

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2022-2026 PROGRESS UPDATE FOR THE PERIOD 1 JULY 2025 TO 30 JUNE 2026, AND ENDORSEMENT OF NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2026-2030

ED&A | 58/6/3 | #7884105

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

- 1) Notes the progress of delivery of the Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 during the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026;
- 2) Endorses the new Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030; and
- 3) Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Nil.

Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report consists of two components:

1. The progress made against the Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026; and
2. The recommended endorsement of the new Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030.

Component 1

The Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 (EDS2026) was endorsed by Council in November 2021 to provide a framework for Council's support for economic development in Cairns. This report provides a summary of the progress made against each of the four pillars of the EDS2026 in the reporting period from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

Key highlights relating to EDS2026 delivery during that period are summarised in the Comment section of this report with further detail included at Attachment 1.

Significant progress has been made towards achieving strategy targets and objectives with the annual value (Gross Regional Product) of the Cairns economy growing to \$12.86 billion, an increase of 15% on the June 2020 baseline.

Component 2

The proposed new Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 (EDS2030) has been iteratively developed during the 2025/26 financial year and includes the following three pillars underpinning economic development:

1. Priority Industries
2. Strategic Economic Precincts
3. Strategic Economic Initiatives

These three pillars are supported by the Pathways for Economic Development, which are thematic groupings of the actions that will support strategy implementation. The proposed new strategy is included at Attachment 2 and is recommended to Council for endorsement.

BACKGROUND:

This Council report is structured into two components.

Component 1: Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026

The *Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026* (EDS2026) was endorsed by Council on 10 November 2021 and has provided the framework for Cairns Regional Council's (Council) support for economic development in Cairns. The EDS2026 aligned directly with Focus Area 1 (Robust Economy) of Council's *Corporate Plan 2025-2030*, as it did with the previous *Corporate Plan 2021-2026*. The four pillars of the EDS2026 were:

1. **Priority Industries/Sectors:** Arts and Culture, Aviation, Construction, Education and Training, Healthcare and Social Assistance, Manufacturing, Marine and Defence, and Tourism.
2. **Geographic Areas of Focus:** City Centre, FNQ Health and Innovation Precinct, Cairns Airport Precinct, Portsmith Marine Precinct, Smithfield Precinct, Southern Cairns Precinct, Gordonvale and Babinda.
3. **Economic Initiatives:** Smart Green Economy, Innovation, Research and Development, Small Business Support, International Relations and Trade, Investment Attraction, Indigenous Business Support, Choose Cairns, Advocacy, and COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience.
4. **Major and Economic Events:** Event Prioritisation Strategy, Event Identification and Attraction, Event Partnerships, Event Delivery Support, Event Performance Assessment, and Event Portfolio Management.

Three ambitious targets were set in the Strategy. They were:

1. Cairns to become a \$13 billion per annum economy, measured by Gross Regional Product (GRP), by 2026.
2. 15,000 new jobs to be created in Cairns by 2026; and
3. For the region to become a recognised leader in the Smart Green Economy.

This report provides a final progress update on the EDS2026 delivery including highlights against each of the four pillars and a status update on the Strategy's three key targets.

Component 2: Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030

Given the update to Council's Corporate Plan (through to 2030) and the upcoming expiry of Council's existing economic strategy in 2026, Officers have implemented a process to develop the new Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 (EDS2030). The proposed new strategy has been developed through an iterative process which began in June 2025 and included detailed economic analysis and stakeholder consultation undertaken by economic advisory firm Conus Business Consultancy Services, a series of Councillor workshops, internal reviews and analysis.

The engagement with Conus Business Consultancy Services to undertake various economic analyses and stakeholder engagement resulted a report outlining key recommendations and considerations. This report formed a significant part of the evidence base informing the strategy development, alongside additional inputs such as the *Our Cairns* survey findings, Councillor feedback, and internal analyses and consultation.

This report provides an overview of the components of the proposed new EDS2030, attaches that strategy and recommends to Council for endorsement.

COMMENT:

Component 1: Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 (EDS2026) Progress Update

Targets

Table 1 on the following page provides an update on progress against each key target outlined in the EDS2026. Due to the time lag in relevant economic data being published, the latest data available with respect to the GRP and jobs targets is for the period to 30 June 2025, noting that 2025/26 data, which will show the complete progress against the 2026 targets below, will not be available until May 2026.

Table 1 – Summary of progress towards targets

#	Target	Result	Comment
1	Cairns to become a \$13 billion per annum economy, measured by Gross Regional Product (GRP), by 2026. ¹	GRP \$12.86 billion (year to 30 June 2025). ²	The latest data provided by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) shows Cairns' economy is \$12.86 billion as of June 2025, which is a \$1.7 billion (15%) increase from the June 2020 baseline of \$11.15 billion. This increase also represents 91% of progress towards the \$13 billion target. ³
2	15,000 new jobs to be created in Cairns by 2026. ⁴	8,248 new jobs created between 30 June 2020 and 30 June 2025. ⁵	Cairns has 88,958 jobs as of June 2025, which is an 8,248 (10%) increase in jobs from the June 2020 baseline of 80,710 jobs. ⁶ This increase also represents a 55% of progress toward the increase of 15,000 jobs. This target was always ambitious, but key factors likely impacting the lower jobs figures include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 legacy disruptions and associated slow and incomplete international tourism recovery. • Tropical Cyclone Jasper in December 2023. • Housing challenges and associated constraints on workforce growth. • Skilled and seasonal workforce shortages. • Interest rate rises and inflationary pressures.
3	Cairns to become a recognised leader in the Smart Green Economy.	Progress achieved.	Since 2021, Cairns has established a strong foundation toward its Smart Green Economy aspirations, with a dedicated strategic framework, active project portfolio and several national firsts, including Australia's first fully electric tourism coach fleet established by Tropic Wings, and a pioneering biodiversity market mechanism in Terrain NRM's Cassowary Credit, which is unique to the region. While full recognition as a national leader is still emerging, the building blocks are firmly in place, and Cairns is increasingly positioned to convert its natural competitive advantages into a globally distinctive smart green economy. <i>N.B. An action to continue progressing the smart green economy concept is included in the new EDS2030.</i>

¹ To be measured against the 30 June 2020 GRP baseline as per Council report dated 10 Nov2021.

² Economy .id Key Statistics

³ GRP for Cairns for the y/e 30 Jun 2020 was revised up from \$10.23B to \$11.15B in subsequent updates.

⁴ To be measured against the 30 June 2020 jobs baseline as per Council report dated 10 November 2021.

⁵ Economy .id Local Jobs

⁶ Note the number of jobs for Cairns as of 30 June 2020 has revised down from 81,036 to 80,710 in subsequent updates.

Highlights

A detailed schedule setting out the progress made in EDS2026 implementation during the period 1 July 2025 projected to 30 June 2026 is included in Attachment 1 of this report. It is noted that in addition to Council's Economic Development and Advocacy Directorate, a number of other Council Directorates have either led or contributed to specific EDS2026 outcomes. This recognises the importance of strong collaboration across the various aspects of Council's operations for successful Strategy implementation.

Highlights of EDS2026 implementation during the period 1 July 2025 projected to 30 June 2026 are as follows:

Cross-cutting all areas

- **Disaster Recovery** – Finalisation and reporting of the economic actions in the Tropical Cyclone Jasper Flooding Event Recovery Plan.
- **Economic Development Strategy Development** – Council engaged Conus Business Consultancy Services to undertake economic analyses and stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the proposed new Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030.
- **Towards 2050 Growth Strategy** – Council's *Towards 2050: Growth Strategy* was endorsed in September 2025. This strategy sets out the community's expectations for the next 25 years and ensures Cairns remains one of the most liveable and sustainable cities in Australia.
- **Development approvals** – During the reporting period Council has processed 1,104 development applications and referral agency responses (at the time of writing).
- **Local procurement** – \$463 million (89%) of Council's total expenditure for 2024/25 was spent locally, with an economic impact (direct and indirect) of \$1.1 billion. This local expenditure creates and sustains local jobs and supports local businesses and industry. Council's direct expenditure creates a ripple effect (indirect impacts) through linkages with other businesses from workers spending money in Cairns and generating additional, or indirect, economic activity.

N.B. Council's local procurement for 2025/26 is not yet known but will be published in an updated State of Procurement report in the coming months.

Priority Industries/Sectors

- **Resource and Performance (R&P) Agreements** – Council has continued to work with strategic partners via R&P Agreements with industry groups including Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Study Cairns, and Super Yacht Group Great Barrier Reef to support the Tourism, International Education, and Maritime sectors respectively. Council Officers work closely with each to monitor outcomes delivered against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) contained in each R&P Agreement. Council also has a sponsorship agreement with Cairns Chamber of Commerce to support small business and similarly, Council's Advance Cairns membership has facilitated close collaboration on advocacy priorities and other economic development initiatives.

- **Film Liaison** – Council’s newly appointed Film Liaison Officer facilitated approximately 50 filming and photography projects, including Black Snow, Selling Houses Australia, and Getaway. Ongoing collaboration with Screen Queensland, local filmmakers and industry stakeholders continues to strengthen Cairns’ reputation as a film friendly destination.
- **Industry and Economic Development Fund (IEDF)** – Council awarded an IDEF grant to the Australian International Marine Export Group (AIMEX) to support the 2025 Cairns Maritime Jobs & Careers Expo through the development of collateral to promote maritime careers.
- **Keeping businesses updated with timely information** – Council’s monthly e-news update is distributed to approximately 38,500 subscribers. The e-news update features the latest news relevant to business, upcoming Council procurement opportunities, upcoming business events and workshops, key statistics and links to further information. Council also distributes a digital welcome pack to new businesses registered in Cairns each month, with key information to help new businesses get started.

Geographic Areas of Focus

- **Babinda** – Council continued strategic partnerships with the Babinda Visitor Information Centre and the Babinda District Community Association (Babinda Taskforce) via R&P Agreements which are aimed at leveraging local partnerships, knowledge and community passion to generate economic development outcomes for Babinda.
- **City Centre** – Council endorsed a 10-year trustee lease with Westshell Pty Ltd to keep the Reef Eye on the Esplanade.
- **Marine Precinct** – Council’s City Safe Program has expanded to provide CCTV monitoring across Ports North Managed areas, including the marina fingers, as well as targeted security patrols during peak periods.
- **Smithfield** – Successful delivery of the Cairns Rainforest Rumble mountain bike event in May 2026, which also featured the finale of the UCI Oceania Continental Series in both downhill and cross-country Olympic (XCO) disciplines.

Economic Initiatives

- **International Relations** – Council engaged the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) to undertake an opportunities analysis of Cairns’ Pacific engagement.
- **Smart Green Economy** – Two additional case studies were developed to showcase projects which are aligned to the two of the three opportunity areas identified in earlier stages of the project. The two additional case studies, and their alignment with the opportunity areas, are as follows:
 - Net Zero Energy Systems.
 - Electric Coach Fleet – Tropic Wings
 - Biodiversity and Carbon Markets
 - Russel River Catchment and Seascape Sustainability Plan – Jaragun EcoServices.

And an additional Case Study was undertaken to showcase our Learning Institutions, CQUniversity and James Cook University’s research and innovation capability.

Delivery of a promotional campaign also took place during 2025/26 to promote the region, including brand, website, and case studies.

- **Small Business Support** – Council partnered with the Queensland Government Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business to deliver the Meet the Buyer event in 2026. The event facilitated over 220 individual speed meetings between 11 large buyers and over 44 small business suppliers as part of the broader Queensland Government’s Cairns Small Business Expo.
- **Indigenous Business Support** – Council, together with the Queensland Department of Trade, Employment and Training, the Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business, the Department of Women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Multiculturalism, the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, and Planning, and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce, delivered an Indigenous Small Business Connect event in Cairns as part of Indigenous Business Month. The event attracted over 80 representatives, including strong representation from local First Nations-owned businesses, and engaged 24 exhibitors.
- **International Relations and Trade** – Council hosted visits from international delegates from Mongolia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

Advocacy

- **Priority Development Area Mount Peter** – Coordinated advocacy for, and successful declaration of, a Priority Development Area (PDA) and secured joint Australian and Queensland Government funding for the Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor, including \$220 million in grants from State and Federal Governments (50/50) and an \$80 million Federal concessional loan for housing-enabled infrastructure.

Major Events

- **Major Events program** – There were 14 events sponsored during the reporting period (July 2025 – June 2026). These events delivered an estimated \$28 million in economic impact (direct and incremental) through primary purpose (event related) visitation to the region.

Component 2: Proposed new Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 (EDS2030)

Targets

The proposed new EDS2030 has two headline targets, which are:

1. Grow the economy by \$1.5 billion (2025 data as baseline)
2. Create 10,000 new jobs (2025 data as baseline)

These targets have been informed by economic analysis undertaken by Conus Business Consultancy Services and feedback from key stakeholders.

Three pillars of EDS2030

The EDS2030 is underpinned by three pillars of economic development, which are:

1. **Priority Industries** – Whilst Council remains committed to supporting broad economic growth across all sectors, the EDS2030 prioritises particular industries because of their strategic contribution to local jobs, future economic growth and prosperity, and long-term economic resilience. The identified priority industries relevant to the Cairns Local Government Area (LGA) include Aviation, Construction, Education and Training, Healthcare and Social Assistance, Marine and Defence and Tourism with Agriculture and Mining also highlighted given their regional significance and wider flow on economic benefits.
2. **Strategic Economic Precincts** – These large-scale strategic precincts are distinct locations with committed investment that will build economic momentum, create jobs, strengthen confidence, and support sustained economic growth and diversification across the region.
 - Cairns Aviation Precinct
 - Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct
 - Cairns Major Events Precinct
 - Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct
 - Cairns South Development Precinct
3. **Strategic Economic Initiatives** – Council delivers a range of discrete economic initiatives that either respond to a particular community need or aim to realise economic benefits from a strategic opportunity. These initiatives fall into two categories (below) and the nature and breadth of delivery will depend on the particular circumstances/need and Council's own resource and budget capacity. The two categories are:
 - Place-Based Initiatives
 - Targeted Interventions

It is noted that the Place-Based Initiatives category accommodates a range of place-based initiatives and interventions outside the Strategic Economic Precincts which aim to support economic outcomes in particular communities and/or discrete geographies such as the Cairns City Centre, Gordonvale and Babinda (where existing initiatives are already delivered and where additional initiatives may be considered) or Smithfield and Palm Cove (where potential interventions are expected to be considered during the term of the EDS2030).

Pathways for Economic Development

The Pathways for Economic Development (Pathways) articulate how Council will support the three pillars of the EDS2030. The Pathways are thematic groupings that bring together related actions under a common strategic focus. Each Pathway represents a distinct avenue for economic growth and activity, allowing Council and its partners to coordinate efforts, allocate resources effectively, and track progress in a coherent and meaningful way. Together, the Pathways form an integrated

roadmap for delivering on the EDS2030's vision for the Cairns economy. The five Pathways are:

- Pathway 1: Investment Attraction and Promotion
- Pathway 2: Strategic Precincts and Land Use
- Pathway 3: Major Events and Visitor Economy
- Pathway 4: Business Support, Innovation, and Local Economy
- Pathway 5: Engagement, Collaboration, and Resilience

Success will be measured by progress against the headline targets of growing Cairns' Gross Regional Product by \$1.5 billion by 2030, the creation of 10,000 jobs over this period, and the individual measures in the Pathways for Economic Development action plan.

It is proposed that a report be presented to Council each year for the duration of the EDS2030 tracking delivery of the actions included therein as well as progress made towards achieving the strategy targets. This annual report will also provide Council with the opportunity to consider what changes (if any) should be made to the strategy (or the associated action plan) to take account of changing circumstances and ensure the strategy remains 'fit for purpose'.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (recommended):

That Council:

- 1) Notes the progress of delivery of the Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 during the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026;
- 2) Endorses the new Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030; and
- 3) Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above.

Option 2:

That Council notes the progress of delivery of the Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 during the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026 but **does not** endorse the Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 at this time.

Option 3:

That Council **does not** note the progress of delivery of the Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 and **does not** endorse the Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 at this time.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

There are a range of risks that may impact the successful implementation of the EDS2030 including macroeconomic factors (such as inflation, interest rates, global fuel security) over which Council has limited direct influence. The prevalence of these risks and their potential impact on the Cairns economy changes from time to time. As noted in the Comment section of this report, the annual report to Council on strategy progress also provides an opportunity for the strategy to be updated/revised to adapt to this changing risk profile if/as necessary.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The EDS2026 has provided, and the EDS2030 will continue to provide, a framework for Council to support economic development in Cairns. The economic outcomes associated with EDS2026 implementation are outlined in the body of this report.

The implementation of the EDS2026 (and development of the proposed new EDS2030) has been undertaken within the Operational Budget allocation for the year ended 30 June 2026.

In addition, allowances have been made in Council's Operational Budget for the year ended 30 June 2027 to support the implementation of the actions relevant to that year as outlined in the strategy. Action in subsequent financial years remain subject to Council's annual operational planning and budgeting processes.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

Both the EDS2026 and EDS2030 align with both the current *Cairns Regional Council Corporate Plan 2025-2030* Focus Area 1: Robust Economy.

The *Update of Council's Economic Development Strategy ensuring alignment with Council's new Corporate Plan* was a key action in Council's Operational Plan for the year ending 30 June 2026.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 - Summary of outcomes of the *Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026*: 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026

Attachment 2 – Draft Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030



Nick Masasso
Director Economic Development and Advocacy

**Attachment 1 – Summary of outcomes of the Economic Development Strategy
2022-2026: 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026**

Priority Industries/Sectors	Outcomes
Crosscutting across all industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of reporting for the economic actions in the Tropical Cyclone Jasper Flooding Event Recovery Plan. • Engaged Conus Business Consultancy Services to undertake economic analyses and stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the new Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030. • Updated the Priority Industry Profiles, which can be found on the Council website. • Monthly e-news update to businesses with over 38,500 subscribers. • Monthly digital welcome pack for new businesses. • Regular officer engagement with key stakeholders across all priority industry/sectors. • Local procurement – \$463 million (89%) of Council’s total expenditure for 2024/25 was spent locally, with an economic impact (direct and indirect) of \$1.1 billion. <i>N.B. Council’s local procurement for 2025/26 is not yet known but will be published in an updated State of Procurement report in the coming months.</i>
Arts and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council established a dedicated Film Liaison Officer to support screen industry activity across the region. • This new liaison service facilitated approx. 50 filming and photography projects, including major productions such as <i>Black Snow Season 3</i>, <i>Selling Houses Australia</i>, <i>Married at First Sight</i>, <i>Outback Truckers</i> and <i>Getaway</i>, alongside locally produced content including SBS’s <i>Taste of the Tropics</i>, Season 2. • Ongoing collaboration with Screen Queensland, local filmmakers and industry stakeholders continued to strengthen Cairns’ reputation as a film-friendly destination while supporting opportunities for regional screen industry growth and investment. • The <i>Understory Film Festival</i> attracted 1,490 attendees to the Tanks Arts Centre in November, delivered in partnership with Cairns Regional Council and the Queensland Government. It also delivered professional development, industry networking, youth development pathways and touring outcomes, while engaging eight businesses and creating 28 jobs.
Aviation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge sharing and provision of data for key stakeholders. • Ongoing collaboration with Cairns Airport regarding the Smart Green Economy Collective Working Group. • Council engaged the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) to undertake an opportunities analysis of Cairns Pacific engagement, inclusive of Aviation training.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors and key staff toured the Airport's new Eastern Aviation Precinct, CQU training facilities, and General Aviation precinct in August 2025 to gain a greater understanding of new facilities and capabilities.
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated advocacy for, and successful declaration of, a Priority Development Area (PDA) in the Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor. • Facilitated Coordinator General to update Councillors regarding the Cairns South State Development Area (SDA) in February 2026. • Continued engagement with Economic Development Queensland and the Office of the Coordinator General to progress both PDA and SDA. • Implementation and review of Council's <i>Development and Investment Incentive Support Policy</i>.
Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued work with Study Cairns through an R&P Agreement to deliver International Education outcomes. • Supported Study Cairns' facilitation of an inbound visit from the Consul-General for Indonesia and the Indonesian Consul for Economic Affairs. • Continued collaboration with James Cook University (JCU), CQUniversity (CQU), and TAFE Queensland through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to promote closer collaboration between Council and each respective organisation. <i>N.B. further information can be found in progress reports for each MOU.</i> • Council engaged the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) to undertake an opportunities analysis of Cairns Pacific engagement, inclusive of Aviation, and Maritime and Defence training. • Ongoing collaboration with JCU and CQU regarding the Smart Green Economy Collective Working Group.
Healthcare and Social Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing engagement with representatives of both the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service and JCU regarding the Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct. • Councillors and key staff toured James Cook University's new Yeinie Building (formerly the Cairns Tropical Enterprise Centre) in March 2026 to gain a greater understanding of new capabilities.
Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing engagement with the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development's Cairns Manufacturing Hub. • Continued work with Superyacht Group Great Barrier Reef (SYGGBR) through an R&P Agreement to deliver super yacht visitation and Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) outcomes. <i>N.B. SYGGBR's merger with Superyacht Australia, this R&P will cease as of 30 June 2026.</i>
Marine and Defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued work with Superyacht Group Great Barrier Reef (SYGGBR) through an R&P Agreement to deliver super yacht visitation and Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO)

	<p>outcomes. <i>M.B. SYGGBR's merger with Superyacht Australia, this R&P will cease as of 30 June 2026.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing engagement with Superyacht Australia to consider co-contribution to their Brisbane 2032 superyacht attraction project, the intention of which will have visitation and MRO related outcomes. Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders to support the sector. • An Industry and Economic Development Fund (IEDF) grant of \$15,000 was awarded to the Australian International Marine Export Group (AIMEX) to support the 2025 Cairns Maritime Jobs & Careers Expo and associated collateral to promote maritime careers year-round. • Ongoing collaboration with Ports North regarding the Smart Green Economy Collective Working Group. • Council engaged the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) to undertake an opportunities analysis of Cairns Pacific engagement, inclusive of Maritime and Defence training.
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued work with Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) through an R&P Agreement to progress destination marketing and visitation outcomes. See TTNQ's annual progress report for more information. • Continued work with Superyacht Group Great Barrier Reef (SYGGBR) through an R&P Agreement to deliver super yacht visitation and Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) outcomes. <i>Noting SYGGBR's merger with Superyacht Australia, this R&P will cease as of 30 June 2026.</i> • Council support for major events with a total economic impact (direct and incremental) estimated at \$28 million in the reporting period.⁷ These events drive overnight visitation and build the destination profile. • Sponsorship of the TNQ Tourism Excellence Awards 2025 (Chair's Award for Excellence).
Geographic Areas of Focus	Outcomes
Crosscutting across all areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's <i>Towards 2050: Growth Strategy</i> was endorsed in September 2025. This strategy sets out the community's expectations for the next 25 years and ensures Cairns remains one of the most liveable and sustainable cities in Australia. • Implementation and review of Council's <i>Development and Investment Incentive Support Policy</i>. • There were 1,104 development applications and referral agency responses "decided" in the 25/26 FY (at the time of writing). • Delivery of the Design Futures Forum: Living Tropical on 18 June 2026.
Babinda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued work with Babinda Visitor Information Centre through an R&P Agreement to support visitation outcomes. • Continued work with Babinda Taskforce through an R&P

⁷ Some data for events held in 2026 is yet to be finalised and therefore the estimated economic impact is subject to change pending finalisation of this event data.

	<p>Agreement to supported economic development outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of Babinda stakeholder group meetings. • Submission to the State Government regarding proposed redistribution of State Electoral Districts in FNQ impacting the Babinda region, with recommendations to align the Mulgrave electorate and Cairns LGA southern and Western boundaries, and to retain the electorate Hill. • The Babinda Taskforce received Council Community Grant awards for the Christmas in Babinda, and 140 Years of Farming the Cairns Region events, receiving \$3,500 (ex GST) and \$10,000 (ex GST) respectively for each event. • The Babinda Harvest Festival Inc. received a Community Grant award of \$19,589 (ex GST) for the 2025 Babinda Harvest Festival. • Implementation and review of Council's <i>Development and Investment Incentive Support Policy</i> which has specific focus on incentivising development in targeted areas within Babinda.
Cairns Airport Precinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge sharing and provision of data for key stakeholders. • Ongoing collaboration with Cairns Airport regarding the Smart Green Economy Collective Working Group.
City Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council endorsed a 10-year trustee lease with Westshell Pty Ltd to keep the Reef Eye on the Esplanade. • Release of the <i>Cairns The Premier Destination for Women's Sport Action Plan</i>. This builds on the momentum already achieved, including the AFLW Northern Nest Partnership, major upgrades to Balow Park, and support for the North Queensland Cowboys Community Development and High-Performance Centre. • Continuing Taipans Sponsorship Agreement to support city centre trading on game days and to also support liveability of the city. • Cairns Ecofiesta delivered in June 2026 is a showcase of the regions green edge -the businesses, the agencies and the non-profits working to conserve and restore our regions greatest economic assets – the reef and the rainforest. Now in its 11th year, Ecofiesta attracts between 8,000 and 10,000 people to celebrate nature and adopt sustainable living practices. • Implementation and review of Council's <i>Development and Investment Incentive Support Policy</i> which has specific focus on incentivising development in targeted areas within the City Centre.
Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing engagement with representatives of both the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service and JCU regarding the Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct.
Gordonvale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of Gordonvale stakeholder group meetings. • Finalisation of Industry and Economic Development Fund grant award acquittal supporting Gordonvale District Chamber of Commerce's Gordonvale Economic Development Strategy. • The Gordonvale District Chamber of Commerce received Council Community Grant awards for the Gordonvale

	<p>Community Carols, and the Sugar Solstice Country Fair, receiving \$5,000 (ex GST) for each event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation and review of Council's <i>Development and Investment Incentive Support Policy</i> which has specific focus on incentivising development in targeted areas within Gordonvale.
Portsmith Marine Precinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's City Safe Program has expanded to provide CCTV monitoring across Ports North Managed areas, including the Marina fingers, as well as targeted security patrols during peak periods. • Continued work with Superyacht Group Great Barrier Reef (SYGGBR) through an R&P Agreement to deliver super yacht visitation and Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) outcomes. <i>Noting SYGGBR's merger with Superyacht Australia, this R&P will cease as of 30 June 2026.</i> • Ongoing collaboration with Ports North regarding the Smart Green Economy Collective Working Group.
Smithfield Precinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for the Queensland Government's \$15.5 million for Smithfield Mountain Bike Park trail expansion. • Successful delivery of the Cairns Rainforest Rumble mountain bike event in May 2026, which also featured the finale of the UCI Oceania Continental Series in both downhill and cross-country Olympic (XCO) disciplines.
Southern Cairns Precinct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council continues to work with the State Government to progress the Cairns South State Development Area (SDA). Council Officers are involved in providing technical advice for development applications and are assisting the State in resolving the infrastructure, stormwater and other challenges within the SDA. • Successfully coordinated advocacy for a Priority Development Area to be declared over the Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor. A PDA declaration was made by the Queensland Government in July 2025 with significant State and Federal funding for infrastructure delivery announced in May 2026.
Economic Initiatives	Outcomes
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured a joint Australian and Queensland Government funding package for Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor, including \$220 million in grants (\$110m each) and an \$80 million Federal concessional loan for housing-enabling infrastructure. • Successfully advocated for the declaration of the Mount Peter Priority Development Area (PDA), supporting coordinated planning and accelerated housing delivery in Cairns' southern growth corridor. • Coordinated Council submissions and advocacy on key State and Federal policy matters including community safety, electoral redistribution, housing infrastructure funding and Northern Australia emerging industries.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened regional advocacy partnerships with industry and community stakeholders including Advance Cairns, TTNQ, Cairns Chamber of Commerce, Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils, Regional Development Australia Tropical North and UDIA. • Progressed coordinated advocacy with State and Federal representatives to support long-term infrastructure investment and housing supply outcomes in the region. • Advanced investigation of a potential visitor levy, including completion of independent economic analysis to support evidence-based decision-making and commencement of targeted engagement with political and industry stakeholders to inform policy development and build support for potential implementation. • Broadened stakeholder engagement through delivery of targeted programs, including coordinated advocacy engagements in Brisbane and Canberra and the launch of a sector-specific roundtable series.
Choose Cairns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content continually monitored and updated where necessary. • Implementation of an AI concierge service to triage enquiries coming through the Choose Cairns website.
COVID-19 Recovery Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete.
Indigenous Business Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council in partnership with State Government departments and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce delivered the Indigenous Business Connect networking event as part of Indigenous Business Month in October 2025. • Promotion of Black Business Finder and Indigenous business events in monthly e-news updates.
Innovation, Research and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsorship of Cairns Chamber of Commerce's Business Excellence Awards for the Innovation Excellence category. • Council office participation on the judging panel for the Cairns Chamber of Commerce's Business Excellence Awards. • Continued collaboration with James Cook University, CQUniversity, and TAFE Queensland to promote closer collaboration between Council and each respective organisation. See their respective progress reports for more information.
International Relations and Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council engaged the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) to undertake an opportunities analysis of Cairns Pacific engagement. This commission included extensive desktop research and consultation of key stakeholders to understand how best Cairns can enhance engagement with our Pacific Island nation neighbours. • Council endorsed an expanded scope to the R&P Agreement with Tradelinked Cairns Inc (Tradelinked), to come into effect in FY26/27, to support business to business connections between Cairns, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific. • Council's Mayor and Botanical Gardens Curator attended the 50th Anniversary of PNG Independence in Lae in September

	<p>2025.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's Program Leader Economic Development joined Tradelinked's annual business delegation in October 2025, meeting with representatives from DFAT, Austrade, Lae City Authority and Lae Chamber of Commerce. • Continued participation in Tradelinked Cairns-PNG-Pacific's international focussed discussions and forums. • Continued participation in the RDA North led Pacific Engagement Technical Working Group. • Council hosted multiple delegations from Lae and Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, facilitated through Tradelinked.
Investment Attraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for investment enquiries on an ongoing basis as required. • Continued participation in Trade and Investment Queensland's FNQ Trade & Investment Group.
Small Business Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in the Small Business Friendly Council program led by the Queensland Government's Office of the Small Business Commissioner. • Delivered the 2026 Meet the Buyer event in partnership with the Queensland Government Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business, as part of the broader Queensland Government's Cairns Small Business Expo, supported 49 representatives from 44 small businesses meeting with 11 large buyers. • Continued sponsorship agreement with Cairns Chamber of Commerce to support advocacy and small business. • Sponsorship of the Cairns Business Women's Club annual awards for the <i>Small Business Owner of the Year</i> category. • Cairns Ecofiesta delivered in June 2026 is a showcase of the regions green edge - the businesses, the agencies and the non-profits working to conserve and restore our region's greatest economic assets – the reef and the rainforest. Now in its 11th year, Ecofiesta attracts between 8,000 and 10,000 people to celebrate nature and adopt sustainable living practices. • The Energy Advantage event in September 2025 engaged approximately 30 local and regional business participants, with presentations by Cairns Regional Council, ecoBiz, and business case studies from Paronella Park and Cairns Taxis, resulting in improved understanding of energy cost reduction and electrification opportunities for businesses. • The Tenders, Energy Savings and Jobs for Sustainable Success event in February 2026 attracted 26 attendees through a partnership between Cairns Regional Council and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce, featuring presentations by GovReady, TAFE Queensland, Tropic Wings, and an exclusive site tour of the Barron Gorge Hydroelectric Station hosted by CleanCo Queensland. • All other initiatives captured in Cairns Regional Council's Small Business Friendly Council Charter – Annual Progress Report

	<p>2025/26.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local procurement – \$463 million (89%) of Council's total expenditure for 2024/25 was spent locally, with an economic impact (direct and indirect) of \$1.1 billion. <p><i>N.B. Council's local procurement for 2025/26 is not yet known but will be published in an updated State of Procurement report in the coming months.</i></p>
Smart Green Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued engagement with the Smart Green Economy Collective Working Group of key stakeholders. Development of additional case studies for Jaragun EcoServices, Tropic Wings and our Learning Institutions (CQUniversity and James Cook University). Continued delivery of promotional campaign to promote the region, including brand, website, case studies (film and print), digital and printed marketing material. Council's Economic Development Officer presented at James Cook University's <i>Micro Factories and Plastics – Cairns Knowledge Exchange Forum</i> on the Smart Green Economy initiative.
Major Events	Outcomes
Events Delivered (in date order)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 Cairns Marathon – Jul 2025 Cairns Italian Festival – Jul 2025 Cairns Super Carnival – Aug 2025 Men's International Cricket T20 & ODI (Australia vs South Africa) – Aug 2025 Port Douglas Gran Fondo - Sep 2025 AFLW Hawthorn 'Northern Nest' – Sep 2025 Dream Aloud – Oct 2025 Shine on Gimuy – Oct 2025 BE Social 2025 – Oct 2025 Cairns Fashion Week 2025 – Nov 2025 Cairns Rainforest Rumble – May 2026 IRONMAN Cairns – Jun 2026 <p>Total economic impact estimated at \$28 million⁸</p>

⁸ Some data for events held in 2026 is yet to be finalised and therefore the estimated economic impact is subject to change pending finalisation of this event data.



Cairns Regional Council

Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030



Acknowledgement of Country

Cairns Regional Council acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Custodians of our region, the Djabugay; Yirrganydji; Buluwai; Gimuy Walubara Yidinji; Mandingalbay Yidinji; Gunggandji; Dulabed and Malanbarra Yidinji; Bundabarra and Wadjanbarra Yidinji; Madjandji; Mamu and Ngadjon Jii peoples. We extend this respect to all elders past, present and future, and other First Peoples within our region.

Stakeholder acknowledgement

Cairns Regional Council wishes to thank all stakeholders and consultees involved in the development of this strategy.

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Mayor's Message

Cairns is a city with enormous heart, ambition and opportunity.

We are the capital of Far North Queensland, a gateway to the Asia Pacific, and home to a resilient community that knows how to back itself. Our economy is already worth \$12.9 billion, but the true strength of Cairns has always been our people, our ideas, our natural advantages and our determination to keep moving forward.

This Economic Development Strategy is about building on those strengths with confidence, maturity and purpose.

It sets out a clear vision for how Cairns can continue to grow as a strong, resilient and future focused regional city, one that creates good jobs, attracts investment, supports local businesses, strengthens existing industries and unlocks new opportunities for future generations.

Importantly, this Strategy reflects what we have heard from our business community, industry leaders, residents and stakeholders. It is practical, but it is also ambitious. It recognises that Cairns has an increasingly important role to play, not only within our own region, but across Queensland, Australia and the broader Asia Pacific.

Council cannot deliver that future alone, but we can lead where it matters most. We must advocate strongly, invest wisely, bring people together and help create the right conditions for businesses, industries and communities to thrive.

Across our region, there is significant opportunity ahead.

The Southern Growth Corridor, including Edmonton and Mount Peter, will play a vital role in delivering the housing, infrastructure, services and liveability needed to support a growing population. At the same time, our region's established and emerging industries, including tourism, agriculture, construction, health, aviation, marine, mining, education, events and screen production, will help shape the next chapter of Cairns' economy.

We also have a once in a generation opportunity ahead of us with the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Cairns must be ready to step forward, tell its story with confidence and position itself as a regional city of choice for visitors, investors, athletes, businesses and new residents alike.

Economic development is about far more than figures, forecasts and strategy documents. It is about people. It is about the small business owner taking the next step. The young person choosing to build a future here. The family seeking secure work and a good life. The investor recognising Cairns as a place of confidence and possibility. A community proud of where it is heading.

That is why partnership will be central to the success of this Strategy. Delivering on our shared vision will require Council to work closely with business, industry, Traditional Owners, all levels of government and the broader community.

Cairns has always been a place of resilience, energy and imagination. Now is the time to harness that spirit and move forward together.

With the right focus, the right investment and the confidence to seize the opportunities ahead, Cairns can continue to grow as a vibrant, inclusive and globally connected regional city.

This is our opportunity, and our future is ours to shape.

Cr Amy Eden
Mayor

Cairns Regional Council Corporate Plan 2025-2030



Robust economy



Natural assets



Design for livability



Community and culture



Focused council

Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030

Our Vision

Shaping a robust, growing and diversified economy that supports a prosperous future for Cairns.

Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aviation Construction Education and Training Healthcare and Social Assistance Marine and Defence Tourism <p>Regionally supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Mining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cairns Aviation Precinct Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct Cairns Major Events Precinct Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct Cairns South Development Precinct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place-based Initiatives Targeted Interventions

Pathways for Economic Development

- Investment Attraction and Promotion
- Strategic Precincts and Land Use
- Major Events and Visitor Economy
- Business Support, Innovation and Local Economy
- Engagement, Collaboration and Resilience

Economic Development Targets by 2030



Grow economy by \$1.5 billion
(2025 as baseline)



Create 10,000 new jobs
(2025 as baseline)

Introduction

What is economic development?

Economic development is the intentional practice of improving a community's economic wellbeing and quality of life. It includes a broad range of activities to attract, create and retain jobs. Economic development is a collaborative effort involving industry, business, government and community stakeholders.



Enabling conditions

Adequate housing supply, sufficient construction capacity, and development feasibility are critical enabling conditions for major precinct delivery. Strong housing accessibility enables workforce attraction and retention, supporting the economic conditions that underpin large-scale urban and regional development.

Who is involved in economic development?

Collaboration is key to successful economic development, and it forms a core part of this strategy. Council works together with public, private, and community stakeholders to deliver a collaborative approach to economic development, coordinating effort and minimising duplication.



What is Council's role in economic development?

Cairns Regional Council's Economic Development and Advocacy Directorate works closely with other Council teams, industry and business, the community, and State and Federal Governments. By collaborating with these partners, we aim to cultivate a strong business environment and support industry growth, driving economic development and creating prosperity for the people of Cairns. Council's role in economic development can vary between activities and initiatives depending on a range of factors.

The various roles Council can undertake are outlined below:



Advocate

Promoting economic development priorities to decision makers and influential bodies.



Partner

Forming partnerships and strategic alliances with other parties to progress economic development priorities.



Funder

Funding other organisations to deliver economic development outcomes.



Facilitator

Facilitating economic outcomes being delivered by others through a range of services and interventions.



Provider

Delivering services directly that support economic development.



Regulator

Regulating activities through policies which support economic development.

How was this strategy developed?

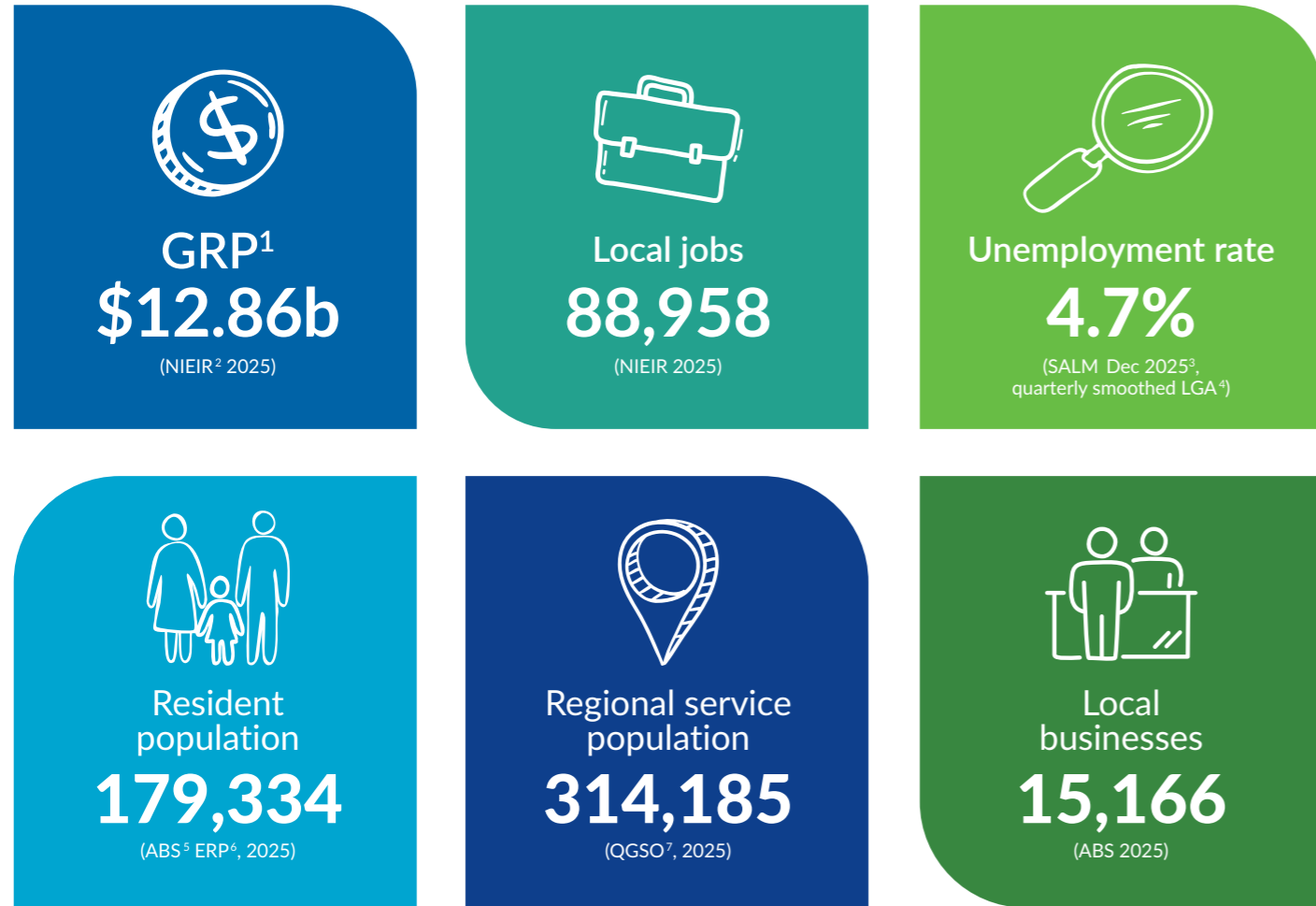
In formulating this strategy, Council undertook a review of the previous Economic Development Strategy and commissioned an external consultant to deliver detailed economic analyses and stakeholder engagement. This work, alongside Council's own assessment of Cairns' competitive advantages, industry strengths, economic drivers, and potential initiatives, was further informed by relevant plans, strategies, and community feedback through the Our Cairns survey. The outcome is a strategy that complements the efforts of other agencies and clearly defines Council's priorities for fostering economic development across the region.

Guiding principles of this strategy

This strategy has been developed, and will be delivered, with the following guiding principles:

- Data-driven
- Collaboration
- Leveraging Cairns' unique competitive advantages
- Building resilience through diversification
- Integration of sustainability and liveability
- Ensuring flexibility to enable the strategy to adapt to changing conditions and circumstances
- Development of a clear actionable plan

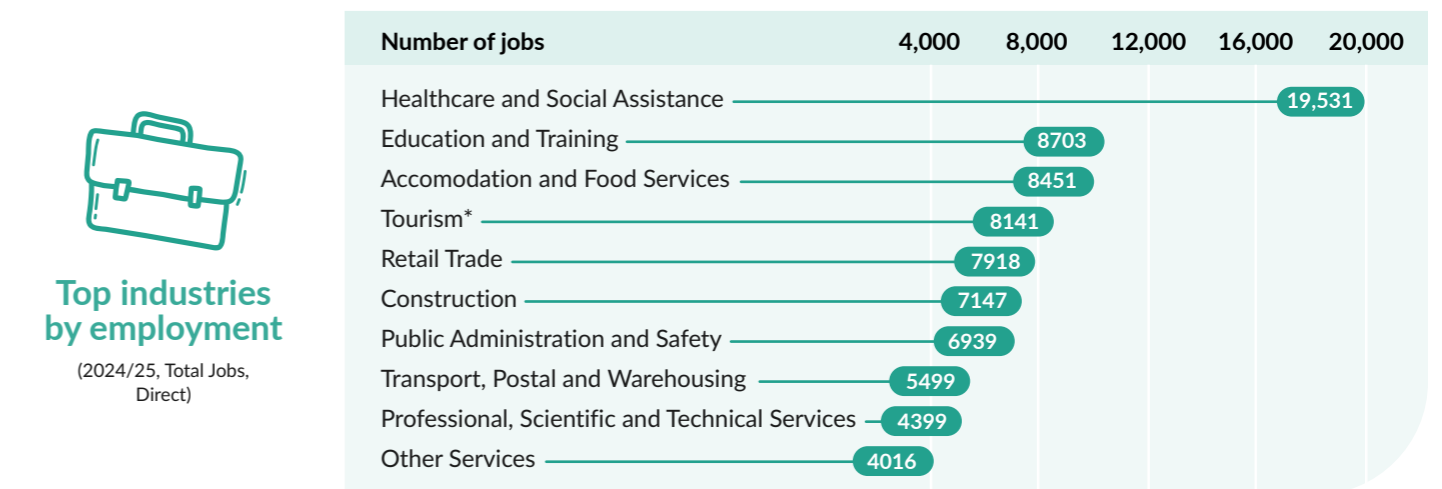
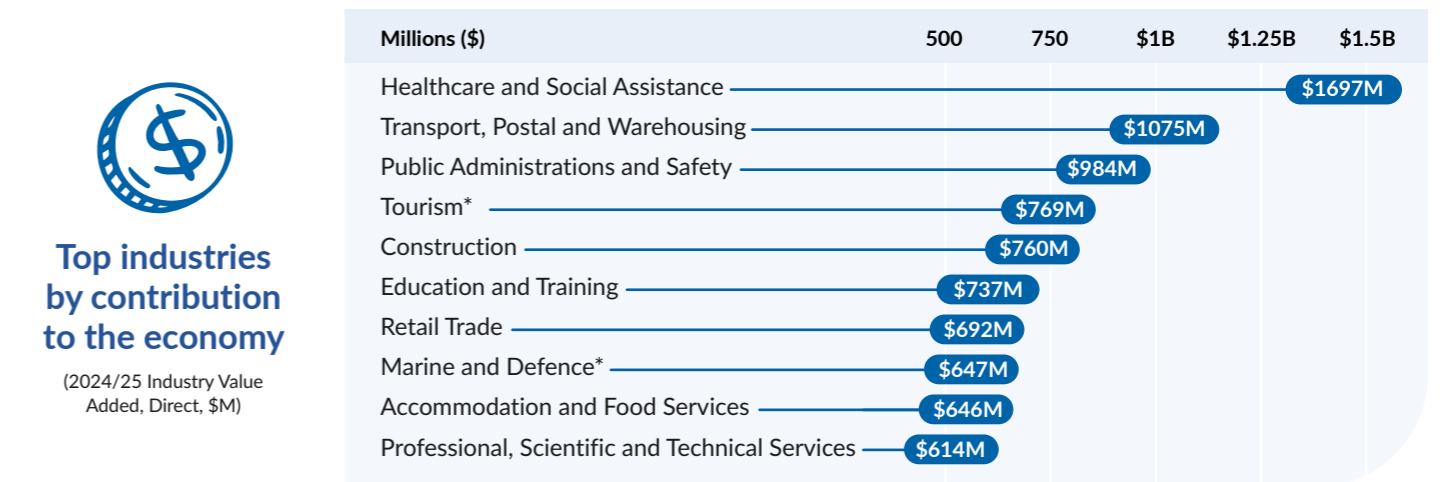
Economic Snapshot



¹GRP - Gross Regional Product ²NIEIR - National Institute of Economic and Industry Research ³SALM - Small Area Labour Markets ⁴LGA - Local Government Area
⁵ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics ⁶ERP - Estimated Resident Population ⁷QGSO - Queensland Government Statistician's Office
Sources: *economy.id



Top industries in the Cairns Local Government Area (LGA)



Note the Top Industries included in the graphs above depict the largest industries in Cairns by employment and contribution to Gross Regional Product (GRP) defined by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industry Classification (ANZSIC) definitions.

*Priority industries identified in this Strategy such as Aviation, Marine and Defence, and Tourism are each non-standard industry classifications and draw from a cross-section of ANZSIC codes. The inclusion of non-standard industries in this strategy is a result of independent analysis of industries representing the best economic opportunity for the region.



Competitive Advantages

Building on what we have; Cairns has an excellent foundation on which to build a robust economy for the future.

The capital of Far North Queensland

Cairns is the economic and service heart of Far North Queensland (FNQ) and connects the region to communities and markets across Queensland, Australia and beyond. Servicing one of northern Australia's largest and fastest-growing regional populations, Cairns acts as the gateway to a nationally significant agricultural area which is also rich in critical minerals. Cairns is the commercial centre and export hub driving the FNQ region's continued economic growth and prosperity.



Globally connected and Australia's northern gateway to the Asia-Pacific region

Cairns serves as Australia's northern gateway to the Asia-Pacific, connecting the region through trade, transport, education, and tourism. Its strategic location and aviation and maritime linkages support regional growth, and opportunities across business, logistics, and international collaboration. Cairns also plays an important role in Australia's National Security agenda, as a vital forward operating base providing maritime logistics, maintenance, and rapid response capabilities necessary to maintain regional stability across the Indo-Pacific.



A diverse and resilient economy

Cairns has one of the most diverse regional economies in Australia. This is achieved through continued growth across multiple sectors, including Healthcare and Social Assistance, Education and Training, Aviation, Marine and Defence, Construction and Tourism, contributing to a resilient and adaptable regional economy.



Tropical expertise

Living and working in the tropics has enabled businesses, research organisations, and health and science institutions to develop effective approaches for operating in remote, hot, humid, and seasonally variable tropical locations.



Cultural diversity

Cairns is home to a uniquely high proportion of First Peoples and a diverse multicultural community, reflecting a rich mix of cultures from across the globe. This cultural diversity strengthens the region, supporting a vibrant and resilient community while contributing to the economy through tourism, education and international connections.

World-class universities and industry training

Cairns' workforce is supported by James Cook University and CQUniversity, which provide education and research capability across a broad range of disciplines. Industry-specific skills development is further strengthened through TAFE Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College, and the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre, who each deliver training aligned to established industries and sectors with strong future growth prospects.



An emerging leader in the Smart Green Economy

With two World Heritage Sites on our doorstep, abundant renewable energy, strong economic and environmental alignment, and an entrepreneurial spirit, the region is perfectly positioned to unlock economic benefits in the green economy as we transition to a low-carbon, nature positive future.



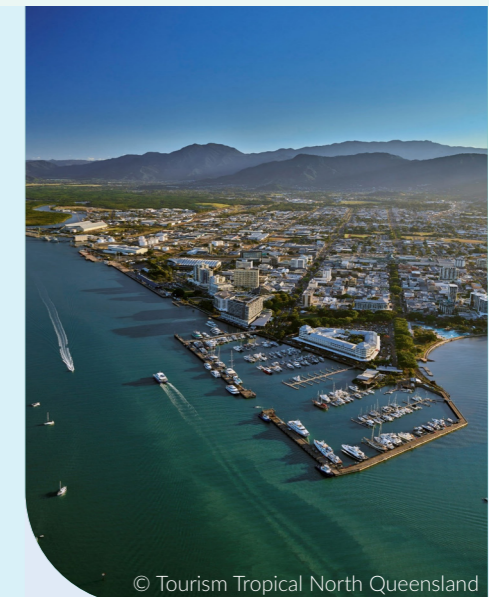
Liveability

Cairns offers a high quality of life, with vibrant communities, accessible services, excellent cultural venues and facilities, a rich program of sporting, music and cultural events, and exceptional natural surroundings. Its climate, lifestyle, and strong social and cultural networks support both wellbeing and long-term regional prosperity.



World Heritage listed reef and rainforest

The Cairns region encompasses two UNESCO World Heritage sites: the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rainforest, both internationally recognised for their rich biodiversity. These ecosystems provide significant environmental and economic value, while also supporting the distinctive lifestyle enjoyed by residents across the region.



Brisbane 2032 co-host city

As a co-host city for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Cairns will benefit from increased tourism, global exposure, infrastructure investment, and business opportunities, supporting long-term regional economic growth and development.

Priority Industries

Whilst Council remains committed to supporting broad economic growth across all sectors, this strategy prioritises the following industries because of their strategic contribution to local jobs, future economic growth and prosperity, and long-term economic resilience.

How we determined our priority industries

✓ Contribution to the economy

✓ Significance to the economy relative to the wider region

✓ Jobs in our region

✓ Growth to date and growth potential

✓ Alignment with Our Cairns Survey

✓ Alignment to State and Federal Government priorities

Aviation



Cairns is a major aviation hub for northern Australia, supporting domestic, regional and international services. Cairns Airport underpins tourism, freight, and connectivity to remote communities, while also enabling defence, emergency response, pilot training, manufacturing, maintenance services, and growing links to Asia-Pacific markets.

💰 **\$411M** Gross Value Added, Direct (NIEIR 24/25)

👤 **1,686** Local Jobs (NIEIR 24/25)

🏢 **74** Local Businesses (ABS 2025)

Construction



Cairns' construction sector underpins regional growth, delivering residential, commercial and civil infrastructure. Activity is driven by population growth, housing demand, tourism development, and public and private investment, supporting local employment and supply chains while building resilience for tropical and remote conditions.

💰 **\$761M** Gross Value Added, Direct (NIEIR 24/25)

👤 **7,147** Local Jobs (NIEIR 24/25)

🏢 **2,699** Local Businesses (ABS 2025)

Marine and Defence



Cairns' marine and defence sector supports naval, commercial and research activity across northern Australia. Anchored by HMAS Cairns and a strong maritime services base, the sector delivers vessel maintenance, sustainment, manufacturing, logistics, marine tourism, research, and growing defence industry capability.

💰 **\$647M** Gross Value Added, Direct (NIEIR 24/25)

👤 **2,531** Local Jobs (NIEIR 24/25)

🏢 **340** Local Businesses (ABS 2025)

Tourism



The tourism sector is a key regional economic driver, attracting domestic and international visitors to the Great Barrier Reef, Wet Tropics, and other attractions. It supports accommodation, hospitality, transport, tours and events, fostering jobs, investment, and regional promotion while driving sustainable and experiential tourism.

💰 **\$769M** Gross Value Added, Direct (NIEIR 24/25)

👤 **8,141** Local Jobs (NIEIR 24/25)

🏢 **1,188** Local Businesses (ABS 2025)

Education and Training



Cairns' education and training sector supports regional workforce development and international engagement, anchored by James Cook University, CQUniversity, and vocational institutions such as TAFE Queensland, and enhanced by sector specific training institutions such as the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College, and the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre. The sector delivers skills for tourism, health, aviation, marine, and tropical science, while attracting domestic and international students to the region.

💰 **\$737M** Gross Value Added, Direct (NIEIR 24/25)

👤 **8,703** Local Jobs (NIEIR 24/25)

🏢 **246** Local Businesses (ABS 2025)

Healthcare and Social Assistance



Cairns' healthcare and social assistance industry is a major regional employer, servicing Far North Queensland and remote communities. Anchored by Cairns Hospital and growing network of public, private, and community providers, the sector supports health, aged care, disability services, and workforce development.

💰 **\$1,697M** Gross Value Added, Direct (NIEIR 24/25)

👤 **19,531** Local Jobs (NIEIR 24/25)

🏢 **1,460** Local Businesses (ABS 2025)

Supported regionally by:

Agriculture



The region's agricultural sector produces sugar, bananas, tropical fruits, cattle, and horticultural crops. It supports regional employment, export markets, and value-added processing, while adopting innovative practices for sustainability, climate resilience and biosecurity across diverse tropical and rural landscapes. The industry also provides flow on benefits to other sectors within the Cairns economy including: tourism; transport, postal and warehousing; and professional, scientific and technical services.

💰 **\$1,426M** Gross Value Added, Direct (REMPAN)

👤 **7,888** Local Jobs (REMPAN)

Mining



The mining and critical minerals sector in Far North Queensland focuses on bauxite, zinc, gold, and emerging critical minerals such as silica. It drives regional investment, infrastructure, employment, and export opportunities, while supporting clean energy supply chains and sustainable resource development. Like agriculture, the mining sector also provides flow on benefits to other sectors within the Cairns economy.

💰 **\$1,052M** Gross Value Added, Direct (REMPAN)

👤 **1,826** Local Jobs (REMPAN)

Strategic Economic Precincts

These large-scale strategic precincts are distinct locations with committed investment that will build economic momentum, create jobs, strengthen confidence, and support sustained economic growth and diversification across the region.



Cairns Aviation Precinct

The Cairns Aviation Precinct will drive economic growth in the coming years through rising tourism, expanding air freight, aviation maintenance and manufacturing through organisations such as Jet Aviation and Skytek, aviation training through the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre, strategic defence operations and enhanced Asia-Pacific connectivity, supporting jobs, investment and regional business development.

Key parties:

- North Queensland Airports (Cairns Airport)
- General Aviation Organisations
- Cairns Aviation Skills Centre

Council's role:



Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct

The Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (CHHHS) has secured more than \$1 billion from the Queensland Government to progress the Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct, which will be a regionally and internationally significant driver of economic growth through advancing healthcare, research, education, and innovation. CHHHS are progressing the Master Plan in 2026 for this record investment in health infrastructure, incorporating James Cook University's Yeinie Campus Building and planned private sector investment. As it is developed, the first Stage of this Precinct will strengthen regional health and knowledge-based industries and support enhanced liveability for communities across the region.

Key parties:

- Queensland Health/Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service
- James Cook University
- Private sector medical and allied health businesses

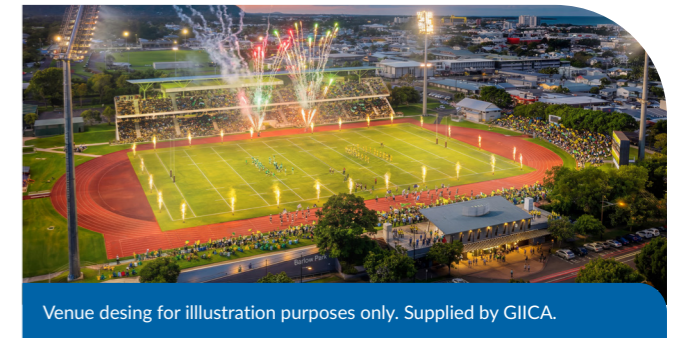
Council's role:



Artist's impression of the new Health Innovation & Surgical Centre. Image used with permission of Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service.

Cairns Major Events Precinct

The Cairns Major Events Precinct is a strategic development project aimed at enhancing the city's sporting, cultural, and entertainment offering. It includes the Cairns Showgrounds and Barlow Park, which are critical for the city's sporting and cultural landscape. The precinct's vision is to strengthen Cairns as a destination for sport and entertainment, with development opportunities such as infrastructure renewal for the Cairns Show Association, high-performance training hub, and open spaces for community engagement. The precinct is also positioned to benefit from the 2032 Games legacy, making it a significant asset for the region.



Venue desing for illustration purposes only. Supplied by GIICA.

Key parties:

- Queensland and Federal Governments
- Cairns Regional Council
- Precinct tenants and other stakeholders

Council's role:



Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct

The Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct incorporating the HMAS Cairns Naval Base, private sector marine and defence supply chains and shipyards, Great Barrier Reef International Maritime College, and the proposed common user facility and associated ship lift, will continue to drive economic activity in the coming years through naval operations, vessel maintenance, component manufacturing, maritime logistics, defence industry growth, marine research, and marine training. The precinct will play a key role strengthening regional employment, investment, capability development, and north Australia's strategic maritime presence.



Key parties:

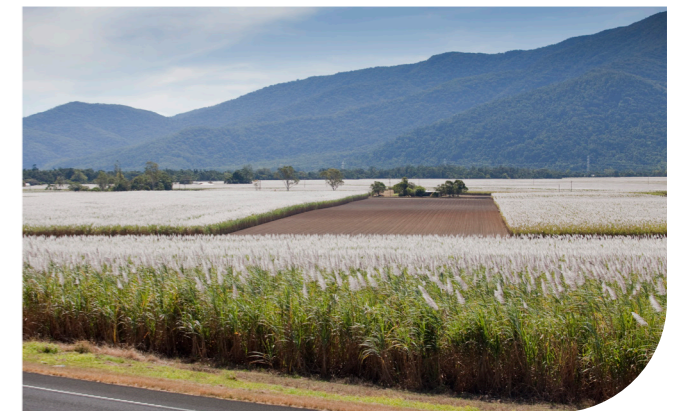
- Australian Department of Defence
- Queensland and Australian Governments
- Ports North
- Shipyards and wider maritime industry base

Council's role:



Cairns South Development Precinct

The Cairns South Development Precinct incorporates the Cairns South State Development Area (SDA) and the Edmonton Growth Corridor which includes Edmonton and the Mount Peter Priority Development Area (PDA). The Cairns South Development Precinct will underpin regional economic growth over the coming years through a range of industrial, residential, commercial, and mixed-use development. It will support jobs, investment, housing supply, infrastructure expansion, and strategic business operations, strengthening Cairns' urban, industrial, and regional economic capacity. The precinct also has the potential to provide opportunities for value added manufacturing and processing for the local sugar sector and regional agricultural industry more broadly.



Key parties:

- Queensland Office of the Coordinator General
- Economic Development Queensland
- Cairns Regional Council
- MSF Sugar and Canegrowers
- Private sector developers and construction, industrial and commercial business operators

Council's role:



Strategic Economic Initiatives

Council delivers a range of discrete economic initiatives that either respond to a particular community need or aim to realise economic benefits from a strategic opportunity. These initiatives fall into two categories (below) and the nature and breadth of delivery will depend on the particular circumstances/need and Council's own resource and budget capacity.



Cairns Aviation Precinct



Cairns Health and Innovation Precinct



Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct



Cairns South Development Precinct



Cairns Major Events Precinct



Place-based Initiatives

Council delivers a range of place-based initiatives and interventions outside the Strategic Economic Precincts which aim to support economic outcomes in particular communities and/or discrete geographies such as the Cairns City Centre, Gordonvale, and Babinda (where existing initiatives are already being delivered) or Smithfield and Palm Cove (where potential interventions are expected to be considered during the term of this strategy).

Where such initiatives are delivered, their scale, nature and timing (non-recurring or enduring), will vary depending on a range of factors including:

- Economic circumstances
- Demonstrated community need
- Council's role and responsibilities and the role and responsibilities of others
- The type of intervention needed
- Expected benefits



Targeted Interventions

These interventions are not tied to a particular geographic area or place and aim to:

- support a targeted component of the economic ecosystem (e.g. small business, innovation);
- deliver tangible benefits from a discrete economic opportunity (e.g. 2032 Games); or
- leverage a strategic competitive advantage (e.g. Pacific engagement, Smart Green Economy, investment attraction, film sector support).
- Plan for and implement a range of initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of natural hazards and proactively positioning Cairns for funding for mitigation and adaption measures to respond to issues such as development feasibility, insurance gaps, and resilient design.

The scale, nature and timing (non recurring or enduring) of these interventions will vary depending on the relevant circumstances.



Pathways and Economic Action Plan

The actions contained within the Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 Action Plan below are organised into a series of Pathways – thematic groupings that bring together related actions under a common strategic focus. Each Pathway represents a distinct avenue for economic growth and activity, allowing Council and its partners to coordinate efforts, allocate resources effectively, and track progress in a coherent and meaningful way. Together, the Pathways form an integrated roadmap for delivering on the strategy’s vision for the Cairns economy.

The proposed actions have been considered based on their relevance to, and scope to support, the long-term economic growth, prosperity and resilience of the Cairns economy. The alignment of the actions to the Priority

Industries, Strategic Economic Precincts, and Strategic Economic Initiatives components of the strategy is clearly demonstrated, as is Council’s role in implementation, the relevant Council Directorates involved, and how success will be measured.

The action plan does not represent binding commitments of Council and may be amended from time to time to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities. Whilst the action plan will inform Council’s annual operational planning and budgeting processes, it is noted that the action plan is subordinate to those activities and accordingly may need to be amended to reflect changing priorities and/or resource constraints identified through those processes. Progress against the action plan will be reported to Council on an annual basis.

Key acronyms used in this document:

- CIA - Cairns Infrastructure and Assets
- EDA - Economic Development and Advocacy
- FBS - Finance and Business Services
- L&C - Lifestyle and Community
- PGS - Planning, Growth and Sustainability
- POP - People and Organisational Performance

Pathway 1: Investment attraction and promotion

Action	Strategic alignment			Our role	Council Directorates involved	Success Measure	Year of delivery (FY)			
	Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives				FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 30
1.1) Develop and share promotional material to showcase local investment opportunities for domestic and international markets.	✓	✓		Provider	EDA	Material developed and promoted	✓	✓		
1.2) Investigate and develop a scalable investment attraction plan including consideration of governance models.	✓	✓		Facilitator	EDA	Plan/model developed, and governance models considered	✓	✓		
1.3) Implementation of agreed long-term approach to investment attraction.	✓	✓		Facilitator Provider	EDA	Implementation of an agreed long-term approach to investment attraction		✓	✓	✓
1.4) Promote Cairns as a place to work, live, and play through the Choose Cairns brand and website, with consideration to expanding the brand.			✓	Facilitator Provider	EDA	Maintain the Choose Cairns website so it remains current and up to date	✓	✓	✓	✓

Pathway 2: Strategic precincts and land use

Action	Strategic alignment			Our role	Council Directorates involved	Success Measure	Year of delivery			
	Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives				FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 30
2.1) Support the progression of the Cairns South State Development Area (SDA).	✓	✓		Advocate Facilitator Regulator	CIA EDA PGS	Actions taken in support of SDA development developed and promoted	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.2) Work with the Queensland Government, Economic Development Queensland (EDQ) and other stakeholders to progress the Mount Peter Priority Development Area (PDA) – supporting greenfield residential growth -and advocate for funding needed to support related infrastructure delivery.	✓	✓		Advocate Facilitator Partner Provider	CIA EDA PGS	Land use and infrastructure planning progressed, infrastructure funding secured, development progressing	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.3) Monitor and consider emerging opportunities to support the Edmonton Growth Corridor.		✓		Advocate	EDA	Nature of opportunities identified and progressed (where possible)	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.4) Collaborate with CHHHS and other stakeholders to support implementation of the Cairns Hospital Campus Master Plan and appropriate development within the Cairns Hospital and Innovation Precinct.	✓	✓		Advocate Facilitator Regulator	CIA EDA L&C PGS	Number and nature of support provided, and outcomes achieved	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.5) Support the progression of the Cairns Aviation Precinct through active engagement and advocacy.	✓	✓		Advocate	EDA	Advocacy support provided	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.6) Support the progression of the Cairns Marine and Defence Precinct through active engagement and advocacy and facilitate effective land use interface between the precinct and the adjoining parts of the Cairns LGA.	✓	✓		Advocate Facilitator Regulator	EDA PGS	Advocacy support provided and land use facilitation	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.7) Facilitate preparation of the Cairns Major Events Precinct Master Plan in consultation with key stakeholders.	✓	✓		Facilitator	L&C	Master Plan completed and endorsed by Council	✓			
2.8) Advocate for funding necessary to progress Council endorsed projects and priorities arising from the Cairns Major Events Precinct Master Plan.	✓	✓		Advocate	EDA	Number and nature of activities and outcomes achieved		✓	✓	✓
2.9) Work collaboratively with the Queensland Government and other stakeholders to support the Olympic Legacy upgrades to Barlow Park.	✓	✓		Advocate Facilitator	L&C	Active engagement with Qld Gov as upgrade progress to ensure legacy benefits delivered	✓	✓	✓	
2.10) Fast-track planning approvals for developments aligning with ‘gentle density’ and infill principles.			✓	Facilitator Provider Regulator	PGS	Fast-track planning approval process developed and implemented	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.11) Review and update of Council’s Development and Investment Incentive Support Policy (or equivalent) including ensuring alignment with this Economic Strategy where relevant.	✓		✓	Facilitator Provider Regulator	PGS	Refreshed policy developed and implemented	✓			
2.12) Consider and if appropriate, implement a range of land use planning interventions (e.g. planning scheme amendments) aimed at supporting economic development consistent with this strategy.	✓	✓	✓	Facilitator Provider Regulator	PGS	Number and nature of interventions	✓	✓	✓	✓

Pathway 3: Major events and visitor economy

Action	Strategic alignment			Our role	Council Directorates involved	Success Measure	Year of delivery (FY)			
	Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives				FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 30
3.1) Develop 2032 Games Roadmap for Cairns to leverage the legacy benefits (economic and other) for Cairns from the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games to generate enduring economic.	✓	✓	✓	Facilitator Funder Provider	EDA	Roadmap finalised and endorsed by Council	✓			
3.2) Oversee the implementation of the 2032 Games Roadmap for Cairns.	✓	✓	✓	Advocate Facilitator Provider	EDA	Progress against the implementation plan		✓	✓	✓
3.3) Proactively collaborate with TTNQ, TEQ and other partners to secure and retain a diverse portfolio of major events in the region aligned with the Cairns and Great Barrier Reef Major Events Strategy 2026-2035.	✓			Advocate Facilitator Funder Partner	EDA	Number, nature and economic impact of major events supported	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.4) Facilitate appropriate Council support to progress Smithfield Mountain Bike Park trail network expansion and Wangetti Trail where required.	✓		✓	Facilitator	L&C	Active engagement and nature of support provided	✓	✓	✓	✓
3.5) Continued investigation and collaborative advocacy for a sustainable tourism funding model for Cairns.	✓			Advocate Partner	EDA	Further investigation and refinement of a sustainable funding model and outcomes of related advocacy to the Queensland Government	✓	✓	✓	✓

Pathway 4: Business support, innovation and local economy

Action	Strategic alignment			Our role	Council Directorates involved	Success Measure	Year of delivery (FY)			
	Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives				FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 30
4.1) Partner with State and Federal Government departments and other stakeholders to deliver events for small business (e.g. Meet the Buyer).			✓	Partner Provider	EDA	Annual event delivered (Meet the Buyer or similar)	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.2) Continued collaboration with the Cairns Chamber of Commerce on Small Business initiatives.			✓	Partner	EDA	Number and nature of initiatives and outcomes achieved	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.3) Disseminate a monthly e-newsletter to local businesses.			✓	Provider	EDA	Monthly e-newsletter disseminated	✓	✓	✓	✓

Action	Strategic alignment			Our role	Council Directorates involved	Success Measure	Year of delivery (FY)			
	Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives				FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	FY 30
4.4) Disseminate a monthly digital welcome-pack to new businesses established in the Cairns region.			✓	Provider	EDA	Monthly digital welcome-pack disseminated	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.5) Support the Queensland Government's Small Business Friendly Council Program.			✓	Facilitator	EDA	Number and nature of initiatives supported	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.6) Monitor and measure the economic impact of Council's annual local spend (e.g. State of Procurement Report or equivalent).			✓	Provider	EDA FBS	Annual report produced	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.7) Strengthen local business participation in Council procurement through communication of anticipated procurement and capacity building (e.g. procurement related events and workshops).			✓	Provider	CIA EDA FBS	Number and nature of initiatives delivered	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.8) Partner with State and Federal Government departments, internal and external stakeholders to support events (e.g. Indigenous Business Month and initiatives relevant to First Peoples businesses).			✓	Partner Provider	EDA L&C	Number and nature of initiatives supported	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.9) Support programs and initiatives that encourage innovation and support the local innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem e.g. Tropical Innovation Festival, Business Excellence Awards.			✓	Facilitator Funder Partner	EDA	Number and nature of initiatives supported.	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.10) Support the development of projects to access Council's Industry and Economic Development Fund (IEDF).			✓	Funder	EDA	Number of projects supported through the IEDF and outcomes	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.11) Work with key stakeholders to develop and promote initiatives aligned with smart green economy opportunities areas.			✓	Facilitator Partner	EDA PGS	Maintain the Smart Green Economy website so it remains current and up to date; development and promotion of new and existing case studies	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.12) Work collaboratively with Screen Queensland and other industry stakeholders to support the film and related industries in Cairns.			✓	Advocate Facilitator Partner Provider	EDA L&C	Number of screen productions supported through permit provision and wrap-around support and broader industry development support	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.13) Investigate place-based initiatives and interventions to support certain localities for example Cairns City Centre, Smithfield, Palm Cove, Babinda and Gordonvale. This may include planning initiatives aimed at realising potential economic opportunities.			✓	Provider	EDA PGS	Number and nature of initiatives and interventions investigated and where appropriate implemented.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Pathway 5: Engagement, collaboration and resilience

Action	Strategic alignment			Our role	Council Directorates involved	Success Measure	Year of delivery (FY)			
	Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives				27	28	29	30
5.1) Manage Council's strategic partnerships with external economic development and advocacy organisations including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance Cairns • Babinda District Community Association (Babinda Taskforce) • Babinda Visitor Information Centre • Cairns Chamber of Commerce • Cairns Taipans • Study Cairns • Tourism Tropical North Queensland including a geographic focus on Babinda, Gordonvale and Palm Cove • Tradelinked Cairns-PNG-Pacific 	✓		✓	Funder Provider	EDA	Effective management of strategic funding agreements; monitoring and evaluation of KPIs	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.2) Collaborate via Council's Memoranda of Understanding with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Cook University • CQUniversity • TAFE Queensland 	✓			Partner	EDA	Number and nature of collaborative initiatives reported each year	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.3) Collaborate with key industry organisations, state and federal agencies and other stakeholders to support strategic initiatives aligned with Priority Industries.	✓			Advocate Facilitator Partner Provider	EDA	Number and nature of support provided and outcomes achieved	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.4) Coordinate economic development stakeholder meetings for Babinda and Gordonvale and receive feedback.			✓	Facilitator	EDA	Minimum of two stakeholder meetings per year	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.5) Develop and implement a program of stakeholder engagement with the city's key employers and private sector operators to understand barriers to growth consider potential action Council can take in response to key themes.			✓	Advocate Facilitator Provider	EDA	Number and nature of engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.6) Collaborate with Local, State and Federal Government organisations and key stakeholders, to progress advocacy priorities on behalf of the Cairns community as per Council's Advocacy Policy.	✓	✓	✓	Advocate Facilitator Partner	EDA	Quarterly meetings held with key advocacy partners and local Members of State and Federal Parliament; advocacy priorities jointly prosecuted, and outcomes achieved	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.7) Collaborate with key stakeholders to progress initiatives aimed at supporting Cairns' engagement with PNG and the Pacific.	✓	✓	✓	Advocate Facilitator Partner Provider	EDA	Number and nature initiatives and related outcomes	✓	✓	✓	✓

Action	Strategic alignment			Our role	Council Directorates involved	Success Measure	Year of delivery (FY)			
	Priority Industries	Strategic Economic Precincts	Strategic Economic Initiatives				27	28	29	30
5.8) Facilitate access to economic data for the purposes of informed decision making across Council, external stakeholders and the community including public reporting on the economic performance of priority industry sectors.	✓		✓	Facilitator	EDA	Facilitation of key data resources	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.9) Support Cairns Chamber of Commerce, Council's Disaster Management Unit, and other partners on opportunities to support business resilience and disaster preparedness.			✓	Facilitator	EDA POP	Number and nature of opportunities supported	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.10) Proactively coordinate the Cairns Local Disaster Management Group's Economic Recovery Sub-Committee (ERSC).			✓	Facilitator	EDA	Facilitation of annual pre-cyclone season ERSC meetings; and coordination of ERSC efforts in the event of disaster	✓	✓	✓	✓
5.11) Commence and progress the Master Mitigation and Adaption Plan - Central Cairns			✓	Partner Provider	PG&S	Plan for and implement a range of initiatives	✓	✓		



How We Measure Success

Success will be measured by progress against the headline targets of growing Cairns' Gross Regional Product by \$1.5 billion by 2030, the creation of 10,000 jobs over this period, and the individual measures in the action plan.

Economic development targets by 2030



Grow economy by \$1.5 billion
(2025 as baseline)



Create 10,000 new jobs
(2025 as baseline)

119-145 Spence Street, Cairns, QLD, 4870, Australia
Phone: 1300 69 22 47
cairns.qld.gov.au

