

# 2025-26 FEDERAL BUDGET SUBMISSION



strengthen  
the far north



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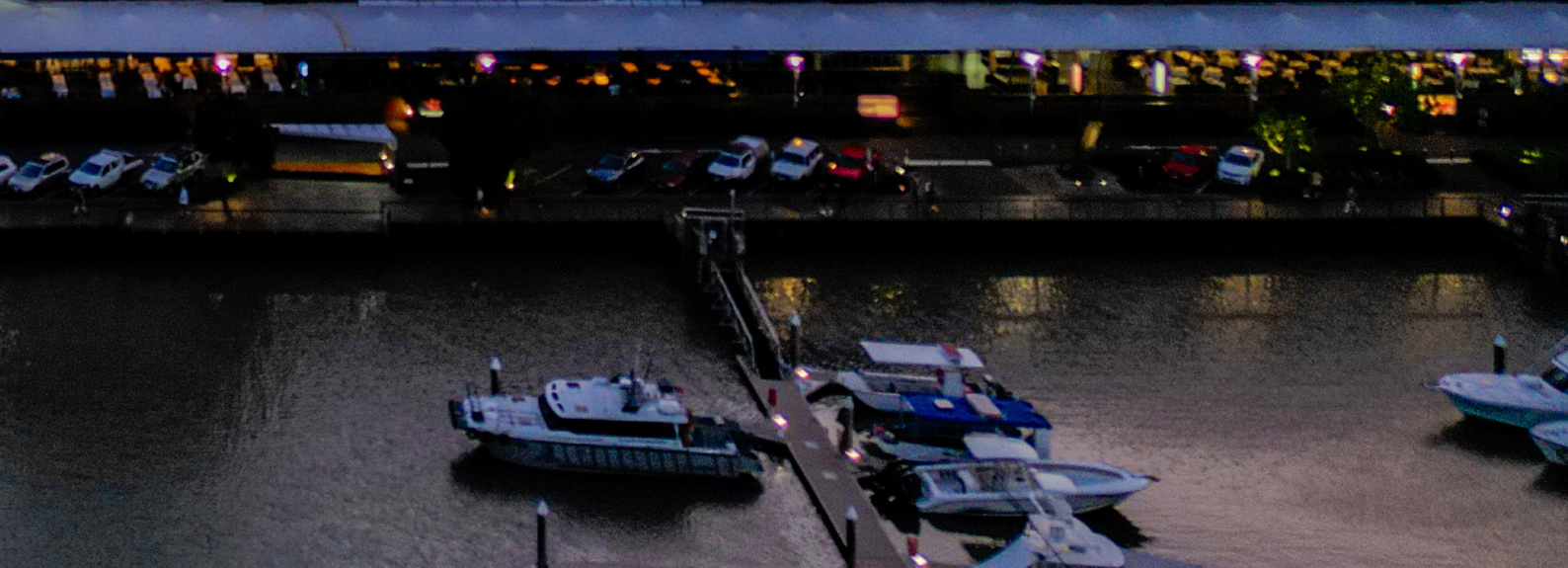
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Advance Cairns acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present.



# FOREWORD

Far North Queensland, the most populous region in Northern Australia, boasting one of the most diverse regional economies nationwide, continues to play an out-sized role in contributing to the prosperity of Queensland.

With the Australian federal election imminent, Advance Cairns is pleased to present this budget submission seeking support from the Albanese Government for key priorities which we believe will build a more sustainable and robust future for the region.

No region in Australia is more internationally connected than Cairns and Tropical North Queensland; our geographic proximity and unique connections to the Asia Pacific and beyond are what truly makes Cairns Australia's most global regional city<sup>1</sup>. We are the northern gateway to Australia and the bridge to the Asia Pacific.



It is this proximity which provides the opportunity to capitalise on our world-class produce and exports, our deep cultural and business ties with the West Pacific, particularly Papua New Guinea, as well as thriving marine and general aviation precincts which further deepen and strengthen these international connections. Far North Queensland's unique advantages make it one of Australia's most desirable places to live and this brings with it increasing population pressures requiring strategic investments into health, regional connectivity and food, water, and housing security that will sustain us into the future.

The priorities outlined in this budget submission will enable the region to enhance our liveability, sustain a growing population and foster economic growth while continuing to host millions of domestic and international tourists. And tourists and residents alike depend on secure and safe water supply, reliable road and transport connectivity and access to health services and so on.

The record-breaking floods of more than a year ago highlighted the vulnerability of the region from an infrastructure and transport perspective. How we invest and plan for our future is critical to ensure a prosperous, climate resilient future. As Australia's globally recognised green brand, we also want to play our part in the energy transition.

These priorities will be fundamental in delivering a prosperous future for the Far North Queensland.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this budget submission.

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Salt, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Economy.id, *Population, Cairns Regional Council*, last updated June 30, 2023, <https://profile.id.com.au/cairns/population>

<sup>3</sup> Economy.id, *Population, Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils*, last updated June 30, 2023, <https://economy.id.com.au/fnqroc/population>

**175.4K**<sup>2</sup>  
CAIRNS CITY  
POPULATION

**289.9K**<sup>3</sup>  
REGIONAL  
POPULATION

**\$19.81B**<sup>3</sup>  
GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT

**380,000km<sup>2</sup>**  
ECONOMICALLY DIVERSE AREA

## ABOUT CAIRNS AND FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

Far North Queensland covers a vast and economically diverse area of 380,000km<sup>2</sup>, slightly larger than the size of Japan, and impacting a population of over 280,000 people. The region stretches from Cardwell in the south to the Torres Strait in the north, and west to the Northern Territory border. It is Queensland's largest region, covering over 20% of the state and 26 local government areas.

Advance Cairns readily acknowledges and thanks the Australian Government for its ongoing support for Far North Queensland and its commitment to drive growth, resilience and diversity throughout the regional economy. Support for these transformational projects below is evidence of this and we look forward to continuing to work together to deliver these commitments to ensure a prosperous future for Far North Queensland.



<p><b>\$195M</b> AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION SECURED</p>	<p><b>\$6,048 SAVED</b> PER HOUSEHOLD OVER 15 YEARS</p>	<p><b>SECURED</b> FUTURE WATER NEEDS INTO THE NEXT DECADE</p>
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## CAIRNS WATER SECURITY – STAGE 1

The Cairns Water Security – Stage 1 (CWSS1) Project is central to securing urban water supply for the Cairns community well into the next decade. The Australian Government’s recent (2025) commitment to provide an additional \$87.5m towards the project (total commitment of \$195m) will secure an estimated saving\* of \$403 per household per year over 15 years (\$6,048 per household in total). The CWSS1 project will bolster resilience and futureproof the city’s water security, delivering a new water intake, a new water treatment plant and water reservoirs as well as the supporting infrastructure to connect into the existing network. Construction commenced in August 2024 with completion expected in mid-2026, weather permitting. CWSS1 is supported by all levels of government – jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments, in partnership with Cairns Regional Council.

\*future rates and/or charges increases avoided



<p><b>\$287.2M</b> AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION SECURED</p>	<p><b>380+ JOBS</b> DURING CONSTRUCTION</p>	<p><b>IMPROVES</b> SAFETY, NETWORK EFFICIENCY, CAPACITY, REGIONAL GROWTH</p>
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## CAPTAIN COOK HIGHWAY, CAIRNS CBD TO SMITHFIELD, UPGRADE

A vital link for the region’s resident population of more than 285,000 (with up to 50,000 tourists per day during peak season) the Captain Cook Highway, ensures accessibility to health, education, community services and business. In recognition of its significance, the Australian Government extended the National Highway A1 to Smithfield, north of Cairns city. The Australian and Queensland Governments have committed \$359m towards the project on an 80:20 basis with master planning, including a staged approach for upgrades to be complete mid-2025.

# CAIRNS MARINE PRECINCT

The Cairns Marine Precinct is a critical enabler of the Far North Queensland economy and is central to building a sustainable, diversified future for the region. A leading maritime maintenance, repair and overhaul destination for vessels nationally and internationally, the precinct is home to a large and diverse marine sector including Defence and Border Force, a world-renowned tourism-reef fleet, commercial fishing, towage and shipping, specialist boat builders and an active cruising yacht squadron, while also playing host to superyachts and cruise liners visiting the region. The precinct also offers education and training pathways with the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College delivering various programs to support the future maritime workforce. As the nation's northern gateway to the Pacific, the Cairns Marine Precinct, plays a key role in capacity and relationship building across the Pacific.

## COMMON USER FACILITY

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

The Cairns Marine Precinct (CMP) has continued to face rapidly growing demand domestically and globally, with maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) providers operating at or near capacity and struggling to meet market demand<sup>1</sup>.

Federal and state governments have committed \$387m towards the delivery of a maritime Common User Facility (CUF) to increase the capacity and capability of the CMP, allowing the precinct to capitalise on future defence and maritime industry business. Since the development of the state government's detailed business case in 2022, ownership and delivery of the project has transitioned to Ports North in late 2024, which necessitated a review into the estimated cost and scope of the project. This review subsequently identified several assumptions and estimates which were inconsistent with the requirements of the project, and required a recast of the cost estimate. This revised estimate was considerably more than the currently committed \$387m.

Ports North is now undertaking a reassessment of scoping and cost estimates to ensure the delivery of a commercially viable CUF which meets industry needs.

Providing a platform for the region's maritime maintenance, repair and overhaul sector to grow is key to the future economic diversification of the region. The Cairns Marine Precinct is poised to foster this growth, possessing a number of competitive advantages including its geographic proximity to the Indo-Pacific, home to HMAS Cairns and one of four strategically located Regional Maintenance Centres (RMC) supported by a strong, established industry.

*"This region is a strategic and economic centre for northern Australia and the Common User Facility is at the heart of that critical role"*

– Hon Catherine King MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

In 2023, the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) observed that Australia was facing the most challenging strategic circumstances since the Second World War<sup>2</sup>. A year on, the *National Defence Strategy* (NDS) highlighted the further deterioration of our strategic circumstances, in line with trends identified in the DSR<sup>3</sup>. Central to these documents was the importance of northern Australia – increasing the Australian Defence Force's ability to operate from Australia's northern bases and deter potential adversaries from projecting power against the nation. As Australia's most northern naval base on the eastern seaboard, HMAS Cairns plays a key strategic role in the nation's defence capability and is currently undergoing a \$240m upgrade to its facilities and deliver vital infrastructure required to accommodate the new Arafura-class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs).

In addition to HMAS Cairns, the precinct is home to the first of four strategically located Regional Maintenance Centres (RMC) established under Defence's *Plan Galileo*. RMCs are tasked with the ongoing maintenance and sustainment of multiple classes of Royal Australian Navy fleet. Australia's plan to double its surface fleet has significant impacts for Cairns which will see a 200% increase in tonnage by 2048<sup>4</sup>.

Cairns' strategic importance and longstanding status as the premier maintenance and sustainment destination for the region has also seen a significant increase in visitation from foreign Defence and border force vessels with this trend only expected to escalate. The CUF would unlock this increased visitation, supporting and strengthening Australia's strategic, partnerships, alliances and dialogues such as AUKUS, the QUAD and deepen our strong relationship with the Pacific.

The economic and strategic benefits created by the delivery of the maritime Common User Facility within the Cairns Marine Precinct cannot be overstated. A functional and commercially viable CUF is essential to meet the future capability and capacity requirements to service vessels across the maritime sector (Defence, civil, commercial and tourism).



Austal Shiplift, Cairns Marine Precinct

## OPPORTUNITY

- Strengthen and diversify FNQ economy, building a more sustainable future
- Increase capability, capacity and competitiveness
- Protect Australia’s national and geopolitical interests
- Solidify Cairns as a leading maritime MRO destination
- Boost job creation and secure future of more than 5,000 jobs supported by the Cairns maritime industry
- Attract investment and re-investment
- Supports the:
  - 2024 National Defence Strategy
  - 2023 Defence Strategic Review
  - Queensland Defence Industries 10-year roadmap
  - Queensland Superyacht Strategy 2018-2028

<sup>1</sup>. PricewaterhouseCoopers (2022). Cairns Marine Precinct Infrastructure Investment Detailed Business Case.

<sup>2</sup>. Department of Defence, *Defence Strategic Review*, Australian Government, 2023.

<sup>3</sup>. Department of Defence, *National Defence Strategy*, Australian Government, 2023.

<sup>4</sup>. Department of Defence, *Plan Galileo and the Naval Shipbuilding Plan: Fact Sheet*, 2024.

## PROJECT STATUS

\$387m state and federal funding committed.

Ports North is now preparing a business case optimisation report that will consider various scoping options. The report is scheduled to be completed in February 2025 and will recommend the scope and additional funding required to support the construction of a commercially viable CUF that meets industry needs.

The CUF design, and plans for relocation of assets required to make way for the project, is currently underway.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government continues to work with the Queensland Government to fund and expedite delivery of the Cairns Marine Precinct Common User Facility. Of note, additional funding requirements will be confirmed following endorsement of the Business Case Optimisation Report recommendations.

# CAIRNS MARINE PRECINCT



## SHIPYARD INVESTMENT

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

The Cairns Marine Precinct (CMP) has continued to face rapidly growing demand domestically and globally, with maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) providers operating at or near capacity and struggling to meet market demand<sup>1</sup>.

To meet the forecast market demand out to 2055 (based on 2022 DBC), federal and state governments have committed \$387m towards the delivery of a maritime Common User Facility (CUF) to increase the capacity and capability of the CMP, allowing the precinct to deliver on future defence and maritime industry business. While the CUF will be catalytic for the region, bringing with it significant opportunity, the anticipated date of operation remains fluid, with late 2028 earmarked as the earliest possible date of completion. It is for this reason; further investment is required to provide local industry with enabling infrastructure in the meantime.

With the greatest regeneration of the nation's naval capability underway since the Second World War, a \$12m investment is required to support the region's three major shipyards to deliver enabling infrastructure and invest in Ports North leasehold, supporting the controlled expansion of regional capability, complementary to the marine precinct's new CUF while ensuring Cairns, as a designated Regional Maintenance Centre, will have the capacity to meet demand.

In northern Australia, shipyards are key players with permanent ship repair and maintenance, and in-service support capabilities, including a significant, diverse, and highly skilled workforce in Cairns. This is complemented by the ability to deliver expeditionary services across the north and Pacific regions. As anchor tenants, the shipyards invest in strengthening the broader maritime workforce, facilities, equipment and services. They serve as a vital link for local industry, actively supporting 620 SMEs in the region through the provision of access to projects often without any mark-up or access-fee. A \$12m investment would upgrade existing leasehold infrastructure to contemporary standards that meet Australian Defence specifications. This includes additional hardstand capacity that can be made available and operational in 2025, enabling the industry to capitalise on existing opportunity and demand for smaller tonnage vessels ahead of the Common User Facility's completion.

To support and unlock capability, and maximise utilisation of infrastructure in the immediate term, an investment of \$12m into the city's three major shipyards is sought in order to meet growing demand and to capitalise on time sensitive defence and maritime opportunities while supporting local industry.

### OPPORTUNITY

- Increase capability, capacity and competitiveness through additional naval certified hard-stand areas, increased wharfage and skilled workforce capacity
- Support the *2024 National Defence Strategy*
- Support Cairns as Regional Maintenance Centre North-East
- Solidify Cairns as a leading maritime MRO destination
- Boost job creation and secure the future of 5,000 jobs supported by the Cairns maritime industry

### PROJECT STATUS

In 2023, the Queensland Government committed \$12m (matched funding) to the shipyards as part of the government's Industry Partnership Program.

To unlock and complete the proposed capacity increase, an additional \$12m is sought from the Australian Government.

### RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government invests \$12m for Stage 2 capacity increases within the city's three shipyards.

<sup>1</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers (2022). Cairns Marine Precinct Infrastructure Investment Detailed Business Case.



Tropical Reef Shipyard, Cairns Marine Precinct.





**HMAS CAIRNS RAN BASE**

- Undergoing \$240m upgrade to accommodate the Arafura-class offshore patrol vessels
- Regional Maintenance Centre
- 900 Navy and civilian personnel
- Home port for six Naval vessels

**COMMON USER FACILITY**

- 5,000 tonne shiplift
- Two blast and paint facilities
- Additional wet berth capacity
- 92m wharf
- Three hardstand areas for vessels up to 120m in length

**TAFE QUEENSLAND GREAT BARRIER REEF INTERNATIONAL MARINE COLLEGE**

- Training provider for the Pacific Maritime Training Services Program
- 20m commercially registered vessel
- Desktop simulators
- Engineering workshops
- Full mission bridge simulator
- Multi-purpose Emergency Response Training Simulator (MERTS)
- Sea survival training immersion pool
- Tug optimised bridge

**CAIRNS MARINE PRECINCT**

- CAIRNS MARINE PRECINCT
- COMMON USER FACILITY
- TAFE QUEENSLAND GREAT BARRIER REEF INTERNATIONAL MARINE COLLEGE
- HMAS CAIRNS RAN BASE
- KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- 1.a/b** | HMAS Cairns Royal Australian Naval Base
- 2.a/b** | Common User Facility
- 3.** | Tropical Reef Shipyard
- 4.a/b** | Austal
- 5.** | NORSTA Maritime
- 6.a/b** | Sea Swift
- 7.a/b** | Norship
- 8.** | TAFE Great Barrier Reef International Marine College
- 9.** | Ports North is a key stakeholder and major land holder

## FNQ PRIMARY HEALTH

The Far North Queensland region encompasses some of the most remote communities in the state. Cairns Hospital is the only major referral hospital in FNQ, providing care to patients from Cape York, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Torres Strait. With a population experiencing increasingly complex, chronic conditions above national averages, expanded health services, clinical research, and education are critical to meet the ongoing health needs of the population.

Our region's Hospital and Health Services (Cairns and Hinterland, Torres and Cape, North West), supported by the Northern Queensland Primary Healthcare Network, James Cook University (JCU), CQUniversity, TAFE Queensland and other tertiary institutions, work together to ensure that Cairns grows its own medical, nursing and allied health workforce to expand clinical services and translate research into practice to improve health outcomes for FNQ communities.

Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service in partnership with JCU have made a significant investment in developing the Far North Queensland Health and Innovation Precinct (FNQHIP). The Precinct, centrally located in Cairns, will be the epicentre of health, education and training facilities enabling clinical and translational research, health service innovation and application of best evidence in health care

## REGIONAL AND RURAL MEDICAL WORKFORCE

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

In the October 2022-23 Federal Budget, JCU Medicine in Cairns was awarded 20 Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs), meaning end-to-end medical training is now delivered in Cairns – an outcome that builds on almost 40 years of commitment by JCU to the region. However, with no additional CSPs being allocated since, the significant and growing unmet demand for medical labour in Far North Queensland is being exacerbated. It is critical that the Australian Government considers both JCU and the Queensland Government's submissions for additional CSPs. JCU, supported by Queensland Health, is seeking an additional 80 places delivered over three years (2026-2028).

In the five years to 2029, projected employment in the Australian Health Care and Social Assistance industry is forecast to increase by around 283,000<sup>1</sup>. This trend is expected to continue in the coming decades with a care and support workforce twice the size of 2020-21 required to meet demand in 2049-50<sup>2</sup>. New modelling shows Queensland will have a workforce shortage of between 3,162 and 4,703 medical practitioners by 2033<sup>3</sup>.

Ensuring demand is met will require a multifaceted approach and how our nation's education and training sector responds to these skills needs is crucial. Regional Australia continues to face acute shortages, particularly in high-skilled roles (both in the health sector and beyond)<sup>4</sup>. To address this shortage, the importance of regional universities cannot be overstated with more than 65% of employed regional university graduates remaining in regional areas on completion of their studies<sup>5</sup>.

In 2025, JCU celebrates 25 years of the Medicine program and remains Australia's most successful university in producing doctors and other health professionals who go on to provide healthcare for regional, rural and remote

communities. JCU is Australia's leading university in the enrolment of students from regional, rural and remote backgrounds, with those students comprising an average 71 per cent or more of the medicine intake each year<sup>6</sup>. Those students are more likely to work in the same or similar community after graduation. A 2019 study on the first 10 cohorts of JCU medicine program found one-third of mid-career graduates were working in regional communities and 44 per cent of mid-career graduates had chosen General Practice and/or Rural Generalism<sup>7</sup>. As of 2024, JCU remains the largest contributor of trainees and fellows in the Queensland Rural Generalist Pathway<sup>8</sup>.

The medicine program is delivered at the University's campus in Cairns and Townsville from years 1 to 6. The spread of students across the north and with placement opportunities throughout regional, rural and remote Queensland including JCU's clinical school in Mackay and study centres in Mount Isa, Emerald and Thursday Island, ensures graduates are trained in the communities where doctor shortages are deeply felt, and with the broad skill base enabling them to be successful in low resource environments.

In addition to undergraduate medicine, between 2016 – 2024, JCU was unique among Australian universities in delivering post graduate Fellowship training in General Practice, accredited by and working with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) and the Federal Government. Whilst JCU no longer directly delivers Fellowship Training, the commitment to building the GP and Rural Generalist workforce of tomorrow continues.



James Cook University medical students on placement at Cairns Hospital. Cairns, 2024.

JCU's professional programs in medicine, nursing, midwifery, allied health, pharmacy, and dentistry are important components in the JCU Model of integrated local community-based primary care training across regional Queensland. The Model is embedded through close relationships with distributed primary health services, including those that are privately run, Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations and Queensland Health. Government investment in JCU and this model will expand the number of doctors and other professionals pursuing primary care careers in some of the most underserved communities in the country, and specifically, meeting North Queensland's primary care health workforce shortages. JCU's success in delivering doctors working in primary care in areas of need is unmatched by other institutions.

Provision of additional CSPs will support the JCU Model to address the skills shortage in the region, increase equity and reduce disadvantage. It will also leverage the significant investment by Queensland Health and JCU in FNQHIP

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, Jobs and Skills Australia, *Employment Projections*, <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/employment-projections>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government, Treasury, *Intergenerational Report 2023*, <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Queensland Health, *Submission: Additional Commonwealth Support Places for medical students June 2024*

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government, Jobs and Skills Australia, *Towards a National Jobs and Skills Roadmap: Annual Jobs and Skills Report 2023*, <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/towards-national-jobs-and-skills-roadmap>

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, S. (2011). *Higher education & community benefits: the role of regional provision*. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). [https://research.acer.edu.au/joining\\_the\\_dots/26](https://research.acer.edu.au/joining_the_dots/26)

<sup>6</sup> JCU Student Management System, Reporting@JCU: *First-year JCU medicine commencing domestic students*

<sup>7</sup> Woolley T, Sen Gupta T, Paton K. Mid-career graduate practice outcomes of the James Cook University medical school: key insights from the first 20 years. *Rural and Remote Health* 2021; 21: 6642. <https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH6642>

<sup>8</sup> Queensland Rural Generalist Pathway 2024 Snapshot: [www.careers.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/336118/QRGP\\_2024-Snapshot\\_Mar24.pdf](http://www.careers.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/336118/QRGP_2024-Snapshot_Mar24.pdf)

## OPPORTUNITY

- Address the unmet need for General Practitioners and Rural Generalists
- Deliver upon recommendations outlined in the *Australian Universities Accord Report*, notably to increase the number of CSPs dedicated and allocated to universities delivering regionally based end-to-end medical schools
- Deliver high-quality local health care for regional Queensland
- Improve equal access to education
- Begin to address skills deficits across the nation, particularly throughout regional, rural and remote Queensland

## PROJECT STATUS

The Australian Government received a submission from the Queensland Government in June 2024 seeking the allocation of an additional 155 new CSPs to Queensland universities in a phased approach over three years, with JCU able to accept 40 places in 2026, 20 in 2027 and 20 in 2028 – for a total of 80 new commencing places.

Not only will this support Queensland's workforce requirements, but importantly bolster the regional workforce and improve health outcomes.

## RECOMMENDATION

To support the training and recruitment of Cairns-based clinicians, James Cook University receives 80 CSPs for its Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) to begin phased from 2026-2028, with majority based in Cairns.

# ROAD CONNECTIVITY

## TABLELANDS ACCESS

An integrated and efficient road transport network is critical for economic stability and growth in Far North Queensland, a region of 380,000km<sup>2</sup> which includes some of the nation's most remote communities. The region's inland roads and Cairns' access to the northern beaches and Tablelands play a vital role in enabling the productivity of northern Australia and the contribution to the national economy through improved connectivity to southern markets. The disruption and dislocation to these road networks in the wake of ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper have underpinned the importance of these links to the region and indeed, to the nation. Growth in population, employment, tourism and freight volumes coupled with the increasing importance of food security, means safety and capacity requirements will only grow. Investment in FNQ's road connectivity is crucial to avoid nationally significant productivity losses, to connect rural and remote communities and to ensure continued regional and state economic development, as well as strengthening the north's strategic defence capability.

## TABLELANDS ACCESS

The road networks connecting the Cairns region with the Atherton Tablelands, Cape York and the Gulf are pivotal to supporting remote communities and growing the regional economy, serving as vital conduits for agriculture, mining and tourism. These networks are central to facilitating the imports and exports which underpin Far North Queensland's economic activity. With sizeable growth in both agriculture and mining in the region predicted over the next decade, the requirement for a safe and reliable road network becomes increasingly urgent to accommodate the expected increase in heavy vehicle traffic.

Far North Queensland's abundant natural resources add to the significance of road infrastructure throughout the region, with the region's mining and agricultural sectors increasingly contributing to national and global supply chains. Shoring up access to the Port of Mourilyan, a key export hub for the region, is integral to this process, particularly in supporting the growth of sugar, mineral sands, magnetite and mineral resources, including Australia's first (world's third largest) high purity silica processing plant – Silica Resources Australia's Mourilyan Silica Sands Project. The role of the Port of Mourilyan underscores the importance of robust road networks to bolster industries of national significance and to facilitate domestic and international exports.

Strengthened road infrastructure will also support growth of other key ports in the region, including the Port of Karumba in the lower Gulf of Carpentaria and the Port of Weipa in northern Cape York, while also bolstering security of northern Australia.

However, the combination of growing freight demands and increasing frequency of severe weather events, has placed considerable strain on the existing infrastructure. This has resulted in increased transport costs and disruptions across the supply chain. Targeted upgrades and resilience measures are crucial to address these challenges and will ensure the long-term economic growth and prosperity of Far North Queensland.

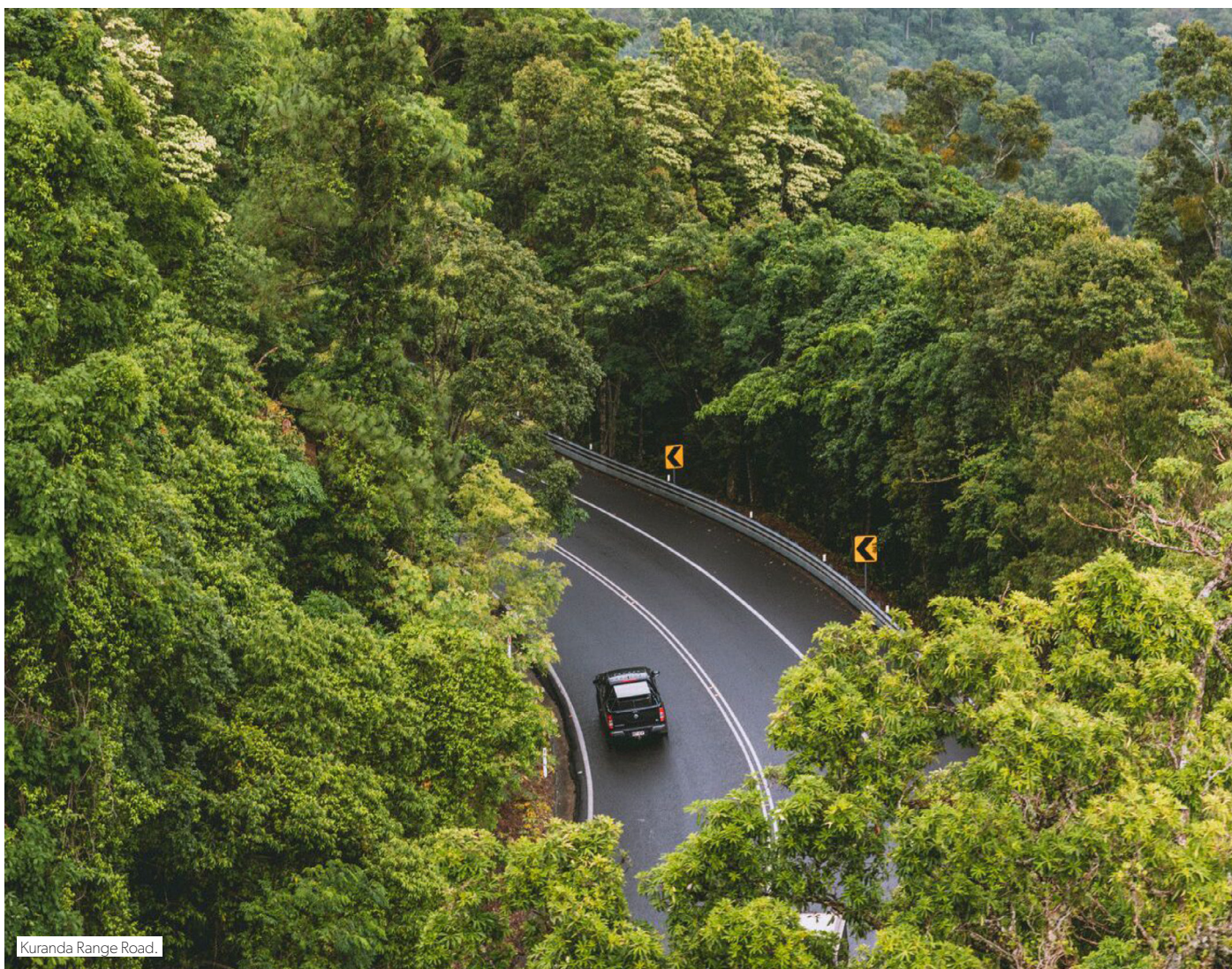
## KURANDA RANGE ROAD

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT, KENNEDY

The Kuranda Range Road (Kennedy Highway, Cairns-Mareeba section) links Smithfield with Kuranda and is the main coastal gateway to the Tablelands, Cape York Peninsula, and the Gulf Savannah. It is a critical link for commuter, commercial, and visitor traffic in FNQ and a vital strategic corridor underpinning the commercial viability of primary industry producers and exporters in the region in providing access to markets through the Cairns air and seaports, and road links to southern markets<sup>1</sup>. In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in traffic demand due to growth in tourism, freight movement, and residential development on the Tablelands. Identifying an alternative to the current Kuranda Range Road would not only address FNQROC's reports that the road is operating beyond capacity with safety and traffic efficiency now at critical levels but would ensure the region capitalises on the full economic potential of the Regional Trade Distribution Centre, funded by the Queensland Government.

A joint commitment of \$262.5m towards safety and resilience upgrades on the Kuranda Range Road has been made by the Australian and Queensland Governments (80:20). However, a permanent solution to this long-standing issue must be found. It is recommended the Australian Government work with the Queensland Government to ensure that \$22m of the \$262.5m commitment is used to conduct a preliminary evaluation and detailed business case into preferred alternative routes to the Kuranda Range Road.

There have been 21 years of studies on the Kuranda Range Road with most recommendations not implemented. As a result, safety, capacity, and efficiency issues are now at a critical point with the recent extreme rainfall in the wake



Kuranda Range Road.

of ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper highlighting this once again. Failure to address this issue has also resulted in constraints on economic development in the region, as evidenced by the abandoned \$640m KUR-World tourism development project. Continued growth in tourism, agriculture, mining, and population on the Tablelands and beyond means it is imperative that a solution is developed for Cairns to Tablelands access prior to a major crisis.

## OPPORTUNITY

- Increased economic and social outcomes, opening up potential new dormitory suburbs for a growing and linear city
- Unlock critical supply chains, improving the region's freight network
- Improve safety and security
- Improve national and regional connectivity

<sup>1</sup> FNQROC, *Kuranda Range Road*, August 2019, [https://www.fnqroc.qld.gov.au/files/media/original/004/98d/138/272/FNQROC-Kuranda-Range-Road-August-2019\\_-\\_DIGITAL.PDF](https://www.fnqroc.qld.gov.au/files/media/original/004/98d/138/272/FNQROC-Kuranda-Range-Road-August-2019_-_DIGITAL.PDF)

## PROJECT STATUS

Intelligent Transport Systems treatments on the Kuranda Range Road have been installed with the project completed in March 2024.

Engagement undertaken as part of the *Far North Queensland Regional Plan* review identified population growth and the linear geographic constraints of Cairns as a major issue. The statutory land-use plan will provide a 25-year framework, the plan has been significantly advanced but not yet released.

Commitment sought towards a preliminary evaluation and detailed business case into preferred alternatives to the Kuranda Range Road.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government works with the Queensland Government to commit \$22m of the \$262.5m investment for safety and resilience upgrades to the Kuranda Range Road and allocates this towards a preliminary evaluation and detailed business case for an alternative route to the Kuranda Range Road.



## NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT NETWORK EXTENSION

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT, KENNEDY

The National Land Transport Network (NLTN) outlines nationally significant road and rail infrastructure links and their intermodal connections. Through an integrated network, the NLTN fosters economic and social development through the provision of Commonwealth funding towards improved land transport infrastructure. Extending the NLTN from its current terminus in Smithfield to Mareeba and then to the Port of Weipa via the Peninsula Developmental Road would bolster economic development, support national security and improve health and wellbeing outcomes in regional and remote communities.

In 2018, the Queensland Government made a submission under the NLTN Determination Review undertaken by the Australian Government. The Department of Transport and Main Roads identified a number of nationally significant road links throughout Queensland to be included as part of the NLTN. This included a request to extend the NLTN in Cairns from its terminus at the Bruce Highway near the Port of Cairns (corner of Comport and Draper Streets) to the Captain Cook Highway through to Smithfield (via the Captain Cook Highway). The Australian Government accepted this submission, extending the NLTN under the *National Land Transport Network Determination 2020*<sup>1</sup>, ensuring critical access to the Cairns Domestic and International Airport and the Smithfield industrial/commercial precinct.

Six years on from this submission, the importance of the north and the requirement for investment in order to realise the potential of Far North Queensland has increased exponentially. Commonwealth and State Governments agree an integrated land transport network should seek to improve national and regional connectivity for communities and industry; improve national, regional, and international logistics; and trade and consistency with viable, long-term economic and social outcomes<sup>2</sup>. As a result, Advance Cairns proposes the extension of the NLTN from its current terminus in Smithfield (intersection of Captain Cook and Kennedy Highways) to Mareeba (intersection of Kennedy and Mulligan Highways), and then to continue onto Weipa via the Peninsula Developmental Road (PDR).

Extension of the NLTN to the Port of Weipa would be the next logical step in the network, securing the federal government support required to drive long-term social and economic outcomes throughout the region. Connecting Cairns to Mareeba, a key centre in Far North Queensland and one of the fastest growing local government areas in the state, would harness significant opportunity for industry expansion

across the agricultural and resources sectors enhancing Mareeba's role as the vital transport and services hub for northern Australia, including Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf of Carpentaria<sup>3</sup>. This, too, would improve connection to the Mareeba Airport and Aviation Industrial Precinct, offering a unique base for the development of regional capabilities in avionics and aircraft maintenance<sup>4</sup>.

Connecting the Port of Weipa via the PDR would maximise these benefits and notably would reinforce safe, reliable and resilient road access to Royal Australian Air Force Base Scherger (RAAF *Scherger*). Since 2014, the Cape York Region Package (CYRP) has delivered progressive works to seal the PDR however, about 145km (roughly one quarter) of the road remains unsealed<sup>5</sup>. Each wet season<sup>6</sup> the PDR faces the prospect of being cut off for as long as four months.

Given its proximity to the Indo-Pacific, northern Australia is poised to play a significant role in Australia's national security strategy following a re-posturing of Defence personnel and equipment across the north<sup>7</sup>. As such, one of the key immediate actions outlined by the Government in response to the *Defence Strategic Review* (DSR), was to improve Defence's ability to operate from its northern bases, particularly its air bases. While investment has been made to carry out upgrades across these bases, the DSR specifically referenced the need to improve the operational capacity and survivability of these bases, noting the requirement for "...a robust national road, rail, maritime and air distribution system" to ensure southern regions can support northern bases<sup>7</sup>. Extending the NLTN to include the Port of Weipa will enable this, ensuring sustained access to our nation's strategic assets in an increasingly uncertain environment.

At present, the NLTN is most notably absent in one of the nation's most remote areas – Cape York. Extending the network from Cairns to Mareeba and onto the Port of Weipa increases connectivity to remote and discrete communities, creating the opportunity for step change. An assessment of the social, environmental and economic impacts of early works undertaken as part of the Cape York Region Package (including upgrades to the PDR), found the upgrades were of significant benefit to the Cape York region. The assessment highlighted that the program is critical to facilitate positive social, environmental and economic outcomes, contributing to the overall growth and development of the Far North Queensland economy. It noted that complete benefits can only be realised through completion of works in their entirety, requiring a committed funding source<sup>8</sup>.



Extending the National Land Transport Network from Smithfield to Mareeba, and then to the Port of Weipa is vitally important to the development of international, inter-state and inter-regional trade, commerce and travel. Building on the progress made by the Cape York Region Package, sealing of the Peninsula Developmental Road in its entirety through the extension of the NLTN would secure the economic, social and strategic potential of Far North Queensland, increasing year-round reliability, supporting local communities, bolstering industry expansion and enabling long-term economic growth.

<sup>1</sup> National Land Transport Network Determination 2020 (Cth)

<sup>2</sup> National Land Transport Act 2014 (Cth)

<sup>3</sup> Mareeba Shire Council, Regional Economic Profile, <https://msc.qld.gov.au/region/regional-economic-profile/>

<sup>4</sup> Mareeba Shire Council, Mareeba Airport Aviation Industrial Park, <https://msc.qld.gov.au/region/mareeba-airport-aviation-industrial-park/>

<sup>5</sup> Department of Transport and Main Roads, Cape York Region Package Stage 2, last updated September 18, 2024, <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/projects/cape-york-region-package-stage-2>

<sup>6</sup> Transport and Resources Committee, Queensland Parliament, Inquiry into the Peninsula Developmental Road (Laura to Weipa) Project, April 2023

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence, National Defence: Defence Strategic Review (2023)

<sup>8</sup> The State of Queensland, Department of Transport and Main Roads, Cape York Region Package: Social, Environmental and Economic Impact Assessment Evaluation Report – December 2022

## OPPORTUNITY

- Develop and facilitate international, inter-State and inter-regional trade, commerce and travel
- Increase road and rail supply chain resilience
- Improvements in social outcomes for local and Indigenous communities in Cape York through better access to health services, employment and education opportunities
- Improved connectivity between Cairns and the region’s agricultural production hubs across the Tablelands, Cape York and Gulf of Carpentaria
- Supports broader national priorities such as defence, the development of critical mineral resources and Closing the Gap
- Provides pathway towards increased connectivity between key national security assets (Port of Weipa and RAAF Scherger)

## RECOMMENDATION

The Queensland Government works with the Australian Government to amend the *National Land Transport Act 2014* to extend the national highway designation from its current terminus at the intersection of Captain Cook and Kennedy Highways to the intersection of the Kennedy Highway and the Mulligan Highway, and ultimately, to extend that vital network across to the Western Cape, to Weipa.



## SAVANNAH WAY

### GULF SECTION

ELECTORATE(S): KENNEDY

The Savannah Way traverses northern Australia, linking Cairns in FNQ to Broome in Western Australia’s Kimberley. The route is about 3700km long, crossing 15 national parks and five World Heritage areas as it navigates the Top End.

Considered to be in the top 10 road trips of Australia, the self-drive tourism market delivers \$69.8m annually into the Gulf region<sup>1</sup>, with 38% of visitors starting the journey in Cairns.

The Gulf section of the Savannah Way takes in 888km from Forty Mile Scrub west of Mt Garnet to the Northern Territory border. Significant sections of the road are already sealed, however, there are many substantial sections that require pavement upgrades, bitumen seal, minor realignment of substandard curves, concrete causeways, and four major river crossing upgrades.

Recognising the need to seal the Gulf section of the Savannah Way, in 2019 the Australian and Queensland Governments committed \$62.5m for road upgrades through the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative. This will be spent across various shire councils, with a prioritised list formulated in 2021. The Mt Garnet to Carpentaria Shire border section is 510km and requires funding to upgrade the road and floodways for reliability and to meet current construction and safety standards for heavy vehicles, tourists and commuters. This includes about \$60m-\$80m to upgrade the low-level river crossing at Gilbert River between Georgetown and Croydon. The river crossing is vital to the Gulf Savannah region and highly susceptible to flooding with unsafe entry and exit points<sup>2</sup>.

Burke Shire to the Queensland border requires further sealing, widening and improvements, including progressive upgrades of the river/causeway crossings with initial focus at Gregory River (near Tirranna Springs Roadhouse), Branch Creek near the Queensland/NT border and Nicholson River (near Doomadgee), followed by Alexandra and Leichhardt River crossings.

Upgrading the remaining sections is estimated to require:

- \$40m to finish sealing 70km between Normanton and Burketown<sup>3</sup>.
- \$50m to seal 63km between Hells Gate and the Queensland border.
- \$60m-\$80m to upgrade the Gilbert River crossing.

### OPPORTUNITY

- Increased economic and social outcomes
- Improved safety and resilience
- Improved regional connectivity particularly in isolated and remote communities
- Supports local workforce development and retention

### PROJECT STATUS

Major investment has been made to seal around 3,200km of the route.

In October 2024 the LNP (and now Queensland Government) announced \$500,000 to fund a business case for the Savannah Way focused on upgrading the Gilbert River Bridge.

Further funding is required to seal the remaining unsealed sections.

### RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government (in partnership with the Queensland Government) supports the sealing and improved flood resilience of the Gulf section of the Savannah Way by investing:

- \$40m to seal 70km between Normanton and Burketown
- \$50m to seal 63km between Hells Gate and the Queensland border
- \$60-\$80m to upgrade the Gilbert River crossing

With priority given to upgrades to widen the road between Mount Surprise and Croydon, including the Gilbert River Crossing.

To maximise the value of roads investment in Queensland, and to bolster defence, biosecurity, community connectivity, progress northern Australia development and give a future to the youth in communities such as Doomadgee and Robinson River, the Australian Government is encouraged to partner with the Northern Territory Government to continue to seal roads beyond the Queensland/Northern Territory border.

<sup>1</sup> Gulf Savannah Development, *Tourism Survey Report*, March 2018, <https://www.burke.qld.gov.au/downloads/file/522/gsd-tourism-report-2018>

<sup>2</sup> Gulf Savannah Development, *2024-25 Queensland Budget submission*

<sup>3</sup> NWQROC, *Developing Northern Australia Conference Paper*, July 2023





## KENNEDY DEVELOPMENTAL ROAD

### THE LYND – HUGHENDEN

ELECTORATE(S): KENNEDY

The Kennedy Developmental Road is a key strategic link from northern Australia to the southern freight hubs of Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. The road is central to tourism, horticulture, freight and cattle movement through Queensland's north and north-west region. However, for many years sections of the road remained unsealed, causing safety issues for locals, tourists, and transport operators that regularly used the road.

From mid-2017 to 2020, under the Northern Australia Roads Program, the Department of Transport and Main Roads completed sealing 42km of the Kennedy Developmental Road (The Lynd – Hughenden). In 2018, \$50m was committed under the Roads of Strategic Importance to progressively seal a further 48km of the Kennedy Developmental Road (The Lynd – Hughenden), construction was completed in late December 2023.

With this project now completed, only 10.8km of unsealed sections remain along the Kennedy Developmental Road.

Sealing the final 10.8km of the Kennedy Developmental Road and completing the White Cliffs realignment would be of significant economic benefit to the region, providing a direct transport corridor for primary producers to freight goods from FNQ to our southern markets faster and more reliably than the existing Bruce Highway route.

The recent widespread flooding in the wake of ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper and increasing frequency of extreme weather events has highlighted the both the fragility and importance of our transport networks and of the value of providing a secure inland alternative.

Sealing the Kennedy Developmental Road in its entirety is a priority project that would provide a year-round, all-weather route to southern markets for agricultural produce and livestock, reducing costs and increasing safety for all road users.

#### OPPORTUNITY

- Increases resilience – would provide an alternate supply route to FNQ, vital when the Bruce Highway traffic is disrupted due to extreme weather events
- Reduces freight costs between FNQ and southern market, supporting the sustainability of primary production in northern Australia
- Increases regional economic development, supporting growth in agriculture, mining and tourism sectors
- Enhances supply chains and increases sovereign capability

#### PROJECT STATUS

Flinders and Etheridge Shire Councils delivered the 48km sealing works, completing construction in December 2023.

\$30m is now required to seal the final 10.8km of the Kennedy Developmental Road and complete the White Cliffs realignment.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government commits \$30m to seal the final 10.8km of the Kennedy Developmental Road and complete the White Cliffs realignment to ensure this key strategic route between Cairns and southern freight hubs is sealed in its entirety.

## CAIRNS WESTERN ARTERIAL ROAD DUPLICATION REDLYNCH CONNECTOR TO CAPTAIN COOK HIGHWAY

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

The road network spanning Cairns' northern beaches is of regional significance and remains essential to Far North Queensland's future prosperity and liveability. A cohesive, effective and resilient road network between Cairns' CBD and northern beaches guarantees access to vital healthcare, education and community services in addition to resident, tourist and trade and business connectivity.

The Cairns Western Arterial Road (CWAR) is central to freight, commuter and tourism traffic and supports resilience and connectivity when the Captain Cook Highway, Cairns CBD to Smithfield is flooded.

The effectiveness and safety of the road transport network in and around Cairns will continue to be adversely impacted until the CWAR is fully duplicated from Redlynch to Smithfield and in line with an upgrade of major intersections. A total commitment of \$300m has been pledged by the Australian and Queensland Governments on an 80:20 basis to duplicate from Redlynch Connector Road to Captain Cook Highway.

The CWAR is considered a priority infrastructure project as the road is heavily congested daily, with about 42,000 vehicles using the road each day<sup>1</sup>. Further, when the Captain Cook Highway floods in the event of a natural disaster or during wet season, CWAR is the only flood-free access route

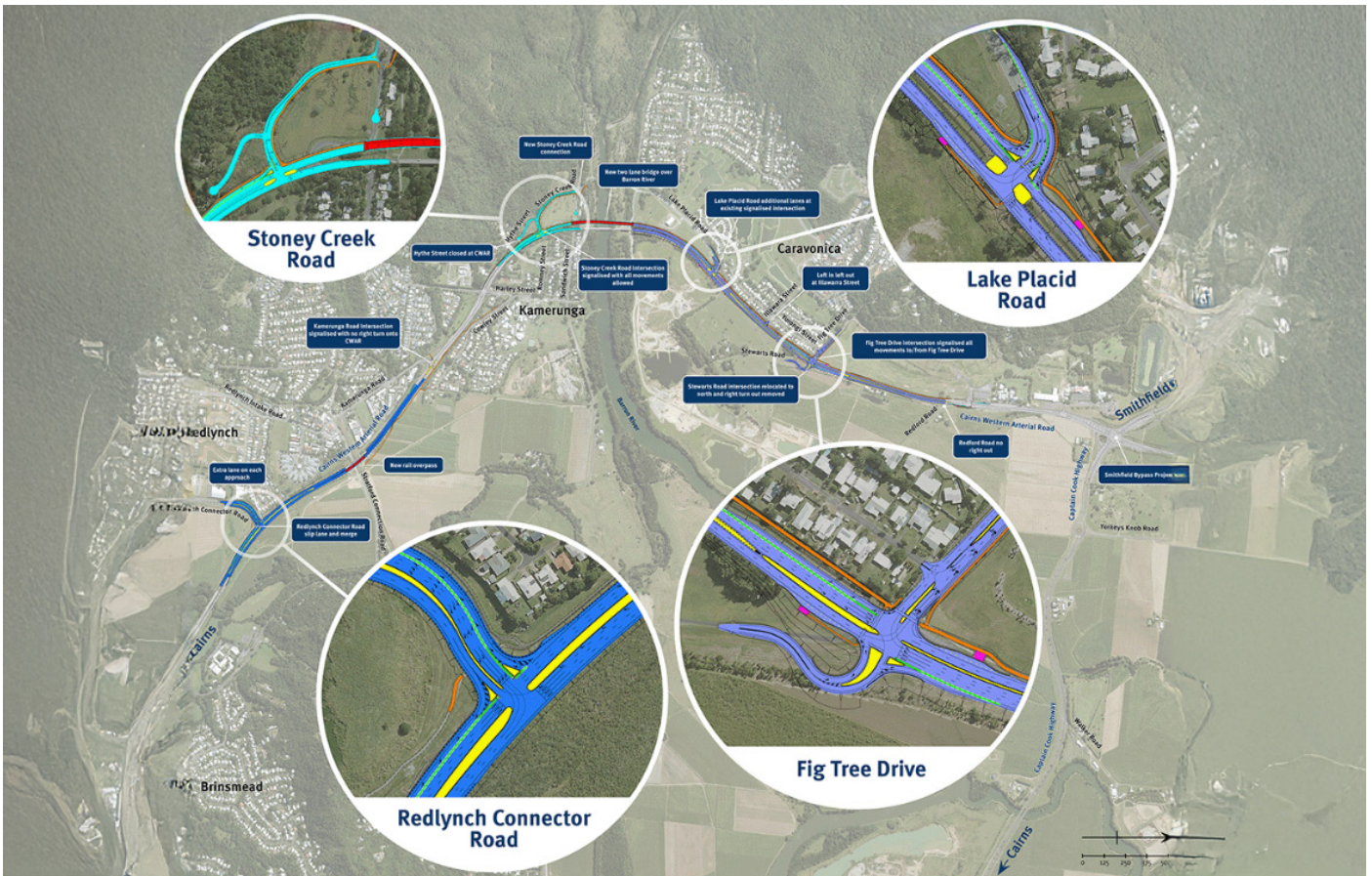
between Cairns, the northern beaches, and the Kennedy Highway. Increasing extreme weather events make this all the more imperative, as evidenced during the recent widespread flooding in the wake of ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper where CWAR was one of the few major roads to remain open throughout the flooding, albeit the road was overwhelmed.

Upgrading CWAR is essential to connecting Cairns' freight routes with the region's premier areas of agricultural production (Tablelands, Cape York Peninsula, and Mossman), while also meeting demand for daily commuter traffic. At the 2020 Queensland state election, the Queensland Government pledged \$60m to upgrade the CWAR. In the 2021-22 Federal Budget, the Australian Government committed a further \$240m to upgrade the remaining single lane sections of the CWAR. Despite the initial commitment made almost four years ago and a total of \$300m in funding committed to complete the CWAR with work originally slated to begin in late 2022<sup>2</sup>, construction is yet to commence.

It is now imperative that the Queensland and Australian Governments work together to expedite construction, preventing further delays to this network.



Cairns Western Arterial Road



CAIRNS WESTERN ARTERIAL ROAD, REDLYNCH CONNECTOR ROAD TO CAPTAIN COOK HIGHWAY, DUPLICATION MAP

**Legend**

*Artist's Impression - Locations are approximate*

- █ New pavement - Stage 1
- █ New bridges
- █ New bike lane
- █ New shared pathway
- █ New islands and painted median
- █ New bus stops
- █ New pavement - Stage 2
- █ New pavement - Stage 3

### OPPORTUNITY

- Contribute to the growth of the regional economy, improving connectivity
- Enhance disaster and climate resilience
- Decrease travel time while increasing network reliability and efficiency
- Improve safety
- Encourage use of public and active transport

### PROJECTS STATUS

In the 2023-24 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced a strategic review of its investments across Australia through its Infrastructure Investment Program (IIP).

The Department of Transport and Main Roads is currently working towards meeting the Australian Government’s requirements to facilitate the release of the construction funding.

In the meantime, the Queensland Government has released funding for preparation works for Section 1 (Lake Placid Road to Captain Cook Highway).

Preparation works for Section 1 commenced in late 2024.

### RECOMMENDATION

Advance Cairns urges the Australian and Queensland Governments to work together to ensure requirements necessary for the release of the Australian Government’s financial contribution towards construction funding are met as a matter of priority and, subsequently, see to the expedited delivery of the Cairns Western Arterial Road (Redlynch Connector to Captain Cook Highway duplication), preventing further delays to this critical network.

<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure Australia, *Cairns Western Arterial Road capacity*, last updated April 4, 2023, <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/map/cairns-western-arterial-road-capacity>

<sup>2</sup> Mark Bailey, *“Work wraps up on Harley Street intersection upgrade”*

## FNQ HOUSING CRISIS

Like many communities across Australia, Far North Queensland desperately requires solutions to address the housing crisis currently being experienced, a problem made even worse in the wake of household displacement caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper. Vacancy rates across Far North Queensland are among the tightest across not only the state, but the nation – Cook (0.0%), Mareeba (0.4%), Tablelands (0.5%) and Cairns (0.9%)<sup>1</sup>. This crisis is amplified across the economy with housing a critical enabler of growth. This shortage of dwellings places additional pressures on the region's ability to attract and retain staff across the board. Driven by a combination of factors, including population growth, limited housing supply, rising construction costs and labour shortages, Australia's housing crisis is a multifaceted issue requiring interventions from all levels of government, the private sector and not-for-profit sector.

## ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

James Cook University is committed to meeting the needs of domestic and international students in Cairns. These students contribute to the regional economy and their work as professional graduates is an important factor in growing Cairns. Students require safe, affordable and appropriate housing.

The existing self-catered John Grey Halls student accommodation located on the Nguma-bada, Smithfield Campus is at capacity. John Grey Halls student accommodation is a 300-bed facility occupied by 60% domestic and 40% international students. In addition, other student accommodation providers are moving out of this student sector, leaving a critical shortage and further exacerbating the housing crisis in Cairns. These halls provide fit for purpose accommodation for students who would otherwise be forced to enter into the general housing market, directly impacting the limited supply available for residents.

To address the immediate housing needs of the Cairns region, James Cook University (JCU) has developed an initiative to deliver a 250-bed student accommodation facility, alleviating pressure on Cairns' rental market by releasing rentals currently occupied by students back into the general community, whilst also contributing to a more vibrant and dynamic precinct for Cairns.

This development requires capital funding of \$60m. It is proposed that this be funded jointly by federal and state governments, with contributions of \$25m each, and a contribution of \$10m from JCU. In addition, JCU will provide the land, intellectual capital, the governance structure, and project management team required to successfully deliver this project.

JCU has a proven track record in the delivery of significant capital developments including the recently (2022) completed \$55m, 400 bed Burrilga Yumba Student accommodation complex on the Bebegu Yumba campus in Townsville.

Augmenting existing designs for the recently completed student accommodation without the requirement for DA will allow JCU to fast track this project.



James Cook University student accommodation Cairns.



James Cook University student accommodation, Townsville.

## OPPORTUNITY

- Scarce freehold land available in Cairns
- Address immediate housing needs of Cairns and surrounds
- Increase Cairns' growth, economy and overall liveability
- Promote continued growth in the education sector and increase economic diversification as well as the compounding economic return from students studying and working in the city
- Positive reflection on Cairns as a student-friendly city and demonstrate commitment to education
- Supports JCU's recruitment and retention of a diverse student body through an improved living and study experience
- Promote diversity through a broad range of accommodation offerings, catering to different needs and preferences
- Supports recommendations of the *Australian Universities Accord*

## PROJECT STATUS

Capital funding of \$60m required to deliver the accommodation project.

Joint federal and state commitment of \$50m (50:50) sought. JCU will contribute the remaining \$10m. With government funding support, JCU can fast track this accommodation project.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian and Queensland Governments make a joint commitment of \$50m (\$25m each) towards capital funding for a student accommodation facility. James Cook University will support the project with a \$10m contribution towards capital funding in addition to supplying the land, intellectual capital, governance, and project management team required to successfully deliver this fast-tracked project.

<sup>1</sup> Real Estate Institute of Queensland (REIQ), "Low vacancy rates are the new normal, says REIQ", media release, November 4, 2024.

# EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Far North Queensland has a dynamic and vibrant education sector with two universities, six TAFE campuses, 35 secondary schools, and a number of private language and business schools. In 2022/23, more than 13,000<sup>1</sup> people were employed in Education and Training in FNQ, contributing \$915.4m to the local economy<sup>2</sup>. The region is shifting towards a knowledge-based economy, which has implications for educators and regional training facilities. To accommodate the shift, the sector has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure in recent years, and additional projects are flagged for investment.

With a strong student base now established, James Cook University and CQUniversity continue to play a vital role in capacity building and the knowledge economy in the region. Through collaborative partnerships and to address current gaps in education pathways, the two universities are working to build capacity across a range of industries and community initiatives.

## CQUNIVERSITY CAIRNS CBD CAMPUS

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

Since commencing on-campus delivery in Cairns in 2016, CQUniversity has experienced significant expansion. Now operating across four leased sites in the city, the University now requires new purpose-built facilities<sup>3</sup>. As part of CQUniversity's Community Impact Plan, a proposal to deliver a permanent, purpose-designed Cairns CBD campus was developed in 2019. At the original proposed scope, the new campus will provide expanded research capabilities, increase course offerings and increase CQU's capacity to engage more local students, supporting higher education pathways for students from low socio-economic and/or disadvantaged backgrounds. Through these objectives, CQUniversity aims to reinforce its commitment to the community, facilitate regional development, and provide diverse educational opportunities aligned with the evolving needs and workforce requirements of Cairns and its surrounding areas.

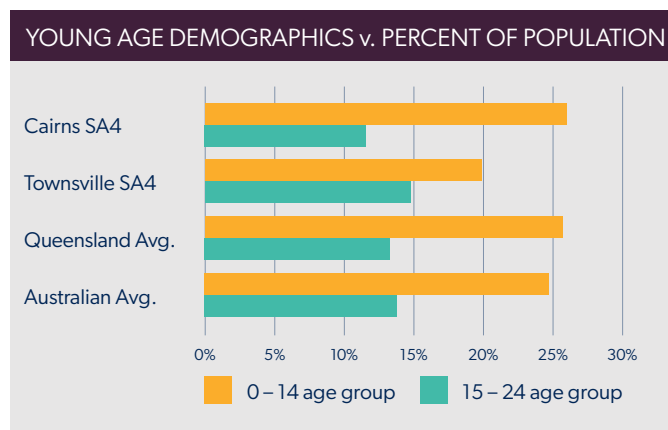
With an aim to provide improved access to tertiary education, increase skills development and boost liveability, the Australian Government delivered on its 2021 commitment to construct the new CQUniversity Cairns CBD campus by committing \$50m in the October 2022-23 Federal Budget<sup>4</sup>. As CQUniversity progresses through detailed design for this project, it is critical for all parties to continue their positive working relationship to ensure the full benefits of this project are delivered. The additional students this new campus will attract, and the additional graduates produced are not just vital for the FNQ region but important for the future productivity of the Australian economy, as identified by modelling undertaken by BIS Oxford Economics<sup>5</sup>, cited in the Australian Universities Accord Report, emphasising the need for significant increases in higher education qualifications:

*"Australian labour market demanded an additional 490,000 people with higher education qualifications in 2022. This is expected to grow to around an additional 696,000 higher education qualifications on average, per year, in the decade from 2042 to 2052. All in all, an additional 5.8 million people will need a higher education qualification in 2052, roughly doubling the number of people with a higher education qualification as the share of all jobs requiring a higher education is estimated to increase from 36% to 55% of the working population over that period."*

The Accord Interim Report's discussion on equity contributions to growth also noted that 53% of all of the sector's growth to 2035 is expected to come from Regional and Remote enrolments<sup>6</sup>. In order to meet this target, the expectation is that the sector will need to grow from its 2021 regional and remote enrolments by 89%, with expanding capacity in Cairns aligned with that expectation.

The proposed CQUniversity development of a new purpose-built campus will facilitate sustained growth and contribute to meeting the educational needs of the community.

At present in the Cairns region, a demographic disparity exists in comparison to other regions. This is evident in a lower population within the 15 to 24 age group when compared with the 0 to 14 age group. The expansion of university education is poised to significantly address this demographic imbalance.





CQUniversity Cairns CBD Campus artist render, 2024.

Analysis of Jobs and Skills Australia’s Internet Vacancy Index by the Regional Australia Institute (2022) shows that health-related professions such as medical practitioners and nurses are the most in-demand professions in regional Australia based on advertised vacancies, with the number of advertised vacancies for medical practitioners and nurses growing by 197% between December 2017 and December 2022. The analysis notes that vacancy rates for these professions in regional and remote Australia has consistently grown faster than in metropolitan Australia, and the scale of regional skills shortages in these professions was such that in many cases multiple regional employers were competing for the same applicant. As part of that analysis, Regional Australia Institute noted the following increases in vacancies in health-related professions in Far North Queensland between December 2017 and December 2022:

The data clearly shows a significant increase in demand for health-

HEALTH PROFESSION VACANCY IN FNQ			
Profession	Dec 2017	Dec 2022	Increase
Medical Practitioners and Nurses	200	432	116.0%
Health Diagnostic and Therapy Professionals	113	295	161.1%
Carers and Aides	213	344	61.5%

related professionals in Far North Queensland. The expansion of the University’s delivery of health-related courses in Cairns would directly address the region’s skills shortages in these and other related professions and contribute to improving healthcare provision across Far North Queensland communities.

## OPPORTUNITY

- Address significant skill gaps throughout the region, including allied and mental health, engineering and technology
- Revitalise the Cairns CBD
- Increase capacity to attract more equity students to study in Far North Queensland in line with the priorities identified under the *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*

## PROJECT STATUS

\$50m committed in October 2022-23 Federal Budget.

Since the original concept development in 2019, increases in materials and labour costs have resulted in an identified shortfall of \$37.5m.

CQUniversity has committed \$10m of its own funding towards the project, leaving a shortfall of \$27.5m.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government affirms its commitment to the delivery of the CQUniversity CBD Campus in line with the original scope, through a commitment of an additional \$27.5m, bringing the total federal government contribution to \$77.5m. This, combined with CQUniversity’s \$10m contribution, will ensure the full benefits are realised for Far North Queensland and the nation more broadly.

<sup>1</sup> economy.id, *Employment (total) by industry*, <https://economy.id.com.au/fnqroc/employment-by-industry>

<sup>2</sup> economy.id, *Value-added by industry sector*, <https://economy.id.com.au/fnqroc/value-add-by-industry>

<sup>3</sup> Bowles, Annabel. “CQUni’s push for new CBD campus picks up steam”. *Tropic Now*. October 14, 2020. <https://www.tropicnow.com.au/2020/october/14/cqunis-push-for-new-cbd-campus-picks-up-steam>

<sup>4</sup> The Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Arts, *Regional Ministerial Budget Statement 2022-23*

<sup>5</sup> BIS Oxford Economics (BIS OE), *Higher Education Qualification Demand: Preliminary Report* Produced for Department of Education [unpublished report], BIS OE, Sydney, April 2023

<sup>6</sup> DOE (Department of Education) (2023) *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*, DoE, Australian Government, accessed 8 November 2023. <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/accord-interim-report>

## GENERAL AVIATION

Cairns' General Aviation Precinct is a major contributor to the regional economy, and is home to more than 100 businesses including major maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) businesses, education and aeronautical skills training providers, freight consolidation services, tourism operators, and rescue and charter flights.

Cairns Aviation Skills Centre and CQUniversity produce highly skilled aircraft engineers and pilots who are then employed in well paid jobs in the local economy. These organisations are already delivering on some of the aspirations outlined in the recently released *Aviation White Paper – Towards 2050*. Together, they have the potential to deliver so much more with targeted support. The key themes are:

- Address industry demand
- Enhance safety
- Support workforce development
- Promote innovation
- Connecting regional Australia
- Regenerating general aviation

Far North Queensland's MRO sector is vital to the region's connectivity, servicing fixed wing and rotary aircraft that ply the Cape, Torres Strait, Papua New Guinea and the wider Asia-Pacific. These services ensure emergency and humanitarian aid as well as FIFO flights and provide critical connectivity to areas where it matters most.

## CESSNA CARAVAN SIMULATOR

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

The Cessna Caravan (C208) light aircraft is ideally equipped for versatile, remote operations in demanding conditions and is widely used across the region by a number of commercial operators. It is the most commonly used aircraft by Far North Queensland-based MAF International (MAF), the world's largest humanitarian airline and the proponent of the simulator.

The C208 aircraft provides critical access to remote communities which would otherwise be isolated. There are currently 152 registered in Australia, with more on the way, and close to 300 in the immediate region.

Pilot training currently takes place within aircraft in flight, allowing little room for pilot error in treacherous and remote terrain and unpredictable climactic conditions. The simulator provides a step change in sustainability for rural aviation, offering a unique carbonisation reduction opportunity. With more than 2600 of these aircraft currently in operation worldwide and an 18-month wait time on new units, the popular C208 airframe is resilient and will remain relevant for decades into the future, having been handpicked for development of full electric engine capability. Additionally, the widespread use of the C208 in challenging conditions has seen several incidents which have resulted in both human and capital loss. With some models carrying up to 12 passengers, the impact of one accident prevented far exceeds the implementation costs of the simulator.

By removing the need to conduct elevated risk training manoeuvres in the air, the simulator not only provides significant value in reducing in-aircraft training times, saving operators hours in maintenance, but also keeps aircraft online for operational use. Further, in the present context of pilot shortage, the simulator provides an opportunity to fast-track pilots towards industry readiness, enabling repeated

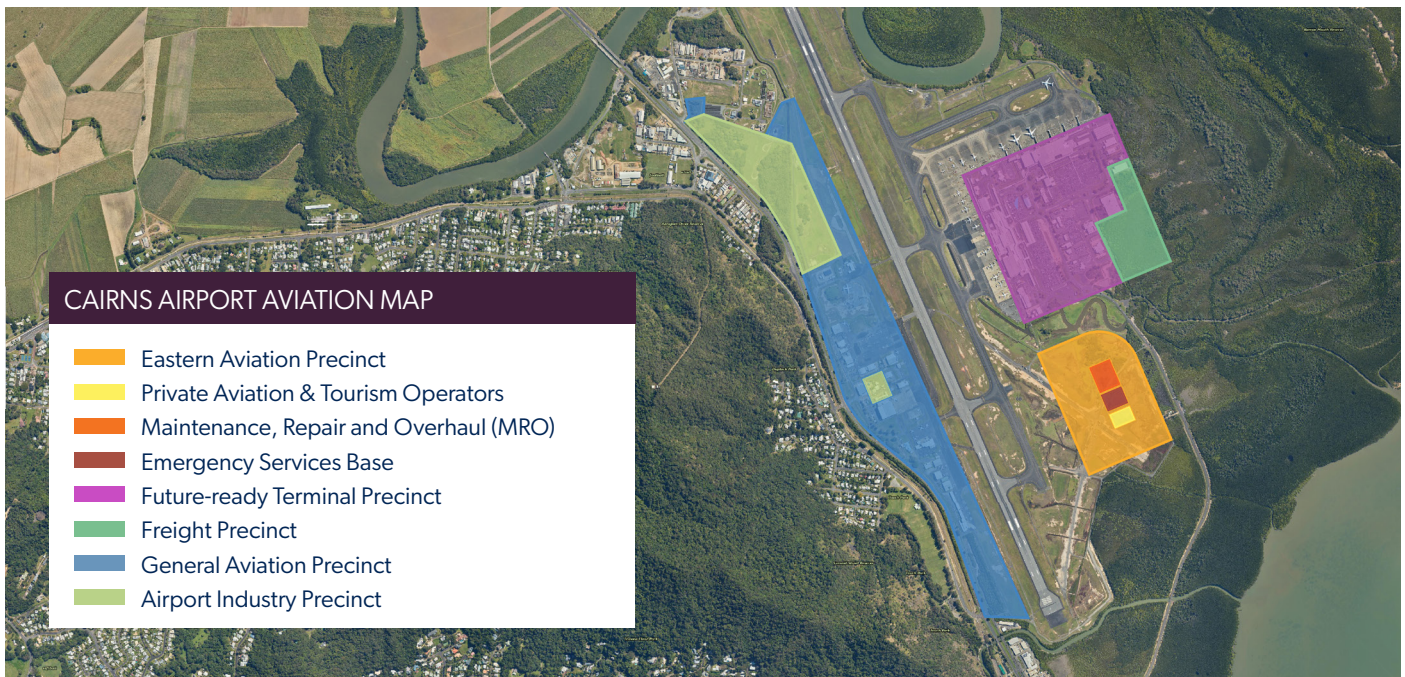
exposure to difficult operational scenarios that quickly develop pilot competency.

MAF estimates that greater than 60% of selected training can be migrated into the simulator, covering initial ratings and recurrent training. A reliable feature of rural aviation for decades to come, the C208 is an aircraft type commonly flown by less experienced pilots on a pathway towards airline careers. The simulator provides an environmentally sustainable base for improving safety in general aviation and providing valuable career skills that enable future growth in the Australian airline industry.

A Cessna Caravan simulator would be the first of its kind outside the United States and would provide a steady stream of new pilots prepared in a safe environment for unique regional conditions. It would also ensure that current pilots are upskilled on an ongoing basis. Together with the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre (CASC) and Aviation Australia, Australia's only Cessna Caravan simulator would cement Cairns as a national aviation training hub, complementing the pilot training offered through CQUniversity's aviation school.

The simulator would align with the training offered at the Queensland Government's Cairns Aviation Australia facility within the industry led CASC, and also attract pilot trainees from across the region, helping build capacity in the Pacific, particularly in Papua New Guinea (PNG) where MAF is currently expanding its training offerings for new pilots, under its Mareeba flight school – the only offshore flight school accredited by CASA PNG. In addition, MAF has a long-standing pilot training program through its operations in East Arnhem Land and hopes to further expand its Indigenous training program.





Establishing Australia’s first Cessna Caravan full flight simulator in Cairns and cementing the region’s position as a premier aviation training hub, requires a capital investment of \$8-10m from the Australian Government. This investment would unlock the opportunity to accelerate the implementation of this asset by years, bringing critical safety outcomes and alleviating pilot shortages without delay. MAF International has committed to ensuring the success of the project by covering costs associated with all operating expenses, estimated to be in excess of AUD\$1m p.a., including support, maintenance, administration and logistics staff and device and facility maintenance. The Australian Government Office of Impact Analysis rates the Value of Statistical Life (VSL)<sup>1</sup> at \$5.4m per individual, meaning that the value proposition of this investment is beyond question, making the success of this project a key commitment of MAF International.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of Impact Analysis. 2023. *Value of statistical life*. <https://oia.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/value-of-statistical-life.pdf>

## OPPORTUNITY

- Australia-first Cessna Caravan full flight simulator, cementing the Far North as a premier aviation training hub
- Significant potential to establish Cairns as the national hub for pilot training for the Cessna Caravan, in partnership with the Queensland Government’s Aviation Australia at the CASC
- Introduce new standards of safety and enhanced pilot training for pilots who typically service rural and remote parts of Australia, PNG and the Pacific
- Free up aircraft for commercial, humanitarian and emergency use in the region
- Train and build capacity throughout Indigenous communities, as well as PNG and the Pacific (adopting a model similar to the current Pacific Maritime Security Program and the Pacific Maritime Training Services program delivered in Cairns at the TAFE Great Barrier Reef International Marine College)

## PROJECT STATUS

The lack of access to simulator training for Cessna Caravan pilots is limiting critical commercial and humanitarian services and creating material safety risks. Investment of \$8-10m required.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government commits \$8-10m towards establishing Australia’s first Cessna Caravan full flight simulator (to be operated on a common user model) to ensure safe training across commercial and humanitarian sectors, establishing the city as the only such centre for specific pilot training across Australia and the wider Asia-Pacific.

# GENERAL AVIATION



## AVIATION MAINTENANCE TRAINING CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE AND HANGAR

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

Through the establishment of a state-of-the-art Aviation Maintenance Training Facility, Cairns could cement itself as the premier location in North Queensland for aeronautical skills training and as a key base for aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO).

The General Aviation sector is the backbone of the broader aviation industry, providing Australia with the skills, innovation and expertise required to grow the industry and train the next generation of aviation professionals<sup>1</sup>. There is a significant shortage of key aviation workers, including pilots, flight instructors, aircraft maintenance engineers and engineer instructors, directly preventing the aviation industry from growing to meet demand, and creating additional pressure on the existing workforce. This trend is set to continue with increased demand forecast throughout the industry, resulting in international competition for skills, and further exacerbating the already disproportionate impact workforce shortages have on both regional areas and general aviation across Australia.

With the vision for the future of Australia's aviation workforce to be diverse, highly skilled and responsive, Cairns is already positioned to provide clear pathways for training for both pilots and aircraft maintenance engineers. Situated at the airport and aligned closely to industry, the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre and CQUniversity can support the growth of under-represented populations within Australia's aviation sector – First Nations people, women and students from non-English speaking backgrounds – by providing relevant training and support required to meet increased demand through the establishment of an Aviation Maintenance Training Facility.

The Aviation Maintenance Training Facility would bridge the current and projected shortage of skilled aviation engineers and pilots through increased comprehensive and contemporary training that meets industry standards and prepares graduates for immediate employment, particularly with the co-location of a new fit-for-purpose common use hangar. This proposed state-of-the-art Facility would provide students with direct practical experience whilst enabling current MRO operators to expand operations.

The new hangar would provide capacity for three mid-sized jet aircraft (Boeing 737 or Airbus A320) to be maintained simultaneously.

This additional capacity would also provide Far North Queensland with the opportunity to capitalise on the significant demand for regional jet maintenance with about half of the fleet currently maintained overseas. Although regional jets can access cheaper international maintenance providers, airlines with high asset utilisation prefer to have jets maintained domestically to reduce downtime. As the only regional airport in Australia with international capacity to attract new customers, Cairns possesses two highly capable MRO operators currently working at capacity, but willing and able to expand if maintenance infrastructure were available. As a direct result of the constrained infrastructure, an estimated \$15m in business was lost to the region in the past 12 months alone. These MRO operators do not have the resources to individually invest in the large structures required to make a step-change in the size and type of aircraft that they maintain.

 **\$88M** ECONOMIC VALUE ADDED<sup>2</sup>

The general aviation sector contributed over \$88m overall, with the latest data showing that Cairns' aircraft MRO sector added \$36m in value-added output to the regional economy.

 **913** SKILLED AND PROFESSIONAL JOBS

MRO and training facilities accounting for ~ 700 employees, 372 of whom are dedicated to MRO services alone.

 **25+** APPRENTICESHIPS ANNUALLY

The MRO and training facilities offer a steady stream of apprentices, providing critical training and career pathways in both trades and highly skilled professional roles.



In response to the growing demand for aircraft MRO, aviation maintenance professionals and the need to enhance safety and operational efficiency in the aviation industry, government support is sought to deliver a state-of-the-art Aviation Maintenance Training Facility. This facility will serve as a hub for technical education and hands-on training, equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge required to excel in aviation maintenance roles.

### FACILITY FEATURES

- **Training aircraft and equipment:** real-world aircraft and advanced maintenance equipment for hands-on training, supported by industry for industry.
- **Classrooms and simulation labs:** modern classrooms and simulation labs equipped with the latest technology to provide theoretical knowledge and practical experience.
- **Workshops and technical labs:** dedicated spaces for practical exercises and technical skills development including a world-leading Composite Centre of Excellence which not only supports aviation but also maritime industries.
- **Instructor offices and administrative areas:** facilities for faculty and administrative functions, ensuring smooth operations and support for students.
- **Safety and compliance areas:** designed to meet industry safety standards and regulatory requirements.

Work on Cairns Airport's new Eastern Aviation Precinct is underway with the Airport investing an initial \$40m to deliver new aircraft stands and enabling infrastructure. The new Eastern Aviation Precinct is the ideal location for the Aviation Maintenance Training Facility that can meet required demand, keep business in the region and attract new highly skilled jobs to Far North Queensland.

Importantly, this facility would also underpin the stated strategic importance of northern Australia to the nation's interests as laid out in the Australian Government's Defence Strategic Review. This would see that the region's aviation infrastructure is sufficiently robust and scalable. Regional investment to deliver improved infrastructure at Cairns Airport would result in increased support for Defence into the future and can support rapid deployment and resupply in times of need – a regional focus area highlighted within the *FNQ Regional Infrastructure Plan*<sup>3</sup>.

A federal government investment of \$50m is sought to support the infrastructure development of this critical project.

### OPPORTUNITY

- **Workforce development:** address industry shortages through skilled and non-skilled job creation, attraction and retention; increase employee diversity, new career pathways, apprenticeships and program offerings in regional Australia
- **Expand regional training facilities:** establish a leading training facility known for excellence and innovation, ensuring FNQ is at the forefront of aviation and maritime technology, strategic readiness and capacity building
- **Enhanced safety and resilience:** improved maintenance practices, contributing to higher safety standards; supports disaster resilience
- **Economic growth and impact:** support 100 jobs during construction; increased operational efficiency; deliver long-term benefits to the local community by offering study, training and work opportunities in Cairns; attract investment across the general aviation sector maximising commercial uptake alongside Cairns Airport's initial \$40m investment in the new Eastern Aviation Precinct

### PROJECT STATUS

Federal government investment of \$50m is required to develop a state-of-the-art Aviation Maintenance Training Facility to ensure the required training can be undertaken to support a future skilled workforce for the aviation industry and drive growth in Australian aviation at a time of critical workforce shortage and the increasing strategic importance of the North.

### RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government invests \$50m to deliver a state-of-the-art Aviation Maintenance Training Facility within the Cairns Airport Eastern Aviation Precinct. The Facility would encompass a 10,000m<sup>2</sup> hangar which is to be operated under a common user model incorporating Cairns Aviation Skills Centre as the proponent, with ownership of the Facility to revert to the state of Queensland.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, *Aviation White Paper – Towards 2050* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Cairns Airport, *Economic Assessment & Airport Census*, September 2022.

<sup>3</sup> State of Queensland, Department of State Development and Infrastructure, *Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan*. 2024.

# THE LEADING DESTINATION FOR WOMEN'S SPORT IN AUSTRALIA

Cairns is ambitiously positioning itself as a vibrant hub for women's sports in its quest to become the leading destination for women's sports in Australia. This vision is part of an innovative strategy to enhance the region's profile and drive economic development through sports tourism and community engagement.

The relocation of the North Queensland Cowboys NRLW Program, along with the construction of the Cairns Community, Development and High Performance Centre (CDHPC), will help realise this vision by securing the first national women's sporting team for the Far North. This initiative will bring significant economic benefits, create jobs, and enhance community wellbeing.

Cairns Regional Council has unveiled a bold vision to position the Cairns Region as the leading destination for women's sport in Australia. The CDHPC will address the current lack of High Performance training facilities in the Far North region along with supporting the promotion and attraction of professional women's sporting teams.

## CAIRNS COMMUNITY, DEVELOPMENT AND HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRE

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

The Cairns Community, Development and High Performance Centre (CDHPC) is an important development for the Cairns Major Events Precinct. The Cairns Major Events Precinct is a strategic parcel of land covering an area of approximately 26 hectares located less than one kilometre from the Cairns CBD, adjacent to Barlow Park Stadium and across the road from the Cairns Showgrounds. The precinct is comprised of a number of component parts which together, provide a strong foundation to further develop the site as a major events precinct of national significance in the lead up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The CDHPC at West Barlow Park will complement the ongoing upgrades at Barlow Park and elevate Cairns' position as a hub for athletes, teams, and events.

Cairns is perfectly positioned to harness this vision which also benefits our neighbours in the Pacific. By leveraging significant sporting infrastructure, the international airport, ample accommodation options, attractive climate and geographic location, we can cement the city's position as the preeminent destination for women's sport in Australia and expand the ability to host major sporting events in Cairns in the near future.

The CDHPC will house both the Cowboys NRLW and Northern Pride squads.

The 4,000m<sup>2</sup> CDHPC will include:

- High-Performance Centre for the Cowboys and Northern Pride's programs in the NRLW, Q-Cup and other associated competitions.
- New administration workplace areas for both organisations, including meeting room spaces available for community access and use.
- A wet recovery area that can also be used for community use for hydrotherapy or early childhood learn-to-swim classes.
- An indoor field that can be used by the Cowboys and Northern Pride squads but also for managed use by community and school groups.
- Elite training for Queensland Academy of Sport and Pacific Nations athletes.
- Touring, travelling and tropical elite training facility.
- Third party Allied Health, Sports Medicine and Sports Science tenancies.
- Community training field.
- Hospitality spaces such as a cafe a small function room.

The CDHPC requires capital funding of \$30m. It is proposed that this be funded jointly by the federal and state governments, with a contribution of \$15m each. In addition, the North Queensland Cowboys will operate the facility and will commit \$10m in funding for operational and administrative costs providing a sustainable foundation into the future.



Womens North Queensland Cowboys

## OPPORTUNITY

The economic impact of these initiatives is significant, not only during construction but also in the future.

### Construction of the CDHPC:

- \$34.7m in output for the Cairns LGA
- \$12.5m contribution to GRP
- 89 FTE jobs

### Ongoing operations of the NRLW team and the CDHPC:

- \$12.6m contribution to the Cairns LGA economy annually
- \$5.9m contribution to annual GRP
- 62 FTE jobs ongoing
- Cement the region's reputation as the preeminent destination for women's sport in Australia
- Build the region's reputation as a sporting and events destination (including for high performance training), thereby delivering jobs and economic growth through increased visitation
- Enhance health and wellbeing outcomes through increased community participation in a variety of sports
- Build athlete capability and capacity in the lead up to, and beyond the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Increase public amenity and activation of a key site located within close proximity to the Cairns CBD
- Enhance liveability which positively contributes to workforce attraction and retention

### Additional social and economic outcomes:

- Enhanced health and wellbeing: Establishment of a world-class, high-performance training facility
- Enhanced community connectivity and pride: Promotion of positive role models
- Reduced crime and anti-social behaviour: Expansion of the Cowboys Community Foundation programs, including initiatives addressing domestic violence
- Major Events Precinct: Alignment with Cairns' vision to attract more sporting events and promote economic growth
- Education and research: Partnership opportunities with local tertiary and vocational educational institutions

## PROJECT STATUS

Design for the CDHPC has been completed and is awaiting development approval. Capital funding of \$30m required to deliver the project.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian and Queensland Governments make a joint commitment of \$30m (\$15m each) towards capital funding of the Cairns Community, Development and High Performance Centre. The North Queensland Cowboys will support the project with a \$10m commitment in operational and administration costs providing sustainability into the future.

# FOOD AND WATER SECURITY

Water and food security have become priority national policy issues on the back of record drought periods in Australia, as well as disruption to supply chains through COVID-19 and recent flooding events. The ability to meet increased demand for fresh Australian produce from Far North Queensland is at major risk due to the lack of a long-term water implementation strategy. Agricultural exports are vital to FNQ with the industry sector output currently valued at \$2bn<sup>1</sup>, constrained mainly by factors such as irrigation and access to market. Urban demand also continues to increase with Cairns' population growth averaging 1.9% per annum over the past 10 years<sup>2</sup>. This, combined with a long-running history of three million tourists visiting FNQ annually, means an effective and multi-faceted water supply strategy is required to ensure the growing needs of the region can be met.

## LAKELAND IRRIGATION AREA SCHEME

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Tropical North has completed a detailed business case for development of the Lakeland Area as a significant irrigated agricultural area. The business case was funded from a \$10m grant under the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund (NWIDF).

Expansion of the currently irrigated 1,800ha area is limited due to a lack of adequate and reliable water. The preferred project includes a 296,000ML dam to irrigate up to 10,000ha of identified high quality land, taking one percent of outflow of the Mitchell River to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The scheme will directly generate up to \$382m p.a. in agricultural production with an increase of up to \$213m p.a. in Gross Regional Product (GRP). The scheme would also significantly contribute to population growth and boost Cook Shire economic productivity, with up to \$300m in additional GRP.

Bilateral government support is now required to progress the development approval processes for the project, support a proponent through the detailed design stage (including funding through the National Water Grid Authority) and accelerate the review of the Mitchell River Water Resource Plan to provide for the required water.

### OPPORTUNITY

- Contributes to food security through a significant expansion of irrigated agriculture in FNQ
- Provides major economic opportunities to deliver transformational change to the Cape York Peninsula, addressing generational disadvantage
- Provides a pathway to Indigenous engagement through the Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation and 'on country' presence
- Provides opportunities for population migration to regional areas of FNQ

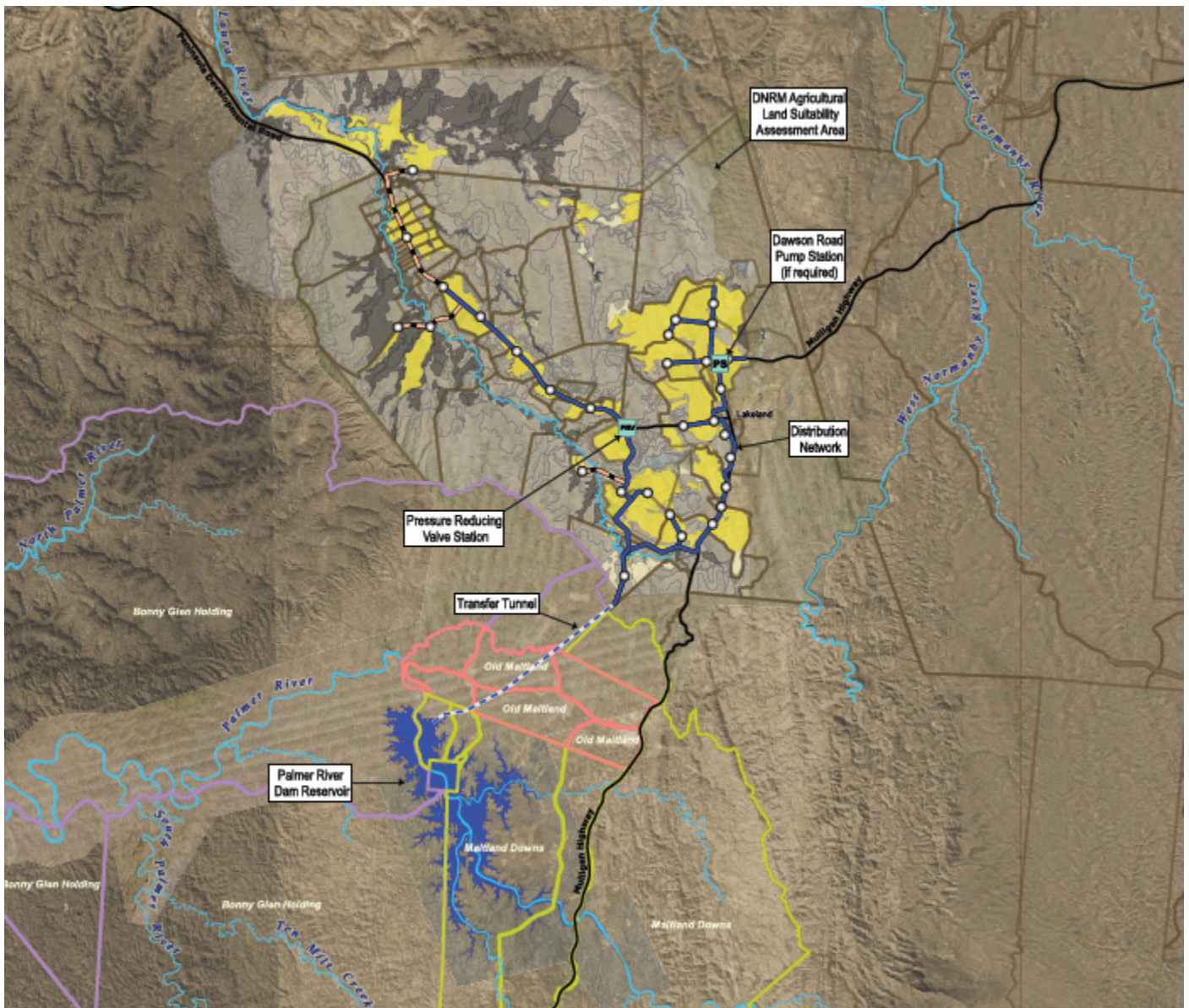
### PROJECT STATUS

The Detailed Business Case is with the Australian Government. While the capital costs are notable, implementation of the scheme in line with previous agricultural schemes with significant government contribution to construction, will make the scheme affordable and realise the substantial identified benefits.

### RECOMMENDATION

The Australian and Queensland Governments work together to facilitate and coordinate the development approval processes for the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme Project through formation of an independently chaired Mobilisation Group to include representatives of government at state and federal level as well as representatives of the local council of Cook Shire, the Western Yalanji peoples and the Lakeland growers. The purpose is to solve several significant issues including:

1. Acknowledgement that development of Lakeland irrigation to its fullest extent be recognised as a catalytic strategic initiative for economic development of regional Queensland and Cape York Peninsula.
2. A commitment to provide the necessary water from the Mitchell catchment through a new Water Plan.
3. Resolution of proposed funding split between Government and private sources to allow determination of one or more project proponents and to provide certainty for farmers about their funding and fee contributions.
4. That the Australian Government gives due consideration to funding the detailed design stage of the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme.
5. The Lakeland Area be declared a precinct with established development rules around environmental protection and urban and rural development, based on a regional basis (not individual landholder basis).
6. Flexibility with the CAPEX payback period from growers (e.g. =>100 years)



LAKELAND IRRIGATION AREA SCHEME MAP<sup>3</sup>

**LEGEND**

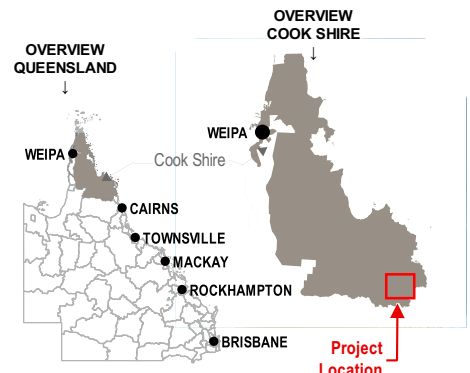
- Major Watercourse Lines
- Watercourse Areas
- Major Road
- Water Supply Scheme Components**
- Palmer River Dam Reservoir FSL 401.0m
- Adopted Supply Nodes
- Pump Station (if required)
- Pressure Reducing Valve Station
- Stage 1 Distribution Network
- Stage 2 Distribution Network
- Transfer Tunnel (from Palmer River Reservoir)
- Properties

**Property Boundaries of Interest**

- Maitland Downs
- Old Maitland
- Bonny Glen Holding

**DNRM Agricultural Land Suitability Assessment**

- DNRM Agricultural Land Suitability Assessment Area
- Agricultural Land Class A | Regulated Vegetation Non-remnant
- Agricultural Land Class B | Regulated Vegetation Non-remnant
- Agricultural Land Class A | Regulated Vegetation Remnant



<sup>1</sup> economy.id, *Total exports by industry sector - FNQROC*, <https://economy.id.com.au/fnqroc/exports-by-industry?BMID=25>

<sup>2</sup> Cairns Regional Council, *Geography & population*, <https://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/experience-cairns/facts-figures-history/geography-population>

<sup>3</sup> Regional Development Australia Tropical North, *Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme*, <https://www.rdatropicalnorth.org.au/our-projects/lakeland-irrigation-area-scheme/>

# CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Far North Queensland is particularly susceptible to the risks of climate change with rising sea temperatures leading to bleaching of the iconic Great Barrier Reef, more intense tropical cyclones, record rainfalls reshaping major river systems and other extreme weather events wreaking havoc on vital infrastructure such as road networks, health systems and key transport infrastructure such as our domestic and international airport, regional airports and seaports. The economic and social cost of the dislocation in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Jasper alone, emphasised the importance and urgent need to employ climate adaptation strategies across Far North Queensland. The wettest cyclone on record, Tropical Cyclone Jasper underscored the region's unique vulnerability to climate risk, isolating the major population centre of Cairns in all directions, as major road networks were rendered impassable, and the Cairns Airport was temporarily closed. The disruption extended to vital infrastructure Cairns Hospital preparing for possible patient relocation after vital water treatment services were impacted – and resulted in over 10,000 insurance claims lodged.

Some flood victims are yet to return to their homes almost a year later as the region braces for another cyclone season with predictions of storms of greater intensity, bringing with them more rainfall. This submission covers three areas: coordinated planning, insurance, and sustainable aviation fuel. These challenges require a suite of urgent interventions to address the obstacles we currently face and to ensure not just the region's economic resilience but the sustainability of our communities, our towns and our major city, Cairns.

## DISASTER RESILIENCE

### FNQ ECONOMY AND SUPPLY CHAIN

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT, KENNEDY

The record-breaking flooding associated with Tropical Cyclone Jasper highlighted Far North Queensland's economic, transport and infrastructure vulnerabilities. With significant primary impacts in the tourism, aviation and agricultural sectors, the event temporarily left the region's major population centres of Cairns and Port Douglas isolated with all major roads cut off.

Beyond the immediate flooding, major longer-term damage occurred to vital transport linkages to the north, west and south-west of Cairns city, including all four range roads between Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands (Palmerston Highway, Gillies Range Road, Kuranda Range Road and Mossman Mount Molloy Road). The Kuranda Range Road, remains at risk of serious disruption in future events and is regularly subject to closures due to weather events and accidents at other times.

The primary route between Port Douglas and Cairns (Captain Cook Highway) re-opened in a limited capacity six weeks after the flood event and remains impacted by multiple single lane closures. Meanwhile, the Palmerston Highway, the only B-double route connecting the coast to the agricultural region of the Tablelands, suffered significant damage with an entire section of the road sinking 2m and shifting 2m sideways.

Far North Queensland's landscapes and river systems have been permanently altered, meanwhile coastal communities, assets, and river catchments have suffered significant damage. The impacts on critical infrastructure including water storage, treatment and supply systems, secondary road networks and the region's major domestic and international airport and general aviation precinct in Cairns have been well-documented.

With experts and insurance models predicting a greater risk of more frequent, intense weather events in Far North Queensland (including cyclones, floods, droughts and heatwaves), the region requires a more effective approach to planning for and building a more climate resilient future and economy.

To address these challenges, a renewed approach to regional economic planning and associated land use and infrastructure planning is recommended, presenting a major opportunity for the region to both secure its future and to realise its true potential. A failure to take advantage of recent events by not adequately planning leaves us even more vulnerable to increasing extreme weather.

A key element of the region's sustainability is the ability to attract investment. It is critical that such planning provide clear signals to the investment community about areas that are open for development and, equally, in an area rich in unique environmental values, those that are not.

### OPPORTUNITY

- Build a more climate resilient future and economy
- Reduce vulnerability to natural hazards
- Utilise the resources and unique insight of all three levels of government
- Begin to address significant budgetary pressures associated with disaster recovery
- Build investor confidence in renewable energy projects
- Support Australia's potential to become a renewable energy superpower





## PROJECT STATUS

FNQ and Cape Regional Statutory Plans have been significantly advanced but not yet released.

Explicit Commonwealth and State government support sought for Advance Cairns, Regional Development Australia Tropical North and the Regional Organisations of Councils (supported by James Cook University) to commence work with senior Deputy Secretaries (Treasury and DITRD&C) and Directors General (State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Treasury), to co-design such a visionary and collaborative regional-planning approach.

## RECOMMENDATION

To deliver a more visionary and whole of Far North Queensland region approach to economic, land use and infrastructure planning, a commitment is sought to establish a formal, place-based and trilateral partnership arrangement between the Commonwealth, State and our Regional Organisations of Councils.

## INSURANCE AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY 2025 CYCLONE REINSURANCE POOL REVIEW

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT, KENNEDY

An increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters driven by rising sea temperatures is a phenomenon being faced worldwide, creating significant challenges for governments, insurers and communities. Australia is no exception, being particularly vulnerable due to its vast and disaster-prone regions, especially those across northern Australia, including the largest population base in Far North Queensland. As the impacts of climate change continue to intensify, so do the rising costs associated with natural disasters, making it increasingly challenging for insurers to provide affordable coverage, leaving some communities with insurance that is technically available, yet financially out of reach.

The introduction of the Cyclone Reinsurance Pool (CRP) was a significant step towards addressing the affordability and availability of insurance across northern Australia. In September 2024, the ACCC's (Australian Competition & Consumer Commission) third insurance monitoring report highlighted the CRP had begun delivering lower insurance premiums for some consumers, although noted that savings were being offset by various factors impacting insurance markets, including extreme global weather events<sup>1</sup>.

The evolving nature of these extreme weather events driven by the impacts of climate change<sup>2</sup>, has raised concerns surrounding the CRP coverage period, currently providing coverage for cyclone and flood related damage up to 48-hours post the declared end of a cyclone. While the 2024 *State of the Climate* report projects a reduction in frequency of tropical cyclones, it highlights a greater intensity of those that do occur, amplified through an expected increase in rainfall, combined with higher sea levels. These trends are already manifesting, as seen in December 2023 with Tropical Cyclone Jasper and the record-breaking rainfall in the wake of its downgrade to a tropical low. This damage, caused beyond the current 48-hour coverage period, renewed debates surrounding the adequacy of the CRP coverage period.

Sure Insurance, a major regional Queensland insurance provider, has reported that an extension of the current CRP window of coverage from 48 to 168-hours would enable the provision of household insurance premium savings to its Cairns and Far North Queensland policyholders.

It is Advance Cairns' view that such a complex issue with a variety of consequences should undergo thorough evaluation. As the Cyclone Reinsurance Pool is due for review this year (2025), it is recommended that the period of coverage feature as a core component of the 2025 review, with a comprehensive assessment into the potential impacts associated with any extension to the 48-hour claims period to take place as part of that process.

The CRP, in conjunction to a range of other initiatives, such as the critical research undertaken by the James Cook University (JCU) Cyclone Testing Station (delivering an estimated \$60.9bn in economic savings), are instrumental in addressing the challenges of insurance affordability and availability, and bolster the ability of Far North Queensland, and northern Australia more broadly, to respond to the rapidly changing climate.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Competition & Consumer Commission, *ACCC Insurance monitoring report, 2024*

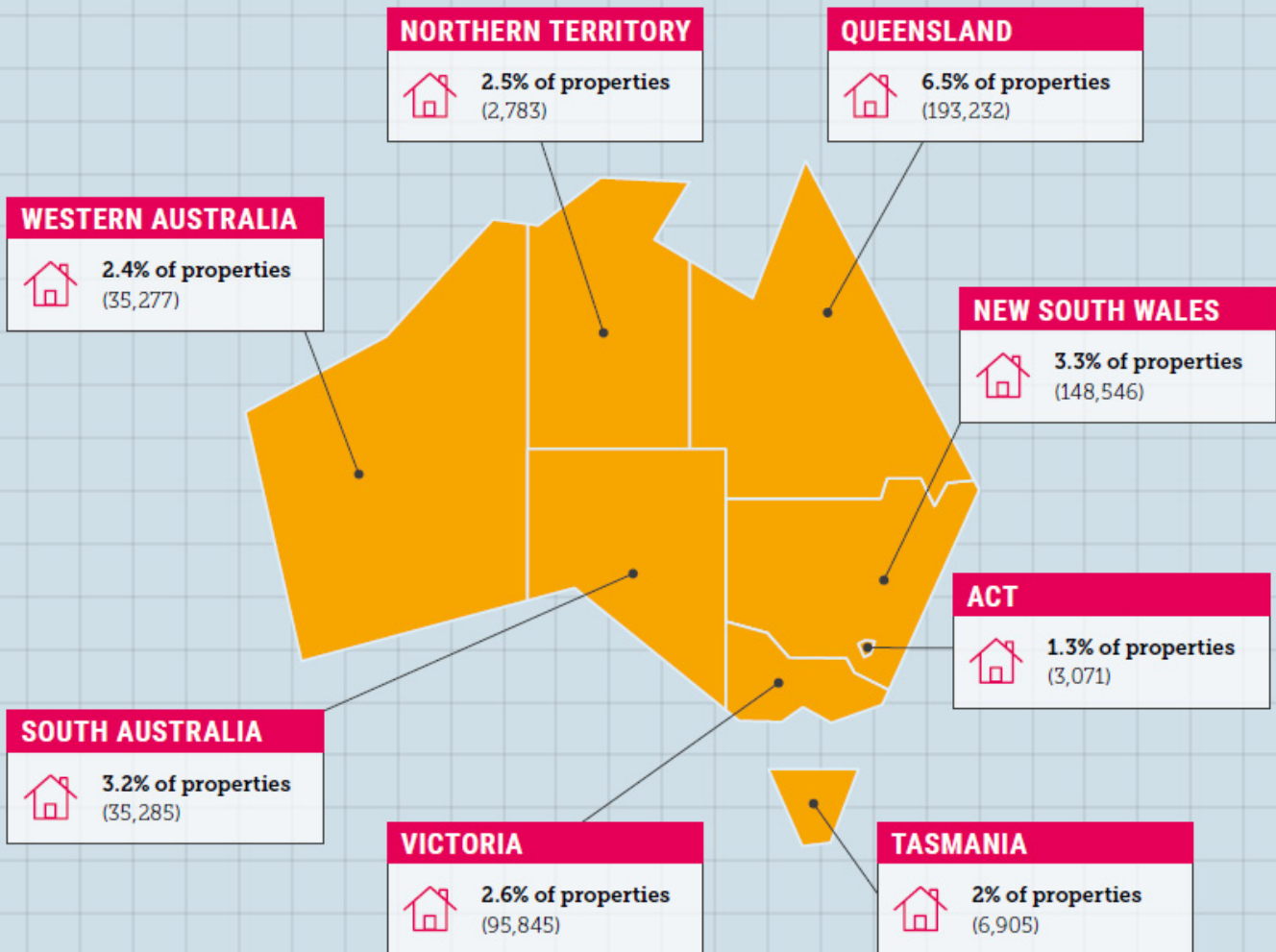
<sup>2</sup> The Bureau of Meteorology & CSIRO, *State of the Climate, 2024*

<sup>3</sup> The Climate Council of Australia, *Uninsurable Nation: Australia's most climate-vulnerable places, 2022*

### OPPORTUNITY

- Assess the impacts associated with an increased claims period
- Ensure the CRP remains fit-for-purpose, meeting its intended function – to lower insurance premiums for households and small businesses with high cyclone and flood related damage
- Work towards improved insurance affordability and availability, putting downward pressure on premiums
- Enhance the capabilities of the JCU Cyclone Testing Station
- Potential to better reflect the extended nature of tropical cyclones
- Acknowledge the evolving risk profile of tropical cyclones
- Proactive action to mitigate financial risks associated with climate change

## PERCENTAGE OF HOMES IN AUSTRALIA THAT WILL BE EFFECTIVELY UNINSURABLE BY 2030



THE CLIMATE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA: RANKINGS BY STATE AND TERRITORY<sup>3</sup>

### PROJECT STATUS

The Cyclone Reinsurance Pool is due for review this year (2025).

As part of the review – the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia is scheduled to hold a public hearing into the Cyclone Reinsurance Pool on Friday, 7 February 2025.

Commitment sought to ensure the extension of the claims period (48-hour period) will feature as a core component of the upcoming review.

### RECOMMENDATION

As part of the 2025 review into the Cyclone Reinsurance Pool, the Australian Government commits to undertaking a comprehensive assessment into the impacts associated with any extension to the 48-hour claims period, ensuring the CRP remains fit for purpose as climate risk evolves.



## SCALING AUSTRALIA'S SUSTAINABLE AVIATION FUEL INDUSTRY

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT, KENNEDY (NATIONWIDE)

Aviation is integral to the Australian social and economic fabric, connecting Australians to each other and to the world, while also unlocking international markets and facilitating economic growth across the country. With air travel demand set to grow, the sector faces significant challenges on its path to net-zero. Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is central to addressing this challenge and the absence of policy incentives in Australia puts the nation at risk of missing its opportunity to create and foster a domestic SAF industry.

With its rich agricultural resources, Far North Queensland has significant potential to play a key role in the bioenergy space, however the current regulatory framework requires refining and targeted policy support to underpin the development of the industry, signal demand and build investor confidence.

The aviation sector currently accounts for about 2.5% of the world's global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions<sup>1</sup> with Australia the second biggest emitter of carbon per capita on domestic air travel<sup>2</sup>. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates that SAF could contribute roughly 65% of a reduction in emissions required by the industry to achieve net-zero by 2050<sup>3</sup>. In 2022, more than 300 million litres of SAF was produced globally, equating to only 0.1% of total jet fuel demand<sup>2</sup>. Qantas, Australia's largest carrier, has alone committed to the purchase of 500 million litres of SAF by 2030. A 65% reduction in emissions across the industry will require a forecasted 450 billion litres of SAF annually by 2050 – in short, a vast increase in production from a standing start.

Global and domestic industry demand for SAF is evidently strong, however high capital costs, variable feedstock supply and limited policy support risks acting as a deterrent to the investment required to encourage the development and uptake of a SAF industry, preventing Australia from capitalising on this opportunity.

Strong regulatory mandates are already in place around the world with most airlines and countries with SAF commitments mandating 10% usage by 2030 to drive demand. Japan is among one of the leaders in this space, adopting a 10% SAF mandate by 2030 for all international flights using Japanese airports.

Policy support would too, see the added benefit of mitigating risks associated with national fuel security – a prominent concern worldwide, but particularly in Australia. With an increasing focus on bolstering our sovereign capability and initiatives to support fuel security, supported by major policy levers such as the *Future Made in Australia* policy, the SAF industry presents an enduring solution to national fuel security.

To capitalise on these benefits, meaningful, strategic policy support is required. A stable regulatory environment, financial support to bolster the establishment of the industry and a target for industry to work towards would enable the nation to dramatically reduce emissions, stimulate economic growth and job creation, reduce reliance on imported fuels and, importantly, signal stability and certainty to the investor community. If Australia fails to act, we risk losing our high-quality biomass to offshore production, increasing our reliance on international markets, and forfeiting skilled jobs, technology and capital investment. In Far North Queensland, a well-established generational sugar industry would provide the feedstock for SAF, complementing sugar production. This would bolster the sugar industry which has been in decline due to the high volumes of cane land required which have been impacted through competing land use.

As well, one of the byproducts of SAF (ethanol production) is green diesel which would provide a solution to the region's marine fleet's push to find a solution to decarbonise. Each year, the fleet takes more than two million domestic and international tourists out to the Great Barrier Reef which has been significantly impacted by rising sea temperatures. The industry's commitment to sustainable tourism is evidenced through the provision of high-quality reef restoration and rehabilitation tourism experiences. Currently, those tourists experience the reef via diesel-powered vessels. The establishment of a refinery in the Tropical North to produce SAF from sugar cane while deriving green diesel in the process would significantly accelerate the tourism industry's path to decarbonation and further aim to protect the World Heritage listed reef. This would deliver a truly circular regional economy while at the same time provide a steady base of regular income for sugar producers and their families helping to offset large cyclical market fluctuations.



## OPPORTUNITY

- Opportunity not only for Far North Queensland but for Australia to take a leading position globally in the production of Sustainable Aviation Fuel
- Provide government support critical to capitalise on the Australian renewable fuels industry opportunity
- Increase sovereign capability and reduce reliance on imported fuels
- Deliver emissions reduction to the most emission-intensive transport sector in Australia
- Increase economic benefits to the agricultural sector
- Increase production of renewable diesel and provide an opportunity to further decarbonise (marine reef fleet, generator use in rural and remote communities)
- Harness the experience and insight of key industry and aviation stakeholders who bring deep understanding drawn from global experience (Brazil, for example) and sector knowledge who are well-advanced in pursuing this energy transition opportunity for the region and for the nation

## PROJECT STATUS

Without the establishment of initiatives to support the industry, Australia risks squandering its opportunity to capitalise on the opportunity the SAF industry presents – strategic benefits in economic development, job creation, innovation, fuel security and green diesel by-product.

Domestic policy intervention is required to catalyse the opportunity in order to develop a sound, stable regulatory framework to provide investor certainty.

Significant insight and preparatory work has been undertaken at various stages along the supply chain and is now gaining momentum, driven by global and domestic demand.

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), *Sustainable Aviation Fuel Roadmap*, 2023

<sup>2</sup> JetZero, *Submission on the Commonwealth Government Aviation Green Paper*, 2023

<sup>3</sup> International Air Transport Association, *SAF Deployment*, 2023

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government commits to catalysing the development of Australia's Sustainable Aviation Fuel industry through:

1. The development of a comprehensive stable regulatory environment to provide investor certainty;
2. Financial incentives to establish the Australian industry; and
3. Steady implementation of targets to increase uptake of Sustainable Aviation Fuel for industry to work towards.

This policy support, in addition to deep, productive and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders including biofuels producers, the aviation sector and potential investors is essential to establish this nascent industry.

# REEF AND RAINFOREST

The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef are two of the planet's most biologically diverse ecosystems. These irreplaceable natural wonders provide essential biodiversity, economic, cultural and ecosystem services. However, both are at risk due to climate change, pollution, biosecurity threats and unsustainable practices. Long-term investment in transformative programs aimed at addressing these risks is essential to ensure the resilience of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef, bolstering Australia's global leadership in environmental protection and sustainability and protecting a vital economic driver for the economy of Far North Queensland.

## GREEN CONNECTIONS

### REGENERATING THE WET TROPICS FORESTS TO SECURE A RESILIENT FUTURE FOR BIODIVERSITY, ECONOMY, AND CLIMATE

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT, KENNEDY

The Wet Tropics is the only place in the world with two interconnected World Heritage Areas - the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Forests, an ancient landscape with links to prehistoric times. These natural assets underpin the region's tourism industry, which attracts 2.7m visitors annually and contributes \$4.6bn to the regional economy<sup>1</sup>.

The Wet Tropics Forest provides direct, indirect and non-use ecosystem services estimated to be worth more than \$5.2bn annually<sup>2</sup> in 2014-15, equivalent to \$6.6bn today and supporting over 13,000 jobs. However, management expenditure versus visitor-generated income, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is the second-lowest<sup>2</sup> of the 16 World Heritage Sites in Australia yet creates the largest economic impact<sup>3</sup>. In addition to generating tourism revenue, the Wet Tropics Forests provide essential ecosystem services such as water filtration, pollination for agriculture, flood reduction, and cooling urban areas, which reduce cost of living pressures. If this 'free' asset was a dam<sup>4</sup>, over \$100m would be allocated annually for routine maintenance, and additional investment would be provided for significant upgrades or repairs.

Despite its undeniable value, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is confronting the escalating threats of development, biosecurity and climate change, which jeopardise its future.

#### GREEN CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

The Green Connections Program proposes a large-scale rainforest regeneration effort to address these threats and enhance resilience by reconnecting large areas of fragmented habitat and removing pests and weeds. The program aims to regenerate 20,000 hectares of crucial forest habitats over 25 years by prioritising efforts in high-value biodiversity areas and revitalising unproductive agricultural land. The program will also incorporate market-based mechanisms such as carbon farming and biodiversity credit schemes. Local communities, farmers, private landholders, and Indigenous groups will benefit and be integral to the program's success, ensuring that cultural and ecological values are preserved, and the region continues to prosper.

The program has been designed through collaboration with trusted partners and stakeholders, including Rainforest Aboriginal Traditional Owner groups. Key elements include:

- 1. Strategic Planning:**  
Targeting high-priority areas using science-based methods.
- 2. Maximising Impact and Minimising Risk:**  
Leveraging existing investments and proven results.
- 3. Capacity Building:**  
Increasing skills and capability to deliver large-scale restoration efforts.
- 4. Investment and Incentives:**  
Attracting significant financial investments through market-based mechanisms.
- 5. Measurable Outcomes:**  
Monitoring and verifying restoration progress as well as impact.
- 6. Scientific and Traditional Knowledge:**  
Integrating scientific evidence and Indigenous ecological knowledge.



Seedling nursery, Terrain NRM

## OPPORTUNITY

The Green Connections Program promises significant returns across multiple areas including:

### Economic Benefits:

- Preservation of natural assets valued at over \$6.6bn/yr.
- New jobs created in rural communities.
- Opportunities for income diversification for landholders.

### Social and Community Benefits:

- Empowerment of Indigenous communities and opportunities for Traditional Owners to work on country, especially youth.
- Increased climate resilience, contributing to future-proofing community infrastructure.
- Improved property health and productivity for landholders through supporting sustainable land use practices.

### Environmental Benefits:

- Carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change.
- Improved water quality benefitting the Great Barrier Reef.
- Enhanced resilience of the Wet Tropics to climate change.
- Habitat protected for endangered and iconic species including the cassowary.
- Greater landscape connectivity to enable wildlife movement (and migration due to climate change).

### National Conservation Goals:

- Contribution to Australia's 30 by 30 target, which aims to protect 30% of land and marine areas by 2030, aligning with global biodiversity conservation goals.
- Contribution to the *Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032* to protect, manage and restore Australia's threatened species and important natural places.

## PROJECT STATUS

Terrain NRM, the Wet Tropics Management Authority and Wet Tropics Restoration Alliance have developed the Green Connections Program, which is ready to scale.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government commit to an initial investment of \$20m in 2025-26, increasing to \$100m annually (indexed to inflation) in equally staged increments over five years, as part of a 25-year ongoing commitment. This investment will support the regional economy, enhance biodiversity and cultural values, generate economic benefits, and contribute to national and global conservation objectives.

<sup>1</sup> Tourism Tropical North Queensland, *Tropical North Queensland National Visitor Survey & International Visitor Survey*, June 2024

<sup>2</sup> Wet Tropics Management Authority, *State of Wet Tropics Report 2014-15: Economic Value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area*, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Gillespie Economics and BDA Group, *Economic Activity of Australia's World Heritage Areas – Final Report*, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Jacobs Australia, *Investing in the Great Barrier Reef as economic infrastructure*, 2016

## INCREASING THE RESILIENCE OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF A 25-YEAR COMMITMENT

ELECTORATE(S): LEICHHARDT, KENNEDY

### THE GLOBAL IMPORTANCE OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

The Great Barrier Reef (the Reef) is the world's largest coral reef system, spanning over 2,300 kilometres and supporting thousands of species. Its ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration, coastal protection, and provision of fish habitats, are vital for local communities and global biodiversity. The Reef also holds deep cultural significance for Indigenous communities. Economically, the Reef is valued conservatively at over \$68bn<sup>1</sup> today, and contributes over \$6bn annually to the Australian economy, supporting over 64,000 jobs in tourism, fishing, and research industries. If the Reef was a built infrastructure project, such as a dam<sup>2</sup>, over \$1bn annually would be allocated for maintenance, and additional investment would be provided for major upgrades or repairs. In recent years, the Australian Government has significantly increased investment in the Reef and moved to a nine-year \$1.2bn funding model, the largest ever investment. However, a fully funded long-term commitment to delivering on the Reef 2050 plan is required.

Recent reports show the Reef is suffering continued deterioration, with some areas experiencing irreversible damage. We risk losing this unique and valuable asset without a long-term sustained investment program.

### THE REEF 2050 PLAN: A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The Reef 2050 Plan outlines strategies for improving water quality, addressing climate change, protecting biodiversity, and promoting sustainable use. Implementing the plan effectively to achieve these goals requires sustained and long-term funding.

### OPPORTUNITY

Infrastructure projects typically receive long-term rolling funding to ensure sustainability. Implementing a similar 25-year investment plan with a rolling five-year works program would address the Reef's challenges in several key areas:

#### 1. Climate Change Adaptation:

Rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification are a significant threat to coral health and biodiversity. The Reef 2050 Plan includes strategies to increase the Reef's resilience.

#### 2. Water Quality and Pollution:

Poor water quality caused by sediment, nutrient and pesticide runoff, plastic pollution, and coastal development stresses the Reef further. Long-term investment would ensure ongoing momentum in improved land management practices, wastewater treatment, and infrastructure.

#### 3. Ecological Health and Biodiversity:

Conservation efforts like expanding marine protected areas, coral regeneration, monitoring, and habitat protection are vital.

#### 4. Economic Resilience and Job Creation:

The Reef's declining health threatens industries like tourism and fishing. A 25-year investment plan would provide economic stability, investor confidence, job creation in restoration and research and secure livelihoods for dependent communities.

#### 5. Global Leadership in Environmental Protection:

A 25-year plan would show leadership and enhance Australia's global environmental reputation.

#### 6. Indigenous Community Engagement:

Indigenous communities have deep cultural ties to the Reef. Sustained investment to empower them in conservation efforts would ensure they benefit from sustainable management, creating pathways for economic prosperity and cultural preservation.





## PROJECT STATUS

A strategic investment for future generations: The Great Barrier Reef is at a critical juncture and the Australian Government must act now to safeguard its future with a 25-year investment plan aligned with the Reef 2050 Plan.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Australian Government commits to:

- A 25-year investment plan to implement the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan with a rolling minimum five-year fully-funded work program.
- Strengthen the collaborative partnership between State and Commonwealth agencies and increase investment in place-based initiatives tasked with protecting and restoring the Reef to ensure a coordinated long-term investment program that drives transformative change for the Reef's future.

<sup>1</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *At what price? The economic, social and icon value of the Great Barrier Reef*, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs Australia, *Investing in the Great Barrier Reef as economic infrastructure*, 2016





**ADVANCE  
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2025-26 FEDERAL BUDGET SUBMISSION