comprising
13,934 kilometres of roads
and **545 bridges**

7,445
hectares

of **parks and playgrounds**
providing green spaces
that support health and
wellbeing

More than
\$2.5billion
in water assets

critical to ensuring
safe, reliable supply for
residents and businesses

Restoring FA Grants to 1 percent is not a handout, it is an investment in safer roads, healthier communities, and stronger local economies. Without it, councils are forced to cut back, delay critical maintenance or push costs back onto ratepayers who are already stretched. With it, local governments can continue to deliver the essential services and infrastructure that Australians rely on every day.

ROAD INVESTMENT

An aerial photograph of a concrete bridge spanning a river. The bridge has two lanes of traffic. A white car is driving on the left lane, and a red car is driving on the right lane. The surrounding area is densely forested with green trees. The sky is clear and blue.

● KURANDA RANGE ROAD UPDATE

DISCUSSION: Kuranda Road is still a priority. This corridor has not been a functioning two lane road since October 2020 and carries over 11,000 vehicle per day.

The Kuranda Range Road remains a critical priority. This corridor has not functioned as a reliable two-lane road since October 2020, yet it carries over 11,000 vehicles a day.

We acknowledge and thank the Federal Government for the \$210million committed during the 2022 election campaign. It is vital that this investment is targeted effectively to future-proof this key economic corridor. A clear solution is needed to increase capacity, improve heavy vehicle efficiency, enhance safety, and reduce both supply chain costs and carbon emissions.

SAFE AND RESILIENT SUPPLY CHAINS



DISCUSSION: In September 2022, CSIRO completed a Road and Rail Supply Chain Resilience Review of key freight roads and railways.

Given the critical role of freight and supply chains to everyday life, we request:

- a** A review of the National Key Freight Routes, and
- b** A supply Chain Resilience review which incorporates the significant flooding impacts of 2023, 2024 and 2025 in Far North Queensland.

Cyclone Jasper (2023), Cyclone Kirrily (2024) and the 2025 North and Far North Tropical low in 2025 all caused major road closures cutting off food and essential supplies for weeks. Some of these impacts could be resolved through simple fixes:

- a** Upgrades to low level crossings (e.g. Gilbert River and McLeod River Bridges).
- b** Increased cold storage facilities, particularly in our Indigenous Council areas.

Currently there are no identified National Key Freight routes north of Cairns or West of Conjuboy (See Figure 2 – National Key Freight Routes Map). This leaves our region vulnerable to isolation during extreme weather. At the height of the 2025 event, food had to be flown into Cairns after weeks of interrupted supply.



Figure 1. 4 February 2025 in Cairns



Figure 2. National Key Freight Routes Map²

² <https://spatialinfrastructure.gov.au/portal/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=abcfc3f33b6346728f7e0b7f0e2605eb>

NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT NETWORK EXTENSION

REQUEST

Extend the National highway designation from the intersection of Captain Cook and Kennedy Highways to the intersection of the Kennedy Highway and the Mulligan Highway, and ultimately to extend the vital network across to the Port of Weipa via the Peninsula Developmental Road (PDR).

The National Land Transport Network (NLTN) identifies significant corridors connecting nationally significant ports. Extending the network from Smithfield to Mareeba and onward to the Port of Weipa would:

- Reinforce the corridors strategic importance to Defence, freight and supply chains.
- Highlight its role in supporting remote communities, trade and northern security.

Whilst formal inclusion of this route in the NLTN would not in itself deliver upgrades, it does secure federal recognition of its national significance. This acknowledgement strengthens the case for future investment by demonstrating the corridors importance for regional connectivity, trade access and long-term strategic planning.

Building on the progress of the Cape York Regional Package, full recognition of the PDR to the Port of Weipa would highlight the importance of year-round access for remote communities, local industries, international trade and national security. By extending the NLTN northwards, the Federal Government would formally acknowledge the critical role Far North Queensland plays in underpinning Australia's economic and security interests.



FIRST AND LAST MILE – HEAVY VEHICLE PRODUCTIVITY ROUTES

REQUEST

Establish a dedicated funding program aimed at increasing high productivity vehicles (HPV) access to and from gazetted transport routes, with a focus on local government owned road train routes.

Greater access for High Productivity Vehicles (HPVs) has been a high priority for government, industry, freight operators and end users of freight services because of the productivity gains and cost savings they generate. However, many freight journeys commence and or end on local roads, and an inability to operate HPVs for the entire journey from origin to destination can substantially reduce the gains which would otherwise be achieved.

To maximise outcomes, a program should specifically target deficiencies that restrict HPV access in the following situations:

- a Primary Production** – Roads linking the heavy vehicle network to production and processing sites (e.g. farms to feedlots, sugarcane to mills, mine sites to refinement facilities).
- b Improved Connectivity** – Roads that provide a missing link between two existing heavy vehicle routes where improved access would strengthen freight efficiency.
- c Community Access** – Roads that are the sole freight lifeline to vulnerable or remote communities.

In Far North Queensland there are 18 strategic roads (predominately local government owned) identified in the FNQ Regional Road Investment Strategy which could enable HPVs to operate for the entire journey. Two routes have been identified as critical to future road freight movements; these are:

- Ootann (Almaden-Gingerella) Road which connects the Kennedy Highway and Burke Developmental Road – identified in the CSIRO TraNSIT Beef Roads report as providing the highest savings per head, and
- Richmond-Croydon Road which connects the Gulf Developmental Road to the Flinders Highway.



WATER

Local Government owned Water and Waste to be classed as an essential service under DRFA arrangements 'as a right, not a fight'

REQUEST

It is requested that an eligible undertaking is amended from:

- “operates the asset provides services free of charge or at a rate that is 50 per cent or less of the cost to provide those services”³

to

- “operates the asset provides services free of charge or not operating as a commercial business unit”

The provision of water and waste water services are crucial to prevent disease, protect public health, support the economy and safeguard the environment. They underpin human dignity, well-being, resilient communities and achieving sustainable development goals worldwide. It would be difficult to argue that they are not essential services.

In metropolitan areas with high population density, such services can operate on a commercial basis. However in regional and remote communities, low population spread makes the commercial operation unviable. Here it is local governments that deliver and maintain these critical services.



³ <https://www.qra.qld.gov.au/funding/drfa/drfa-tool-box/eligible-essential-public-assets-drfa>

The financial impact of natural disasters on water and wastewater infrastructure are profound. For example, as a result of Cyclone Jasper:

- Mareeba has a sewer main collapse with a repair value of \$12 million, and
- All inlet systems impacted at a cost of \$15 million in Kuranda.
- In Douglas Shire, their system was taken out at a cost of \$45 million.

Despite the essential nature of these services, councils were forced to fight for DRFA Category D funding because their infrastructure was deemed ineligible under current definitions.

It is recommended to amend the DRFA definition of an eligible undertaking to explicitly include local government owned water and wastewater assets where councils are not operating as a commercial business unit. This change would ensure fair recognition of these services as essential, and prevent unnecessary barriers to disaster recovery funding.

BULK WATER (AGRICULTURAL)



● **ETHERIDGE AGRICULTURE PRECINCT - UPDATE**

Etheridge Shire is seeking to develop a regional agricultural precinct which fosters 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.

● **LAKELAND IRRIGATION AREA SCHEME – UPDATE ON PROGRESS**

The detailed Business Case has been completed. Benefits identified for the region include:

- Access to reliable, adequate and affordable water supply capable of supporting horticulture and broadacre cropping;
- Servicing up to 10,000 ha of arable freehold land, expanding the ability to grow higher value and more diverse range of crops
- Prosperity through increased agricultural activity and associated indirect benefits such as increase in population, transport and value add.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS



REGIONAL STORY TELLING

- Parental responsibility for children.
- First Nations disadvantage, including extreme housing overcrowding, limited home ownership pathways and education

● HOUSING FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

COVID health restrictions starkly exposed pre-existing social issues across Indigenous communities including the number of people living homeless and levels of over-crowding. While the housing needs of discrete Indigenous communities such as Yarrabah, Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale differ from those of Indigenous populations in urban centres such as Cairns, the consequences of inadequate housing are universal. Lack of safe, secure, and appropriate housing undermines:

- Health outcomes (Indigenous peoples are living on average 20 years less than non-Indigenous peoples). This is unsurprising when you consider a standard issue hot water system cannot support 6 or more people, leaving families with cold showers and cold water for basic hygiene.
- Education (space to learn, space to sleep, ability to get to school).
- Employment (ability to sleep well at night and then go to work).

The absence of stable housing is especially damaging for children and youth, contributing to frustration, disengagement and anger.

Don't profit from our history and culture while our people struggle to survive.

We need the Federal and State Governments to work together to ensure the basics of dignity, secure housing, running water, sanitation, and a bed of our own. As Queensland looks toward the 2032 Olympic Games, what legacy will be left for First Nations peoples? Housing cannot remain Queensland's hidden Olympic secret.

Census statistics and population forecasts often understate the true scale of need:

- there is a high number of people disengaged with the process and importance. They don't trust the government.
- rents are linked to household income, so households under-report residents to avoid higher rent.
- Forecasts rely on land supply, an areas where indigenous communities have little or no available land
- Statewide assumptions on birth rates (2.1 per woman) do not reflect reality; in 2021 the fertility rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women was higher at 2.34 births per woman.

These limitations mean that reported demand consistently falls short of actual need.



● YARRABAH

Yarrabah is currently facing a catastrophic housing crisis with over half the population homeless. Anecdotal evidence suggests around 4,000 people live in the community yet there are only 376 social houses. In response, Yarrabah has methodically and strategically identified critical infrastructure needed to begin addressing the crisis. This includes:

Balamba Neighbourhood Stage 1 & Yarrie Homes Project - \$5mil

Council is developing a new residential neighbourhood which will include up to 250 houses and units, a P-12 school, and start up business spaces. The access road is funded (\$5Million) \$5 million is required for the construction of 20 lots.

The neighbourhood design includes the Yarrie Homes project a co-design initiative, that emphasises culturally responsive, community design that aligns with the specific needs and aspirations of the Yarrabah community.

Upgrade Sewerage Treatment and Wastewater to meet contemporary environmental and health standards - \$5mil

Yarrabah Early Learning Centre - \$2mil

The Early Learning Centre is at peak capacity and there is urgent need to expand the existing facility.

- Yarrabah community currently has 340 children aged 0-5 years.
- The Early Learning Centre only has a capacity for 42 children.

The expansion will allow parents to participate in the workforce, education and training.

● WUJAL WUJAL

The draft local housing action plan highlights:

- Unpublished Electoral Commission (AEC) data maybe undercounted by as much as 20.9%.
- Census data from 2021 indicates that 24.2% of houses are overcrowded requiring additional bedrooms.
- Social housing demand far exceeds supply:

	Current Social Housing Stock	Wujal Wujal Housing Applications*
1 Bedroom	8	12
2 Bedroom	20	7
3 Bedroom	44	7
4 Bedroom	18	4
5 Bedroom	1	
TOTAL	91	30



● HOPE VALE

- It is Council's view that a reduction in the overcrowding of housing is the fundamental investment in closing the gap. This investment in housing services results in better housing, economic, health and educational outcomes.
- 65.2% of multi-family households have 6 or more residents.
- 22% of households in Hope Vale are overcrowded (Department of Housing, May 2023)

	Current Social Housing Stock	Wujal Wujal Housing Applications*
		83 Approved Housing Applications
1 Bedroom	10	40
2 Bedroom	53	21
3 Bedroom	135	15
4 Bedroom	69	6
5 Bedroom	3	1
TOTAL	270	83
TOTAL BEDROOMS NEEDED		146

CONCEPT – INLAND DEVELOPMENT BELT – SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

The Inland Development Belt Special Economic Zone (IDB-SEZ) is proposed as a strategic framework to revitalise our regional, remote and very remote communities by addressing long standing structural disadvantages in services, infrastructure and employment. It seeks to attract and retain population through a comprehensive package of incentives such as financial, professional, lifestyle and infrastructure, encouraging individuals, families and businesses to relocate, invest and grow in these regions.

With the 2032 Olympics and growing metropolitan liveability posing risks of skills drain from the regions, the IDB-SEZ would ease growth pressures on cities while enhancing service delivery, strengthening local communities, and contributing to national productivity, resilience and security.

The IDB-SEZ would deliver tailored incentives spanning taxation, housing, professional attraction, industry development, and service equity, applied on a sliding scale according to remoteness. These measures would support economic diversification into industries such as renewables, critical minerals, advanced agriculture, defence supply chains, digital services and Indigenous-led enterprises. Benefits include boosting regional economies, improving liveability, increasing indigenous participation, retaining young people, and enhancing food energy and supply chain security.

By positioning inland and northern Australia as strategic contributors to nation growth and Asia and Indo-Pacific resilience, the ADB-SEZ offers a nation building opportunity to strengthen population, economy and services outside metropolitan centres.



SHARING OUR STORIES AND CONCEPTS:

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. In the foreground, a sandy beach curves along a bay with clear, turquoise water. Two small sailboats are visible in the water. The land is covered in dense, lush green forest. In the background, a larger body of water, possibly a river or estuary, winds through a valley between forested hills. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

- **Port of Mourilyan Master Plan – Update by Cassowary Coast**
- **Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme – story telling – Cassowary and Mareeba**
- **Update on restoration works across the region after Jasper, Kirralie and 2025 tropical low.**







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