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Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games

Via email: sportstrategy@dtis.qld.gov.au

To whom it may concern

FNQROC Submission to Queensland Sport Strategy 2025

The Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) represents 12 member Councils, being Cairns, Cassowary and Tablelands Regional Councils, Cook, Croydon, Douglas, Etheridge, Hinchinbrook and Mareeba Shire Councils, and Hopevale, Yarrabah and Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Councils.

We are excited to be able to provide this submission to the Queensland Sports Strategy 2025 for your consideration. The opportunities highlighted in this submission are drawn from the [Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy](#) which maps out the essential partnerships, programs and investments to achieve the vision of Tropical North Queensland as a sustainable world-class mountain biking destination for locals and visitors alike out to 2034.

By embracing Brisbane 2032 as a launchpad and building on the region's international mountain biking reputation Far North Queensland can join other worldwide destinations as an equal in MTB innovation, accessibility, and sporting excellence. We look forward to future involvement in the delivery of the Queensland Sport Strategy and showcasing Queensland in 2032.

Far North Queensland: A Queensland Centre of Excellence for mountain biking - 2032 and beyond

Far North Queensland stands at the global forefront of mountain biking, boasting internationally recognised facilities, breathtaking landscapes, a rich First Nations heritage, and a thriving outdoor culture and tourism industry. As Brisbane 2032 approaches, the region has an unparalleled opportunity to continue to elevate its role in Queensland as a premier destination for mountain biking, driving economic growth, tourism, health benefits, and community connections through sport.

Anchored by Smithfield Mountain Bike Park, the Southern Hemisphere's oldest UCI-accredited World Cup venue and reinforced by the unique trail offerings at Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park, and Davies Creek Mountain Bike Park the region sets a benchmark for sustainable mountain bike

development. This submission outlines how Far North Queensland can solidify its reputation as a Centre of Excellence for mountain biking in sport, recreation, health, competition, and events while achieving the deliverables of Queensland Sport Strategy 2025.

Places and spaces

Activating FNQ as a World-Class MTB Destination in the lead-up to Brisbane 2032 and beyond

The Far North Queensland region has an international standing and a proven track record in delivering world class competitions and events in both cross country (XC) and downhill (DH) mountain bike disciplines. The region has played a highly influential role in shaping mountain biking, defining the more progressive and gravity-oriented elements of the sport for over three decades.

The World Cup DH Course at Smithfield is iconic on the international stage. The status of the World Cup course builds on the reputation of the nearby Kuranda Downhill, arguably the nation's first true downhill mountain bike track now 35 years old.

The Cairns international airport, visitor infrastructure and facilities also make it the perfect training ground for elite athletes and grassroots riders alike. Brisbane 2032 represents an opportunity to expand access to existing facilities, upgrade infrastructure, and integrate mountain biking into broader sports initiatives for a wide range of legacy benefits well beyond the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The region has substantial mountain bike offerings contained in three closely connected and highly complementary mountain bike parks with additional developments waiting in the wings.

- **Smithfield Mountain Bike Park:** A world-class venue with a strong reputation for hosting international competitions, including the UCI World Cup, UCI Masters World Championships and Crankworx. The commitment of Queensland Government to a \$15.5 m upgrade to the trail network over the next 3 years will propel it to one of the highest quality trail networks on the globe offering everything from the highest levels of international competition to enormous opportunities for recreational riders and tourism. Currently offering around 30km of trails, the upgraded facility will serve up over 80 kms of trails in a globally unique rainforest setting.
- **Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park:** Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park is a premier mountain biking destination and a true trail town. It features over 60 km of purpose-built single-track winding through high altitude open forests. Designed for sustainability, the park caters to all skill levels, offering scenic rides, events hosting, XC race circuits and technical challenges. With its well-maintained infrastructure and long-established reputation, Atherton is a key player in positioning Far North Queensland as a global mountain biking hub. Detailed plans and business cases are in place to expand Atherton to a nationally significant mountain biking destination; however, funding is required to complete.
- **Davies Creek Mountain Bike Park:** Davies Creek Mountain Bike Park, located in the Lamb Range near Mareeba, offers 24.5 km of purpose-built trails designed for all skill levels. The park features singletrack flowing through open forests and granite outcrops, creating a unique riding experience on the edge of the savannah. Its low-rainfall and cooler climate ensures year-round accessibility, making it a key asset of Far North Queensland's mountain biking network. The park aligns with regional strategies to deliver events, enhance eco-tourism and promote accessible outdoor recreation. Detailed plans are in place to expand Davies Creek to a

nationally significant mountain biking destination; however additional funding is required to initiate the next stage.

- **Cardwell Tropical Mountain Trails Project:** A new pump track marks the proposed trail head for 90km of trail earmarked for the spectacular coastal town of Cardwell. Framed as a premier flow destination in the making, in the words of the Girramay traditional owners we invite you to “Ride where our ancestors once walked”. Business cases are in place and now funding is required for the next stage of implementation.
- **Wangetti Trail:** The Wangetti Trail is a transformative multi-day ecotourism route in Far North Queensland linking Palm Cove and Port Douglas. With the first 7.8-kilometer section from Palm Cove to Ellis Beach now open, visitors can already enjoy a dynamic mix of coastal vistas, lush hinterland terrain, and World Heritage-listed landscapes. Spanning 94 kilometres upon completion, the trail is designed for both hiking and mountain biking, providing a world-class recreational experience. Beyond its scenic appeal, the trail promotes outdoor recreation, active lifestyles, and nature-based sport, fostering health, fitness, and community engagement while reinforcing Far North Queensland as a premier adventure destination.
- **Regional Mountain Bike Infrastructure Investment Plan:** The TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy outlines the investment required to continue to activate the region. With the welcome confirmation of funding for the upgrade of Smithfield Mountain Bike Park, the region is seeking additional investment for the expansion of Atherton Forest and Davies Creek Mountain Bike Parks to a national significance standard and the establishment of a new trail development in Cardwell.

Elevating FNQ as a host for global MTB events and the natural choice for an Olympic downhill course.

With the region’s legacy in elite competition and established reputation, Far North Queensland is ready to become a permanent fixture on the global events circuit. Easily accessed through the Cairns International Airport and with three trail networks within 15 minutes to an hour’s drive the region is well placed to continue to grow.

- **Hosting International events:** Utilising the regions world class reputation hosting international events and a long progeny of international downhill riders and trail builders. The World Cup Downhill course at Smithfield, Cairns is a natural fit for the introduction of a downhill category to the Olympic podium.
- **Hosting international pre-games training camps:** Establishing Far North Queensland as a training hub for Olympic-bound MTB athletes, leveraging tropical conditions and varied terrain to simulate different race environments.
- **Expanding the event calendar:** Securing ongoing UCI World Cups, National Championships, Asia-Pacific circuits and Crankworx Cairns to build global visibility and attract international tourism.
- **Developing destination-based MTB tourism packages:** Linking MTB events with eco-tourism experiences, ensuring long-term visitor engagement.

Ensuring sustainable and climate-resilient MTB infrastructure

Far North Queensland’s mountain biking networks are a world-class asset, but long-term viability depends on sustainable design, climate adaptation, cultural sensitivity and integration with conservation efforts. As extreme weather events become more frequent, MTB infrastructure must evolve to withstand environmental challenges while preserving the region’s natural environment.

New trail construction can deliver sustainable design elements to withstand environmental pressures and changing rider usage however existing infrastructure may require refurbishment to meet evolving standards. Strategic investment in infrastructure and supporting local clubs through regional partnerships can deliver the following outcomes.

Eco-friendly trail design: Sustainable trail development is critical to maintaining the integrity of Far North Queensland's landscapes. Key strategies include:

- **Erosion control measures**, such as reinforced trail surfaces, appropriate drainage systems, and vegetation buffers to prevent soil degradation.
- **Revegetation programs** that restore native flora along trail corridors, enhancing biodiversity and reducing environmental impact.
- **Low-impact construction techniques**, including constructed features and elevated sections in sensitive areas, to minimize disruption to ecosystems, improve drainage and reduce compaction.

Climate-Resilient Infrastructure: Future-proofing MTB trails requires innovative solutions to mitigate climate risks:

- **Weather-adaptive surfacing**, using materials that resist heavy rainfall and extreme heat, ensuring year-round rideability.
- **Flood mitigation planning**, incorporating elevated trail sections, water diversion systems, and permeable surfaces to reduce washouts.
- **Fire-resistant materials**, such as non-combustible signage and infrastructure, to safeguard trails in bushfire-prone areas.
- **Adapting trail use to climate extremes**, events like heatwaves are changing the way people exercise. Supporting infrastructure such as lighting, shade and drinking water can assist adaptation.

Integration with conservation initiatives: Mountain biking can coexist with environmental preservation, reinforcing Far North Queensland's reputation as a leader in ecotourism:

- **Wildlife corridors** and conservation efforts integrated into trail networks to support native species movement.
- **Eco-tourism partnerships**, promoting MTB parks as destinations that balance recreation with conservation.
- **Sustainable visitor management**, ensuring responsible trail use through education, signage, and community engagement.

Trail audit & asset management systems: To maintain high-quality, safe, and sustainable trails, implementing trail audit and asset management systems is essential:

- **Regular trail audits** to assess wear, erosion, and infrastructure integrity, ensuring timely maintenance and upgrades.
- **Digital asset management systems** to track trail conditions, usage patterns, and environmental impact, allowing for data-driven decision-making.
- **Standardised maintenance protocols** to streamline repairs, improve efficiency, and extend the lifespan of MTB infrastructure.

- **Accredited trail builders and industry best practice** to support the next generation of trail construction and management operators and ensure succession in the industry.

Governance, partnerships and collaboration: To maintain and grow sustainable trail networks and reduce reliance on grant programs beyond construction.

- **Regional collaboration and coordination** to support and sustain clubs and community focus of mountain biking and leverage of exiting partnerships across councils.
- **Partnerships with tourism** and other local industries to return revenue and benefits from trail users and destination mountain biking back to the trail networks for maintenance and upkeep.

By prioritising sustainability, resilience, and conservation, Far North Queensland can set a global benchmark for climate-adaptive mountain biking infrastructure, ensuring its trails remain accessible, environmentally responsible, and internationally renowned.

Making sport everyone's game

Unlocking the power of sport beyond competition and leveraging MTB for health, youth engagement and social impact

Mountain biking is more than just a sport—it's a catalyst for health, youth engagement, and social impact. With its world-class trails and natural landscapes, the region is uniquely positioned to harness mountain biking as a tool for active living, community connection, and personal development. Encouraging everyday riding through workplace wellness programs, beginner-friendly circuits, and adaptive cycling pathways ensures that mountain biking is accessible to all, promoting physical health and mental well-being. Schools and youth programs can integrate MTB into leadership initiatives, fostering confidence, resilience, and teamwork among young riders.

Beyond competition, mountain biking serves as a social connector, addressing loneliness and mental health challenges by establishing MTB hubs as inclusive community spaces. These hubs provide opportunities for peer engagement, mentorship, and outdoor therapy, reinforcing the sport's role in strengthening social bonds.

With recent advances in adaptive mountain biking and advanced allied health services supported by an international airport, Far North Queensland can become a global leader in MTB-based therapy and rehabilitation, offering specialized programs for injury recovery, mental health support, and physical rehabilitation. By investing in infrastructure, education, and outreach, the region can ensure its trails are not just places to ride—but places to heal, connect, and thrive.

The Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy outlines key recommendations to ensure mountain biking is accessible, inclusive, and impactful, aligning with the following priorities:

- **Participation and engagement:** Encouraging involvement in active lifestyles by expanding grassroots programs, school-based MTB initiatives, and social riding groups to inspire more people to embrace physical activity.
- **Inclusivity, accessibility and equity:** Removing barriers to participation by developing adaptive cycling pathways, gender-inclusive programs, and affordable entry-level opportunities, ensuring fair access for all riders.

- **Confidence and resilience:** Empowering individuals with education, training, and mentorship programs, while addressing challenges like cost, time constraints, and transport to make MTB more accessible.
- **Collaboration and innovation:** Strengthening partnerships across the active industry by integrating MTB into tourism, health, and recreation strategies, while leveraging digital trail mapping and asset management systems to enhance participation.
- **Health and well-being:** Promoting the broader benefits of movement by positioning MTB hubs as spaces for mental health support, youth engagement, and active ageing, reinforcing sport's role in community connection and well-being.

This approach ensures mountain biking in Far North Queensland is truly everyone's game, fostering long-term sustainability, accessibility, and global recognition.

An Aspirational Games

Elevating Far North Queensland's mountain biking future and building Queensland's reputation as an active State.

Far North Queensland is uniquely positioned to capitalise on Brisbane 2032, using mountain biking as a catalyst for sport, recreation, health, and tourism. The Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy outlines key recommendations to ensure long-term growth, accessibility, and global recognition.

Aspiration & momentum – envisioning the future: Brisbane 2032 presents an opportunity to position FNQ as a world-class MTB destination, integrating sport, recreation, and wellness. Building momentum through pre-Games training camps, promotional events, and athlete development initiatives ensures the region maximizes its potential.

Legacy & talent – strengthening long-term growth: Investment in elite training facilities, grassroots development, and expanded MTB infrastructure will enhance accessibility and competitiveness for both recreational riders and aspiring professionals. Scholarships, skill development programs, and coaching pathways will help unlock local talent and sustain the sport beyond 2032.

Equity, engagement & innovation – sport for all: Making mountain biking accessible to all requires targeted strategies, including adaptive MTB programs, youth engagement initiatives, and social connection projects. Leveraging sport for mental health, active ageing, and community-building strengthens FNQ's social impact and inclusivity.

Infrastructure & governance – sustainable sport development: To support long-term sustainability, FNQ must implement climate-adaptive MTB infrastructure, digital asset management systems, and streamlined governance. Simplifying club administration, volunteer engagement, and funding processes will ensure the region thrives as a leading mountain biking destination.

Collaboration & Events – positioning FNQ as a global MTB hub: Far North Queensland has a golden opportunity to leverage Brisbane 2032 as a catalyst for growth, investment, and global recognition in mountain biking. With world-class facilities like Smithfield and Atherton, the region can position itself as a leading destination for sport, recreation, and health, attracting international athletes, events, and visitors.

By enhancing infrastructure, talent pathways, and sustainable practices, FNQ can build momentum, ensuring long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits. Expanding grassroots programs, inclusivity initiatives, and competitive events will drive greater participation, securing FNQ's legacy as a Centre of Excellence for mountain biking.

More people in community sport

Supporting grassroots sport, community engagement and rider development

Far North Queensland has a unique opportunity to increase participation in community sport, leveraging its world-class mountain biking infrastructure to engage more people, strengthen local connections, and promote active lifestyles. With a high level of participation, particularly from women and youth riders, Far North Queensland can lead the way in fostering grassroots participation in mountain biking, making the sport more accessible, inclusive, and community driven. The region's unique geography and globally respected credentials in the gravity disciplines of mountain biking offer a unique opportunity for high-level rider development as well as participation across the community.

- **A rider participation and skills-centric training opportunity:** The region's vibrant mountain bike community supports skill clinics, coaching, and rider development at all levels. The opportunity to grow cutting-edge participatory programs like Gravity Girls Cairns and the youth-focused Junior Shredders/Gravity Squad (Ride Fundamentals) programs is a standout. The positive and enthusiastic feedback from participants is clear, and local providers struggle to meet the demand. Community events and social rides provide an essential avenue for expanding participation through mentorship programs and beginner-friendly events to welcome riders of all levels. Investing through existing local service providers in collaboration with mountain bike clubs is a very cost-effective way to augment participation and facilitate individuals and families overcoming barriers to active lifestyles.
- **Invest in the opportunity to build a gravity MTB academy in the Far North:** Smithfield Mountain Bike Park's unique setting shares its footprint with the internationally acclaimed James Cook University offering a canvas for integration between academic and practical learning. In addition to its unique geography, the peak riding season for the region is during off-season of Australia's southern states offering the opportunity to build a winter ride academy focusing on the strong gravity credentials of the region.

With 2032 in the nations sights it is a pertinent time to investigate the establishment of a mountain biking centre of excellence and National training centre in conjunction with QAS and AusCycling alongside local universities. By pairing with similar institutions in New Zealand or southern Australia the region could function as a winter campus and create stronger partnerships with Pacific and Oceania.

With the exponential increase in the popularity of enduro, the rapid advance in adaptive MTB and the proposed inclusion of a downhill discipline at an Olympic level, the region is well placed to play a critical role in the development of Australia's next generations of riders.

- **Specialist Facilities for Technical and Air Progression:** Mountain biking is evolving rapidly, with disciplines once considered extreme becoming mainstream. Events like Crankworx, Red Bull Hardline and Red Bull Rampage are inspiring a new generation of athletes. Investing in specialist facilities such as indoor or all-weather foam pits and airbags would offer young riders a controlled environment to refine aerial techniques year-round, fostering confidence and skill development while minimizing injury risks. Additionally, securing regional accreditation for

coaching and establishing a progressive jump-line and technical skills park in the region would ensure accessible, high-quality instruction, creating a structured pathway for riders to advance from beginner to expert levels with guided mentorship and professional support.

- **School & green space activation:** Partnering with schools to incorporate MTB and cycling into sports curriculums and utilising local green spaces for training and community riding programs can provide an opportunity to build on the existing bicycle and active infrastructure in the region.
- **Volunteer engagement:** Strengthening the local MTB ecosystem by training event officials, trail builders, and coaches to support the sport's long-term growth. The hosting of high level and club events over many years means the region has many eager and experienced volunteers. Developing reward systems and incentives to better support the efforts of volunteers is a key element of the TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy however investment is required in the marketing and management of the desired model.
- **Access to equipment and opportunities to ride for indigenous, remote and rural youth:** The region has numerous opportunities for rider development, skills and recreational opportunities but these are not accessible to all. Recent investment in facilities including pump tracks and skills parks in remote, indigenous and rural communities provide essential infrastructure but not always the means for participation. The TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy identifies the need for bike equipment libraries and skills coaching for youth in rural and remote communities. This would have application in diversion and social programs as well as facilitate the development of natural aptitude and skill of riders from these communities. There are existing operators and models to build from.
- **Intra-regional transport options for youth:** outside of the immediate Cairns area the FNQ region is without extensive public transport options and many young riders have identified that access to riding opportunities is a limiting factor for those without independent transport. Participation could be increased by providing scheduled intra-regional transport to access the regions mountain bike parks.

By focusing on grassroots development, accessibility, and long-term sustainability, Far North Queensland can increase community sport participation while solidifying its reputation as a Centre of Excellence for mountain biking for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

Conclusion

Far North Queensland already boasts a world-class mountain biking scene—however by embracing Brisbane 2032 as a launchpad for strategic investment, community engagement, and event expansion, it has the potential to become a global Centre of Excellence for mountain biking and an integral pillar of Queensland's sporting future.

Please direct any queries in relation to this submission or the *Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy* to our Natural Assets and Sustainability Coordinator – Travis Sydes t.sydes@fnqroc.qld.gov.au

Yours sincerely



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