

SMALL BUSINESS FRIENDLY PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

EDA | 58/6/1 | #7928965

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council notes the Small Business Friendly Program Annual Report for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

- Queensland Government: Office of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner
- Cairns Chamber of Commerce

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Cairns Regional Council signed the Queensland Government's Small Business Friendly Commitment (the Commitment) on 19 August 2025, which superseded the previous Small Business Friendly Council Charter signed by Council on 21 March 2021. The Small Business Friendly Program (the Program) requires Council to provide annual reports to the Office of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner (QSBC) on relevant activities. This report covers the period 1 July 2025 through 30 June 2026. Some key outputs included in the report are:

- Council's total local spend for 2025/26 was \$539 million, which is 91% of Council's overall expenditure. This expenditure supports local business and jobs, and is split between employee wages, local goods and services, and investment in infrastructure. This sizeable local spend provides a total local economic impact of \$1.211 billion which benefits many small businesses across the Cairns Local Government Area.
- Licensing and Compliance recently undertook a review of Councils fees and charges associated with commercial use activity permits. The main aim of this review was to minimise administrative processes for permit holders and Council and providing certainty around permits ongoing. The outcomes of this review which were endorsed by Council as part of the 2026/27 budget included:
 - Inclusion of multi-year permit options (up to 3 years) for footpath dining permits.
 - Removal of the requirement for Commercial Use Activity Permit holders to complete an annual return process at the end of each financial year by replacing this process with fees invoiced at the commencement of the permit year based on the scale and risk of the activity being undertaken.
- As part of one of three Queensland Small Business Expos hosted by the

Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business, Council delivered the Meet the Buyer event, facilitating 220 targeted meetings between 44 local small businesses and 11 major regional buyers.

BACKGROUND:

Cairns Regional Council signed the Queensland Government's Small Business Friendly Commitment (the Commitment) on 19 August 2025, which superseded the previous Small Business Friendly Council Charter signed by Council on 21 March 2021.

The Small Business Friendly Program (the Program) is an initiative established by the Office of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner (QSBC). The Program provides the framework, support and tools required to help local governments, Queensland Government agencies and large enterprise to realise their role in supporting small businesses.

The Commitment provides a set of simple and clear pledges that members agree to meet. All organisations joining the Program sign the same commitment to small businesses. The obligations in the Commitment are as follows.

Cairns Regional Council commits to working with small businesses, industry, community, and government to be more small business friendly by:

- Uplifting the capability of small businesses
- Fostering ecosystems that help small businesses thrive
- Promoting small businesses and vibrant economies
- Enabling small business development and success
- Working together for small business.

Council and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce signed the Commitment on 19 August 2025.

COMMENT:

As a member in the Program, Council is obligated to submit an annual report to the QSBC detailing its activities related to initiatives delivered supporting the Commitment, including key initiatives and achievements (note the QSBC has shortened and simplified the format of the reporting template for the 2025/26 reporting period).

Council's annual progress report supporting the Commitment for the period 1 July 2025 – 30 June 2026 is attached (Attachment 1).

Key outcomes included in the report are as follows:

- Council's total local spend for 2025/26 was \$539 million, which is 91% of Council's overall expenditure. This expenditure supports local business and jobs, and is split between employee wages, local goods and services, and investment in infrastructure. This sizeable local spend provides a total local economic impact of \$1.211 billion which benefits many small businesses across the Cairns Local Government Area.
- Licensing and Compliance recently undertook a review of Councils fees and charges associated with commercial use activity permits. The main aim of this review was to minimise administrative processes for permit holders and Council

and providing certainty around permits ongoing. The outcomes of this review which were endorsed by Council as part of the 2026/27 budget included:

- Inclusion of multi-year permit options (up to 3 years) for footpath dining permits.
 - These multi-year permits provide for a fee reduction when selecting longer permit timeframes compared to the previous annual renewal permit fees.
 - Remove the administrative and time-consuming annual renewal processes for both permit holders and Council.
 - Provide certainty to businesses who rely on utilising footpath dining spaces throughout the region.
- Removal of the requirement for Commercial Use Activity Permit holders to complete an annual return process at the end of each financial year by replacing this process with fees invoiced at the commencement of the permit year based on the scale and risk of the activity being undertaken.
 - This is a simpler and more equitable charging model that better reflects the activity being undertaken.
 - Less paperwork and reduced administration each year.
 - Greater certainty around annual permit costs and consistent with Council's other regulatory permits.
 - Council was also responsive to feedback from businesses, who were facing a number of increased costs from 1 July 2027 (including payday super, increase in minimum wage, and fuel excise reduction removal), and delayed issuing of invoices for FY2026/27 until January 2027
- As part of one of three Queensland Small Business Expos hosted by the Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business, Council delivered the Meet the Buyer event, facilitating 220 targeted meetings between 44 local small businesses and 11 major regional buyers.

Council Officers have liaised with the Cairns Chamber of Commerce to complete the annual report.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (recommended):

That Council notes the Small Business Friendly Program Annual Report for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

Option 2:

That Council **does not** endorse the contents of this report at this time and requests additional information from Council Officers before reconsidering this matter.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

The risks of individual projects included in the attached report, and which are undertaken in support of small businesses and the community are done so with risks considered and

managed on a case-by-case basis.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

There are no direct costs associated with the Commitment. Any financial and budgetary implications are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The Cairns Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 identifies Small Business Support as a Strategic Economic Initiative while Council's Corporate Plan 2025-2030 commits to supporting actions that promote and protect the growth of diverse industries and small business. The Commitment directly aligns with both documents.

CONSULTATION:

Queensland Government: Office of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner
Cairns Chamber of Commerce

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1- DM#[7929037](#) Cairns Regional Council- Small Business Friendly Program
Annual Progress Report 1 July 2025 – 30 June 2026



Nick Masasso
Director Economic Development & Advocacy

Small Business Friendly Program

Annual Report 2025 - 26

Member information

Details	
Organisation name:	Cairns Regional Council
Main address:	119-145 Spence Street, Cairns, QLD 4870
Main email:	council@cairns.qld.gov.au
Main phone:	07 4044 3044
Main website URL:	www.cairns.qld.gov.au
ABN:	24 310 025 910

Authorised representatives

The nominated staff members will take on the responsibility for Small Business Friendly (SBF) activities, which includes participation in SBF meetings. They will be the primary contact for receiving program details, updates, and inquiries.

Authorised SBF representative details	
Full name:	Nick Masasso
Position:	Director Economic Development and Advocacy
Email:	n.masasso@cairns.qld.gov.au
Mobile:	4044 3522
SBF Proxy details	
Full name:	Sam Doyle- Wiaczek
Position:	Program Leader Economic Development
Email:	s.doylewiaczek@cairns.qld.gov.au
Mobile:	4044 3284

Report information

Details	
Report date:	26/08/2026
Prepared by:	Sam Doyle-Wiaczek / Justine Gill
Stakeholders consulted:	Yes ☒ No ☐
Report published:	Yes ☒ No ☐
Report URL (if online):	N/A

Commitment performance

Celebrate achievements

What were the three most significant initiatives or achievements your council delivered this year to support small business? Where possible, include the outcomes or measurable impacts (for example, number of businesses supported, attendance, investment, or customer feedback).

- Council's total local spend for 2025/26 was \$539 million, which is 91% of Council's overall expenditure. This expenditure supports local business and jobs, and is split between employee wages, local goods and services, and investment in infrastructure. This sizeable local spend provides a total local economic impact of \$1.211 billion which benefits many small businesses across the LGA.
- Licensing and Compliance recently undertook a review of Council's fees and charges associated with commercial use activity permits. The purpose of this review was to minimise administrative processes for permit holders and providing certainty around permits. The outcomes of this review which were endorsed by Council as part of the 2026/27 budget included:
 - Inclusion of multi-year permit options (up to 3 years) for footpath dining permits.
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 - This is a simpler and more equitable charging model that better reflects the activity being undertaken.
 - Less paperwork and reduced administration each year.
 - Greater certainty around annual permit costs and consistent with Council's other regulatory permits.
 - Council was also responsive to feedback from businesses, who were facing a number of increased costs from 1 July 2027 (including payday super, increase in minimum wage, fuel etc), and delayed issuing of invoices for FY2026/27 until January 2027.
- As part of one of three Queensland Small Business Expos hosted by the Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business, Council delivered the Meet the River event

Challenges and barriers

What were the biggest challenges your council faced in supporting small business this year? Were there any barriers you were unable to overcome?

A significant challenge is understanding how to support small businesses facing cost pressures largely outside of Council's control, such as rising insurance, energy, wages, and compliance costs, compounded by softer consumer spending. Council's levers are indirect, such as streamlining approvals, advocating to State and Federal Government on matters impacting businesses and the community, and channelling support and targeted grant programs as they arise. The main barrier is jurisdictional, Council cannot influence interest rates, energy pricing, or insurance markets directly. Balancing immediate business relief expectations against Council's actual regulatory and funding scope requires careful communication, ensuring businesses understand what support is realistically deliverable versus aspirational.

What do you think local small businesses would say are their biggest challenges in working with your council and in working with broader government (state and federal)?

Administrative and regulatory requirements are among the key challenges small businesses face when working with Council. Council has undertaken a review of fees and charges, including the introduction of multi-year permits to reduce administrative burden and provide greater certainty for businesses. Council has also amended the timing of Commercial Use Activity Permits payments to assist businesses in managing increasing operating costs and cash flow pressures. In addition, Council continues to participate in and regularly update the Queensland Business Launchpad, which helps businesses identify the licences, permits and regulatory requirements relevant to their operations.

In relation to broader government, local small businesses may identify increasing employment and operating costs as significant challenges. Increased frequency of superannuation contributions and increases wage costs, together with broader economic pressures such as rising fuel prices and cost-of-living impacts, can place additional strain on business operations. These factors may affect business confidence, workforce planning and capacity for growth, particularly for small businesses operating with limited margins.

What additional support from the Small Business Friendly Program or QSBC could help your council overcome these challenges?

The Small Business Friendly Program provides valuable opportunities for knowledge sharing and continuous improvement across participating councils. Access to case studies, practical tools and best-practice examples from other Small Business Friendly councils would assist Council in identifying and implementing initiatives that have demonstrated positive outcomes for local businesses. Opportunities to benchmark approaches, share lessons learned and have a catalogue of successful projects across the network would further support the development of effective and responsive programs for the small business community.

Procurement

Do you have a Procurement and/or Local Buy Policy?

Do you have a Small Business and/or Local Buy procurement target?

What percentage of procurement was awarded to Queensland small businesses in your council region?

Cairns Regional Council operates under an established Procurement Policy and utilises the Local Buy to support its purchasing activities. Council's total local spend for 2025/26 was \$539 million, which is 91% of Council's overall expenditure. This expenditure supports local business and jobs, and is split between employee wages, local goods and services, and investment in infrastructure. This sizeable local spend provides a total local economic impact of \$1.211 billion which benefits many small businesses across the Cairns Local Government Area.

Data on supplier business size is not currently collected or reported as part of Council's procurement monitoring processes. Council does not have specific targets for local expenditure; however, it remains committed to maintaining and maximising local procurement opportunities where appropriate, while ensuring all procurement activities align with the principles of sound contracting.

Feedback

As a result of your council's participation in the Small Business Friendly Program this year, which of the following outcomes has your council experienced? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Introduced a new initiative supporting small business
- ☒ Improved engagement with local businesses
- ☒ Improved engagement with other councils or levels of government
- ☒ Changed a policy or process that benefits small businesses
- ☒ Reduced red tape

- ☐ Improved procurement opportunities
- ☐ Developed new partnerships
- ☒ Increased executive awareness or support for small business
- ☐ Other / additional comments - provide data if applicable

Participation in the Small Business Friendly Program provides a framework for Council to strengthen its engagement with the local business community and increase collaboration with other councils and levels of government. The program has also contributed to increased organisational awareness of small business needs and opportunities, helping inform Council initiatives and decision-making.

During 2025-26, Council implemented a number of process improvements that benefit small businesses, including changes to permit arrangements, the introduction of multi-year permit options, and updates to fee structures and payment timing in response to business feedback. These initiatives have helped reduce administrative burden and support a more business-friendly operating environment.

Program Evaluation

We'd appreciate your feedback on your experience with the Small Business Friendly Program. Your responses will help us improve the support and services we provide to members.

Feedback	Rating				
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
How would you rate the overall value your council has received from participating in the Small Business Friendly Program?	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
<i>Consider the support provided to small business, networking opportunities, policy improvements, and community impact.</i>					
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
How satisfied are you with the delivery of the Small Business Friendly Program?	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
What improvements or additions would you like to see in the Small Business Friendly Program?	We would welcome the opportunity to attend the Small Business Friendly Conference online for those who are unable to travel.				

Membership requirements

Requirements	Status				
1. Authorised representative and proxy appointed.	Yes ☒	No ☐			
2. Small Business Action Plan (or equivalent) implemented.	Yes ☒	No ☐	Review Date:		
3. Participated in at least four SBF Program activities in the previous FY. E.g. Roundtable meetings, conference.	0 ☐	1-2 ☐	3-4 ☐	>4 ☒	

Please complete the annual report template by 30 September 2026 and return to commissioner@qsbc.qld.gov.au