



CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

2024/25



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decisions

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Industry Snapshot - 2024/25



\$1,643M

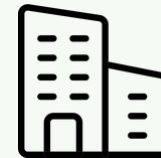
Output / Total Sales



3,580

Local Jobs

4.0% of total local jobs



514

Local Businesses

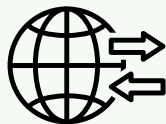
3.4% of total GST Registered Businesses



\$458M

Gross Value Added

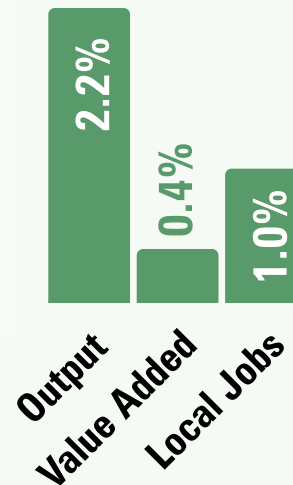
4.4% of total industry value added



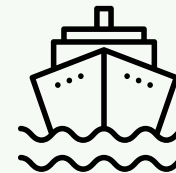
\$665M

Total Exports

**5YR
ANNUAL
GROWTH**



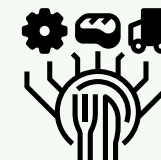
KEY SUB-INDUSTRIES



Transport Equipment

\$130M Value Added

848Jobs



Food Product Manufacturing

\$92M Value Added

620 Jobs

Sources: NIEIR, 2026; ABS ABR 2026

Industry Size and Composition

	 Output/Sales	 Value Added	 Employment
Direct	\$1,643M	\$458M	3,580

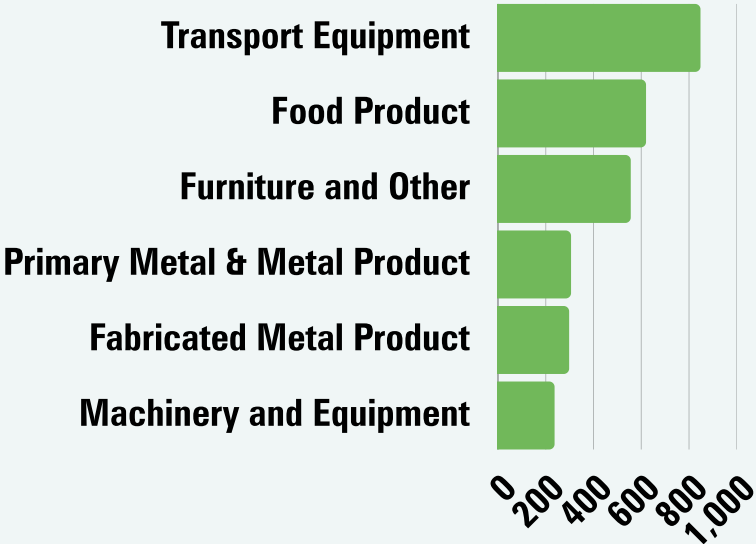
	Indirect/Flow-on Impacts		
Industrial	\$547M	\$261M	1,795
	+	+	+
Consumption	\$343M	\$189M	1,795

Total Impact	\$2,532M	\$908M	7,170

In 2024/25, the Manufacturing Industry in Cairns was estimated to have generated \$458M in direct plus an additional \$450M in indirect impacts for a total contribution of \$908M in Value Added. The industry supported 3,580 jobs directly and an additional 3,590 in indirect employment.

The largest sub-industry for direct employment was estimated to be Transport Equipment Manufacturing with 24% of the total sector's employment.

Sub-Sector Employment, 2024/25
Top Sub-Industries

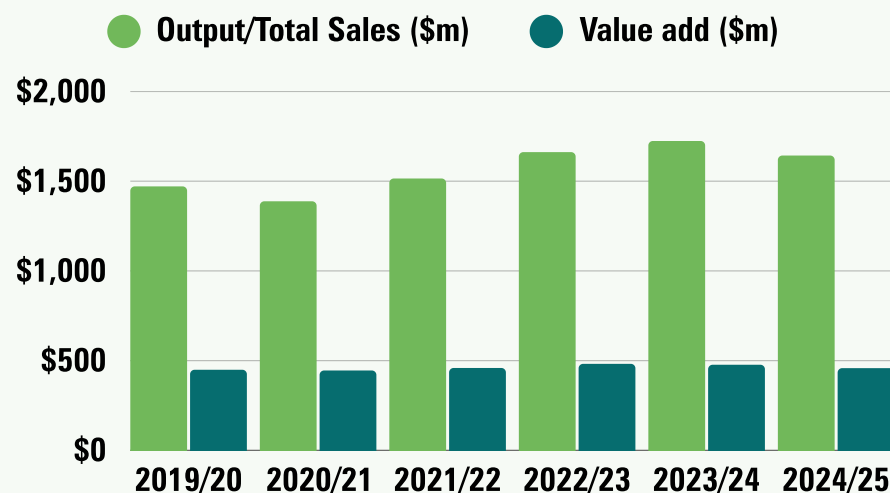


Sources: NIEIR, 2026

GROWTH TRENDS

In 2024/25, there were an estimated 3,580 employees working in the Manufacturing Industry in Cairns and 3,104 full-time equivalents. The industry generated \$458M in Value Added, or \$127,838 per employee (\$147,443/FTE). Growth in the industry has averaged 1.0% p.a. for employment over the last five years and 0.4% p.a. for value added. Both change in jobs and economic value have been below the state average.

Economic Value, Cairns Region, Financial Year



**5 YEAR
AVERAGE
ANNUAL
INDUSTRY
GROWTH**

2.2%

Output/Sales

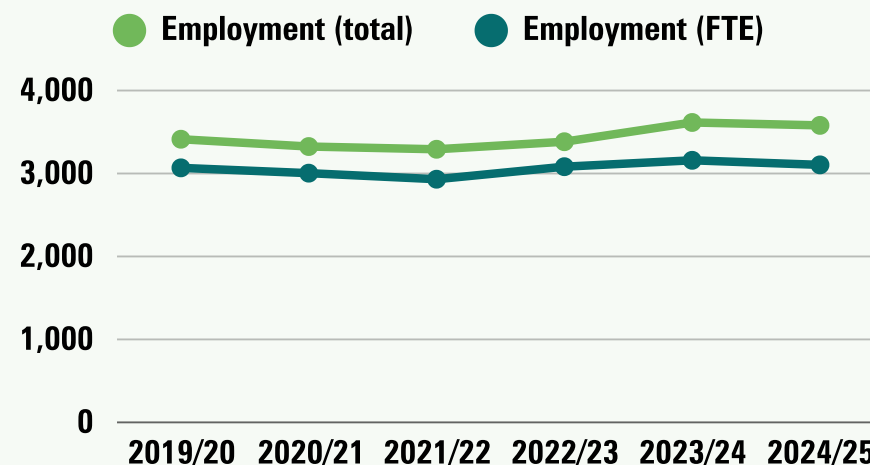
2.6% p.a.

0.4%

Value Added

1.2% p.a.

Average Employment, Cairns Region, Financial Year



**5 YEAR
AVERAGE
ANNUAL
INDUSTRY
GROWTH**

1.0%

Employment

1.2% p.a.

0.2%

FTEs

0.9% p.a.

Sources: NIEIR, 2026



COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE



Cairns has a strong specialisation in shipbuilding supporting 45% of QLD's jobs in this industry. The world-class marine precinct services 15% of all Australian and close to 80% of all North Queensland registered vessels longer than 15 metres.



Cairns continues to win major Defence contracts due to its service role for the HMAS Cairns Naval base. It has recently been designated as one of four Regional Maintenance Centres for the Navy in the country.



Cairns is also over-represented in Aircraft Manufacturing and Repair Services supporting three times the state average employment. This is enabled by Cairns Airport being a regional aircraft maintenance hub.



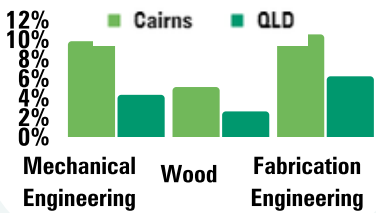
Cairns has an over-representation in sugar manufacturing due to large sugar cane plantations and MSF Sugar's Corporate Head Office being located in Gordonvale, 30mins drive south of Cairns city.



Cairns has a State Government-supported Regional Manufacturing Hub providing support for local manufacturers to develop advanced capabilities, access specialised training, and identify new business opportunities.



Cairns manufacturing workers specialise in a number of roles including mechanical engineering which is >2 times the state average.



¹ Priority Development Areas

Sources: PwC, 2020; ABS Census 2021; NIEIR, 2026

WORKFORCE PROFILE

Workers in the Manufacturing Industry in Cairns in 2021 were slightly older than the state as a whole with a median age of 44 and more male orientated (76% compared to 72% for QLD).

Approximately 66% of the workforce had Certificate III or above qualifications and 19% were working in professional or managerial roles.

In 2021, the FTE median income of the local workforce was just below the state median. The region had a higher share of business owner/managers (16%) than the QLD average.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY, 2021 - CAIRNS REGION



44 years

Median Age

QLD - 42 years



\$65,663

Median Income FTE

QLD - \$66,246



76%

Male

QLD - 72%/28%



24%

Female



82%

Full Time

QLD - 82%



22%

Born Overseas

QLD - 32%



16%

Owner Manager

QLD - 11%



5.1%

Identified as First Peoples

QLD - 2.5%



19%

Professionals/Managers

QLD - 23%



10%

Degree or Above

QLD - 15%

56%

Certificate III to Advanced Diploma

QLD - 44%

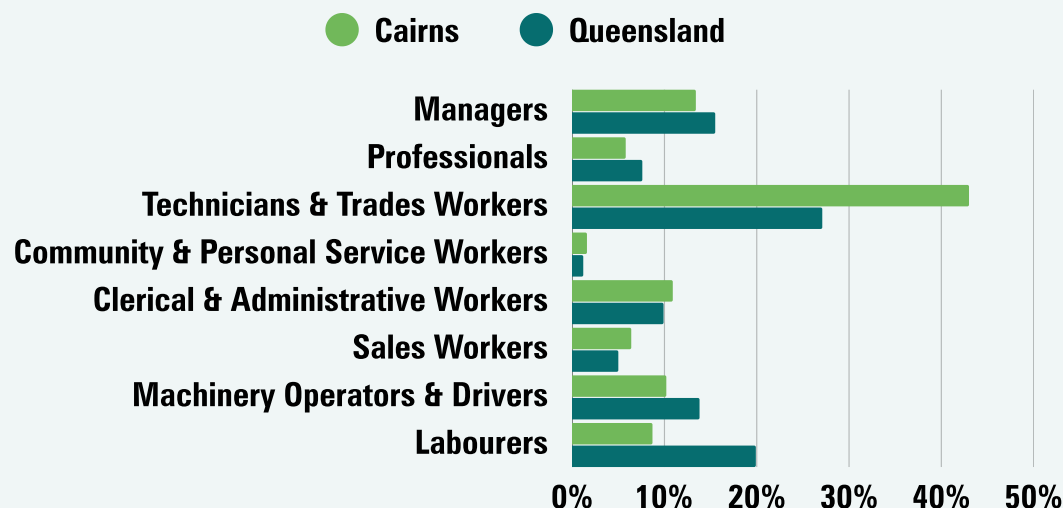
Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

EDUCATION & SKILLS

The Manufacturing Industry in Cairns had a lower share of workers in professional occupations in 2021 (6%) compared to the QLD average (8%), but a much higher share of technicians (43%). The top occupations were Structural Steel and Welding Trades Workers and Aircraft Maintenance Engineers.

The industry had a higher share of qualified workers (67%) than the QLD average (61%) with most having certificate level (trade) qualifications).

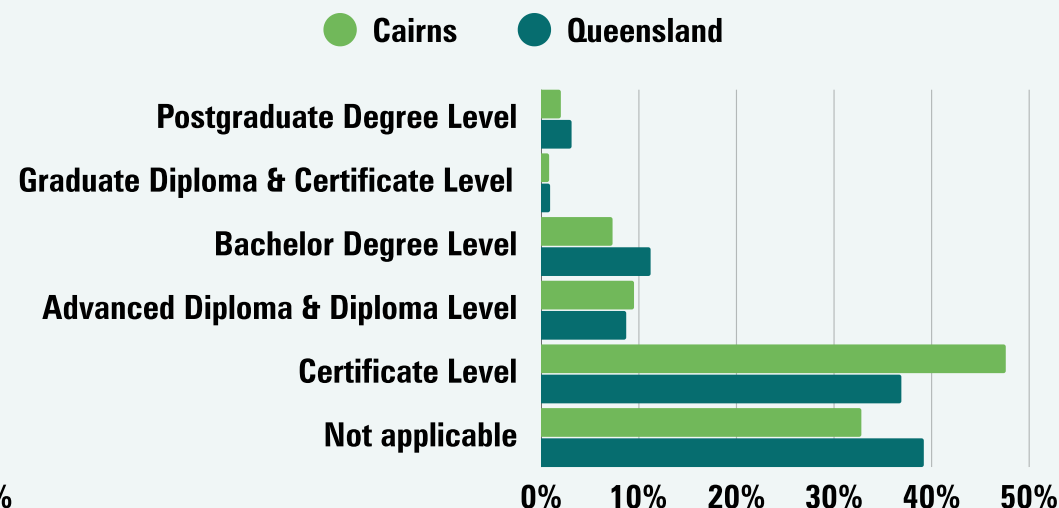
Local Workforce Occupations, 2021



Top Occupations

- Structural Steel and Welding Trades Workers
- Aircraft Maintenance Engineers
- Cabinetmakers
- Metal Fitters and Machinists

Local Workforce Qualifications, 2021



Top Study Fields

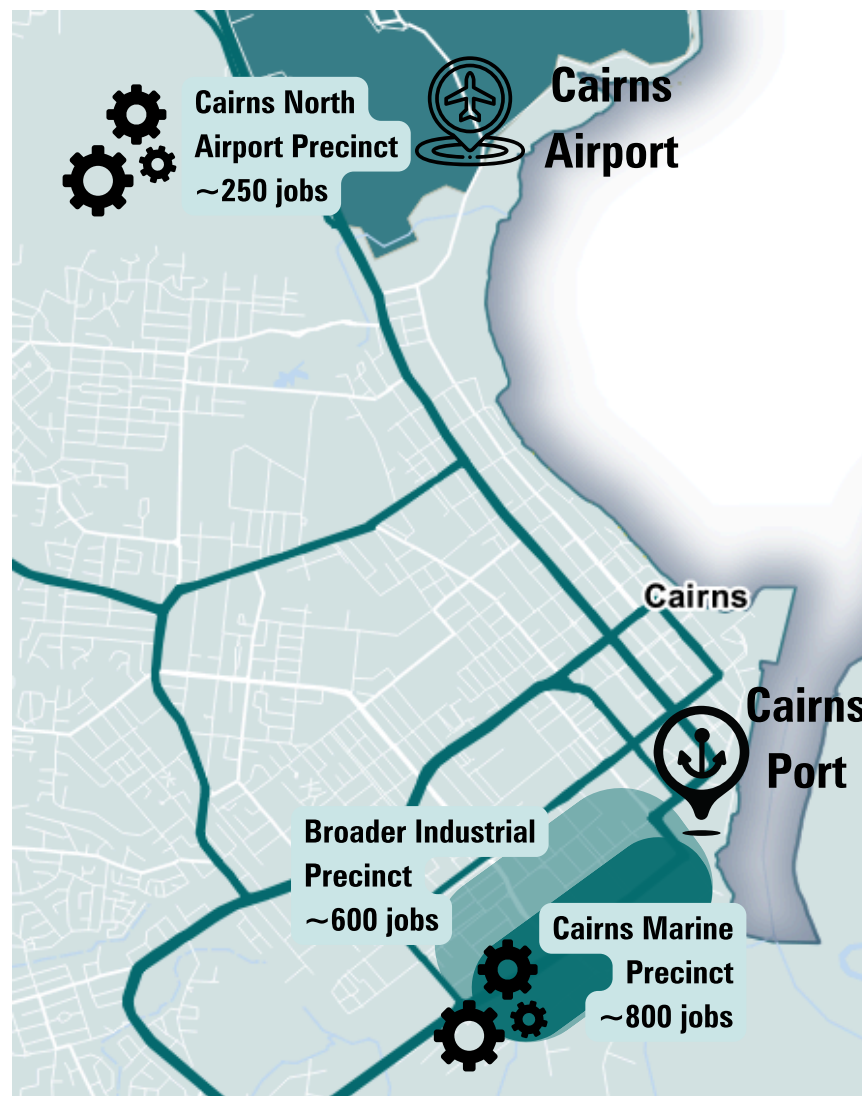
- Boilermaking and Welding
- Engineering and Related Technologies
- Metal Fitting, Turning and Machining
- Cabinet Making

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Main employment precincts



Estimated Industry Jobs, 2021



Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Key employers

- Austal Cairns
- BME NQ
- Cashcor Engineering
- CCW Cabinetworks
- CSF Industries
- Dawsons Group of Companies
- Jet Aviation
- MSF Sugar
- Norship
- Norweld
- Seaswift
- Skytek
- Tonkin Steel
- Tropical Reef Shipyard



PROJECTS & TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE



Expansion of Cairns Marine Precinct

Supported by joint Federal and State Government investment and led by Ports North, the Cairns Marine Precinct expansion will deliver a new marine common-user maintenance, repair and overhaul facility (CUF) featuring a 5,000-tonne shiplift, hardstand areas, climate-controlled sheds for blasting and painting and a wet berth for in-water maintenance. An EOI will officially open on July 13 inviting private sector partners to co-invest, design, build and operate the CUF.



Regional networks and grants

Cairns is one of the designated State Government Regional Manufacturing Hubs. Funding will be available for specialist training, business development and network development for local manufacturers. Key focus areas are marine, aviation, food, modular housing, engineering, fabricated metal product manufacturing, and machinery and equipment manufacturing. The Transforming Queensland Manufacturing Grants Program offers \$79.1 million in funding over 3 years.



Advanced manufacturing facilities

There is an early stage proposal for an Advanced Fibre Composites Maintenance and Repair Facility and access to 3D printing technologies in Cairns. TAFE QLD also opened its \$4.1M Advanced Manufacturing Skills Lab in 2024, providing state-of-the-art training in computer-aided design (CAD), computer-aided manufacturing (CAM), and computer numerical control (CNC).



Cairns South State Development Area (SDA)

The 1159-hectare Cairns South State Development Area provides land for regionally significant industrial development over two separate areas. Developments within the SDA include the approval of a material change of use for an asphalt manufacturing plant and concrete batching plant by Koppen Construction Pty Ltd, highlighting the area's growing industrial activity.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Large specialisations in marine and aviation manufacturing areas with major complementary facilities
- Ongoing navy investment that provides secure employment
- Major education facilities that can target industry needs
- Cairns designated as a Regional Manufacturing Hub which supports training, upskilling and access to government grants



WEAKNESSES

- Shortage of adequate industrial land space has been cited by some local businesses
- Some specialist skills needs in short supply due to under-provision in local training market
- Small population base and distance to larger markets can impact expansion of some businesses
- High input costs impact profit margins



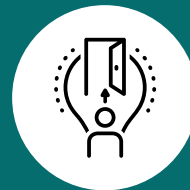
THREATS

- The expansion of the Navy base, while having flow on economic benefits, may add to the skills shortage faced by smaller businesses
- Energy and fuel cost rises to impact profit margins for some time
- Supply chain constraints/weaknesses may continue to see Cairns businesses not reap export potential



OPPORTUNITIES

- Major marine precinct investments will support shipbuilding and maintenance for much large vessels
- Investment in shared facilities for advanced manufacturing can have multiplier effects
- Cairns South SDA and a potential Airport Industry Precinct can address land supply needs
- Growth opportunities for clean energy projects
- Cairns Regional Trade Distribution Centre can enable more air freight opportunities





For more economic data on the
Cairns Region, visit economy.id

