

QUEENSLAND SPORT STRATEGY SUBMISSION

L&C | 79/4/4-02 | #7666830

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council –

1. **Endorses the submission to the Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games on the Queensland Sport Strategy (2025–2035); and**
2. **Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the Local Government Act 2009 to finalise all matters in relation to this submission.**

INTERESTED PARTIES:

- Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report presents a summary of Cairns Regional Council's formal submission to the Queensland Sport Strategy (2025–2035). The submission outlines strategic priorities in leveraging Olympic infrastructure, advancing women's sport, ensuring inclusive participation, and strengthening grassroots sport. Key focus areas include:

- Grants for infrastructure renewal
- Support for club strategic planning
- Disaster funding for recreation infrastructure
- Inclusive infrastructure design & programming
- Olympic legacy opportunities
- Passive recreation infrastructure
- Access to school facilities
- After-school activation
- Cost of participation in sport
- Program funding
- Footpaths for active recreation

The submission seeks to position Cairns as a regional leader in supporting healthy, active communities and ready to capitalise on Olympic momentum to improve liveability for the region. Consultation closes Sunday 15 June 2025.

BACKGROUND:

Council has been actively engaged in shaping sport and recreation outcomes across the region. With Cairns confirmed as a preliminary host city for Brisbane 2032 football events, significant investment has already been committed to infrastructure such as Barlow Park. The Queensland Sport Strategy provides an opportunity to advocate for sustained funding and recognition of Cairns' strengths and unique needs.

Council received an invitation from the Queensland Government on 13 May 2025 to participate in developing the Strategy which will shape the next decade of sport in Queensland. It is recommended that Council accepts the invitation and makes a formal submission to the Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games.

COMMENT:

Council's submission recommends strategic actions under several pillars:

- **Places and Spaces:** Accessible, inclusive, and well-maintained places and spaces are essential to community wellbeing, connection, and active lifestyles.
- **Volunteering and Clubs:** Volunteers and clubs play a vital role in strengthening communities and driving positive change, making it essential to invest in and expand their capacity to maximise their impact and sustainability.
- **Inclusion:** Investing in accessible facilities, adaptive programs, and First Nations-led initiatives ensures that underrepresented groups have equitable opportunities to participate, thrive, and lead in their communities.
- **Olympic Legacy:** Maximising Games-related upgrades in Cairns will deliver lasting community benefits through improved infrastructure, inclusive programs, and increased access to active and connected lifestyles.
- **Participation:** Increasing participation in sport and active recreation requires prioritising flexible formats, casual sport options, and targeted support for inactive demographics to ensure everyone can get involved in ways that suit their needs.
- **Women in Sport:** Council's bold vision to be Australia's premier destination for women's sport. Women's sport is a unifying outcome of Council's priorities—linking infrastructure, legacy, participation, and programming to showcase Cairns' leadership in inclusive regional development.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (recommended):

That Council –

1. Endorses the submission to the Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games on the Queensland Sport Strategy (2025–2035); and

2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the Local Government Act 2009 to finalise all matters in relation to this submission.

Option 2:

That Council does not support the submission to the Queensland Sport Strategy (2025-2035) and withdraws its submission.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

Council's submission to the Queensland Sport Strategy proactively aligns with the Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games and reinforces Council's leadership in advocating for strategic outcomes for Cairns. There is no perceived risk in Council's submission, with all content included in the submission being publicly available information.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

There is no cost associated with the recommendation of this report however, the content of the submission aims to guide investment in Cairns on priority sporting projects and programs.

Sport is a major contributor to the economy of Australia, generating around \$50 billion each year and accounts for 2-3% of Australia's GDP. Fourteen million Australians participate in sport annually, 1.8 million volunteer 158 million hours each year, and 220,000 are employed across the sector. However, sports economic impact goes much deeper than that. A child playing sport develops critical life skills which helps to produce more balanced and successful adults.

Community and Cultural Heritage:

Sport's impact on the Australian way of life is underestimated. It's at the very heart of every community impacting our culture, society and economy. Sport offers a wide range of benefits to individuals and communities as a whole. It promotes physical and mental health, social inclusion, and can even contribute to the economy. Sport provides opportunities for social interaction, builds community, and can even help address social issues like youth crime. In the lead up to Brisbane 2032, there has never been a more opportune time for Council to support both its own initiatives and community led projects as they relate to sport.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The recommendation of this Report supports the Corporate Plan Focus Four: Community and Culture.

Statutory:

Nil.

Policy:

Nil.

CONSULTATION:

Consultation for the Queensland Sport Strategy is led by the Queensland Government. Council officers will continue to engage with the Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games in the development of the Strategy.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 - Submission to the Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games for Queensland Sport Strategy (2025–2035)



Tim Dendle
Executive Manager Community Spaces



Destry Puia
Director Lifestyle and Community

Attachment 1 - Submission to the Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games for Queensland Sport Strategy (2025–2035)

PURPOSE

This submission outlines the strategic priorities and recommendations of Cairns Regional Council in response to the Queensland Sport Strategy Discussion Paper.

With Brisbane 2032 on the horizon, Cairns is uniquely positioned to benefit from the Olympic and Paralympic Games. As a host venue for preliminary football and basketball events and a recipient of significant infrastructure funding, the region is set to experience long-term benefits for aspiring athletes and the broader community. The Games provide a generational opportunity to inspire participation, foster local talent pathways, and activate legacy infrastructure that supports sport at all levels as well as considering active recreation opportunities within the community.

This submission reflects the unique opportunities and challenges facing the Cairns region, with a focus on Olympic legacy infrastructure, Cairns' position as a hub for women's sport, and the need to address long-standing issues such as access to school sporting facilities and volunteer capacity within community sport

KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSIDERATION

Cairns Regional Council has identified ten key focus areas critical to ensuring the Queensland Sport Strategy (2025–2035) delivers meaningful outcomes for Cairns. These focus areas reflect recurring themes across the Council's submission and highlight systemic challenges and high-impact opportunities that require targeted attention.

They respond directly to the barriers faced by regional clubs, councils, and participants—ranging from disproportionate infrastructure costs and limited funding flexibility to access inequities for regional athletes and inactive groups. They also recognise the unique strengths of the Cairns region, particularly its potential to serve as a training and competition hub aligned with the Olympic legacy and to lead in inclusive, culturally responsive sport infrastructure and programs.

These priorities are not only relevant to Cairns but provide a scalable model for broader regional Queensland. By addressing these focus areas, the Queensland Government can help ensure the Strategy is truly equitable, future-focused, and capable of unlocking the social, health, and economic benefits of sport for all Queenslanders.

Councils Top 10 Key Focus Areas are:

① Disproportionate Infrastructure Costs

Costs in regional areas like Cairns are not reflected in existing grant caps. Regional projects exceed standard grant thresholds; funding needs to match true delivery and maintenance costs.

② Support for Club Strategic Planning

Clubs who are predominately volunteers require funding assistance that enable them to plan infrastructure and participation needs strategically and over the long term, especially those with limited state/national body support.

③ Grants for Infrastructure Renewal

It is increasingly difficult for Councils and community clubs to maintain sports and recreation facilities over the long term due to limited funding, aging infrastructure, and growing demand. To support sustainability and maximise the value of existing assets, grant programs should prioritise not only new developments but also the upgrade and renewal of existing infrastructure.

④ Disaster Funding for Recreation Infrastructure

Consider allowing disaster recovery funds to cover general recreation infrastructure, recognising community reliance on these assets post-disaster. This includes park recreation infrastructure.

⑤ Inclusive Infrastructure Design & Programming

Physical infrastructure, programming, and service design should be planned to enable safe, culturally appropriate, and practical participation for marginalised groups.

⑥ Olympic Legacy

Regional athletes face significant cost and access barriers to high-performance training and competition opportunities. Leveraging Cairns' unique geography and existing strengths as a hub for sports like mountain biking and triathlon can support a hub-and-spoke model for high-performance development. Strategic investment is needed to reduce regional cost burdens and create more equitable pathways for talent across Queensland.

⑦ Passive Recreation Infrastructure

There is growing community demand for accessible, high-quality park infrastructure to support unstructured recreation and social sport, yet the cost of delivering and maintaining these assets is a significant barrier for Council. A dedicated funding stream for infrastructure such as walking paths, lighting, and multipurpose courts would enable councils to better support activities like parkrun, casual basketball or tennis, and everyday community use.

8 Shared School Facilities

School facilities often remain underutilised outside school hours, despite growing community demand for accessible spaces. Clear frameworks and partnerships are needed to enable shared use, with councils positioned to manage risk and support community clubs in accessing education infrastructure for sport and recreation.

9 After-School Activation & Cost of Participation

Disengaged youth often face barriers to participating in sport and active recreation, including limited program availability and financial constraints. There is a need to reinstate successful after-school programs, explore inclusive interschool competition models, and continue initiatives that reduce the cost of participation to improve engagement, wellbeing, and social outcomes for young people.

10 Footpaths for Active Recreation

Footpaths are often overlooked as sport and recreation infrastructure, despite their critical role in enabling low-barrier physical activity and supporting recurring community events like parkrun. Dedicated funding is needed to recognise and invest in footpaths as essential infrastructure for inclusive, everyday participation in active lifestyles.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

The ten key focus areas identified by Cairns Regional Council reflect the practical challenges and strategic opportunities facing sport and recreation across the LGA. These focus areas align with six overarching priority themes, with further detail outlined under each of these pillars:

Places and Spaces

Accessible, inclusive, and well-maintained places and spaces are essential to community wellbeing, connection, and active lifestyles.

Volunteering and Clubs

Volunteers and clubs play a vital role in strengthening communities and driving positive change, making it essential to invest in and expand their capacity to maximise their impact and sustainability.

Inclusion

Investing in accessible facilities, adaptive programs, and First Nations-led initiatives ensures that underrepresented groups have equitable opportunities to participate, thrive, and lead in their communities.

Olympic Legacy

Maximising Games-related upgrades in Cairns will deliver lasting community benefits through improved infrastructure, inclusive programs, and increased access to active and connected lifestyles

Participation

Increasing participation in sport and active recreation requires prioritising flexible formats, casual sport options, and targeted support for inactive demographics to ensure everyone can get involved in ways that suit their needs.

Women in Sport

Councils bold vision to be Australia's premier destination for women's sport. Women's sport is a unifying outcome of Council's priorities—linking infrastructure, legacy, participation, and programming to showcase Cairns' leadership in inclusive regional development.

By grouping the focus areas under these themes, Council shows how targeted investment can bring real benefits to local clubs, communities, and the Cairns economy. The suggested recommendations support a clear and effective progression—from fixing basic infrastructure and access issues to achieving wider social, health, and economic benefits through sport and active recreation.

PLACES AND SPACES

Key Focus Area: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10

Discussion Paper: Places and Spaces

Cairns is recognised for its strong commitment to creating active, healthy, and socially connected communities. Our year-round outdoor lifestyle is supported by extensive infrastructure, including sports fields, aquatic centres, walking trails, parks, indoor facilities, and significant public investment in walking and cycling paths, outdoor fitness stations, skate parks, and playgrounds/ play spaces.

Cairns' outdoor lifestyle, high physical activity rates, and integrated investment in active spaces demonstrate the power of infrastructure to drive health, inclusion, and connection. However, rising costs, delivery constraints, and the evolving nature of participation demand a review of the approach to funding and planning.

Sport and recreation infrastructure projects often exceed the capacity of clubs and councils to fund or deliver. For example, lighting three standard fields for club use in Cairns now exceeds \$4M well above the threshold of many grant programs. Smaller clubs without state or national body funding struggle to bridge these gaps along with the day to day running of the club.

Adding to the pressures faced by sporting facilities is the ongoing and widespread issue of vandalism and senseless destruction of property and equipment. This persistent problem places a significant financial burden on both clubs and council, who are forced to allocate resources to repeatedly repair damaged infrastructure and invest in enhanced security measures to protect their facilities.

Administrative expectations and grant processes are also misaligned with the volunteer-led nature of many clubs, resulting in underutilised funding opportunities and volunteer burnout. The requirement for multiple quotes disadvantages local suppliers and further complicates the application process.

Key considerations to guide strategy development for places and spaces.

KEY FOCUS AREA 1:

- Raise infrastructure grant thresholds to accurately reflect the escalating costs of delivering and maintaining sport and recreation infrastructure in regional areas like Cairns—where lighting standard fields for regional/ club level now exceed millions of dollars. Current funding caps are outdated and fail to meet actual delivery needs.
- Support funding for unstructured and active recreation infrastructure, such as shared paths, pump tracks, and social play spaces, not just traditional sporting fields.
- Provide funding for Council to develop Cairns sport and recreation infrastructure plan. This supports targeted, place-based investment that reflects population growth, sport trends, and future demand.
- Invest in supporting infrastructure (e.g. lighting, amenities, car parking digital connectivity, transport access) that allows regions like Cairns to host events,

training camps, and casual sport tourism aligned with natural and climatic strengths.

- Improve data sharing between State Sporting Organisations (SSOs), state government, and local councils to ensure consistent participation data and planning intelligence underpin infrastructure decisions.

KEY FOCUS AREA 2:

- Create dedicated support structures for small and regional clubs, including grant writing assistance and opportunities for co-funding with councils. This ensures equitable access to State funding for groups with limited capacity.
- Require SSOs to collaborate with local governments to develop coordinated, statewide infrastructure plans. This ensures funding is aligned with demonstrated need, avoids duplication, and supports equitable access.

KEY FOCUS AREA 3

- Reform grant programs to explicitly prioritise upgrades to existing community infrastructure, including changerooms, lighting, and surface restoration. Many existing facilities are under strain and require modernisation to meet participation and safety standards.
- Expand grants to cover not just capital works but also renewal and maintenance expenses. Without this, infrastructure deteriorates rapidly, especially in high-use or outdoor environments subject to harsh conditions. Future collaborations between State, Council and clubs in this area will prolong the life of many facilities in Cairns for the community to enjoy.

KEY FOCUS AREA 4

- Expand the eligibility of disaster recovery funding programs to include general recreation and sport infrastructure. These spaces are vital to post-disaster community wellbeing and social reconnection.

KEY FOCUS AREA 7, 10

- Broaden the scope of grant programs to include a wider range of active recreation infrastructure that supports everyday movement and inclusive participation—such as footpaths suitable for park runs, walking loops, cycling connectors, shared paths, pump tracks, outdoor fitness equipment, social courts (e.g. basketball, tennis), and inclusive play spaces. These low-barrier facilities encourage casual, accessible activity for people of all ages and abilities.
- Encourage renewal within community and event precincts—such as the Cairns Major Events Precinct—by funding synergies between venues (e.g. stadiums, skate parks, walking loops, and community hubs).

KEY FOCUS AREA 8

- Recognise and fund schools as legitimate providers of formal sporting infrastructure provision and open state grants to these sites in partnership with councils. Enable councils to coordinate infrastructure delivery across multiple sites, leveraging their local planning capacity and alignment with community needs -

recent best practice examples within the region such as St Andrews College and White Rock State School provide a model for broader implementation.

VOLUNTEERING AND CLUBS

Key Focus Area: 2

Discussion Paper: Making Sport Everyone's Game, More People in Community Sport, Places and Spaces.

Cairns Regional Council recognises that strong community sport relies on the sustainability of local clubs and the commitment of volunteers. While the delivery of physical infrastructure is essential, activating these spaces effectively requires that clubs—particularly those run by volunteers—have access to planning tools, governance support, and adequate resourcing.

Volunteer fatigue, administrative burden, and limited planning capacity continue to impact the long-term viability of grassroots sport. Smaller clubs with minimal resources often struggle to access funding, manage operations efficiently, or plan for growth. Programs such as Go Clubs and Club IQ have proven effective in building club capability, but demand for support far exceeds current program reach and resourcing. Despite these challenges, Cairns performs strongly in physical activity participation, indicating the importance and effectiveness of coordinated community sport systems. According to the Queensland Chief Health Officer's 2023 Report, the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (HHS) region has demonstrated significant improvements in physical activity levels across both adults and children.

Recent findings from the Australian Sports Commission's 2024 Community Perceptions Monitor indicate that fewer than 50% of adults and just 14% of children across Australia participate in sport three or more times per week. Cairns bucks this national trend, driven by:

- A strong network of supported community clubs
- Year-round access to outdoor activity
- Council-supported programs that integrate sport, wellness, and social connection
 - **Adult Participation:** Between 2009 and 2022, the Cairns and Hinterland HHS region recorded an average annual increase of **4.4%** in the proportion of adults meeting physical activity guidelines—the highest rate of improvement among all Queensland regions.
 - **Child Participation:** In 2021–2022, **55.8%** of children in the region achieved the recommended daily physical activity level (at least one hour per day), placing Cairns among the top three regions in Queensland for childhood activity. (Source: Queensland Chief Health Officer's Report)

These outcomes reflect the effectiveness of Cairns' community sport ecosystem and reinforce the need to sustain and scale the systems that support it.

Key considerations to guide strategy development for Volunteers and Clubs.

KEY FOCUS AREA 2

1. Provide financial assistance to strengthen the Go Clubs program, with a focus on enhancing support for volunteer-led organisations. This could include the development of targeted resources or the funding of dedicated support roles to improve club sustainability.

Increase investment in initiatives that build the capacity of local sporting clubs to embed inclusive practices—particularly through governance support, training, and compliance assistance.

2. Introduce Club Strategic Planning Grants to support long-term planning and prioritisation, particularly for clubs without strong state or national affiliation.
3. Incentivise and celebrate volunteers with meaningful rewards and pathways.
4. Subsidise governance training (e.g. Australian Institute of Company Directors) to build robust leadership within sport.
5. Where appropriate, artificial intelligence (AI) tools should be utilised to streamline club management processes and reduce the administrative burden on volunteers. Training and demonstrations of AI applications—delivered through platforms such as Club IQ—can help clubs adopt practical solutions for tasks like communication, scheduling, compliance tracking, and financial management.

By simplifying day-to-day operations, AI allows club committees to redirect their efforts toward strategic planning, marketing, and program delivery, ultimately enhancing the club's sustainability and community impact.

6. Develop a centralised club portal that leverages AI and automation to assist with the day-to-day running of community sport clubs. This would significantly reduce the administrative burden on volunteers and improve efficiency.

Key features could include:

- Automated meeting scheduling and minute recording.
- Governance tools including policy templates and compliance checklists.
- Insurance alerts and reminders.
- Built-in email, newsletter, and SMS communication tools for member engagement.
- Member database and renewal tracking
- Financial templates and budgeting support

The portal should be integrated with existing support systems such as:

- Office of Fair Trading (OFT) for compliance and reporting
- ClubIQ for capacity building and education

- Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games for funding and program access
- Local councils for grants, facility management, and local policy updates

This tool would enable volunteers to focus more on strategic planning, member experience, and community engagement, rather than being bogged down in paperwork and compliance.

Such a platform would not only streamline governance but also encourage more people to volunteer by making their roles more manageable, efficient, and rewarding.

7. Upskill clubs by providing seminars with industry professionals on how clubs can garner their members/ participants to become influencers of their sport and show case their club.

INCLUSION

Key Focus Areas: 2, 3, 5, 8,10

Discussion Paper: Making Sport Everyone's Game, More People in Community Sport, Places and Spaces.

Cairns is home to one of Queensland's most diverse populations. Cairns has the highest number of First Peoples outside dedicated First Nations LGAs, the largest range of Traditional Custodian groups, and the biggest Torres Strait Islander population outside the Torres Strait. This unique diversity enables Cairns to support First Nations aspirations while unlocking broader social, economic, and cultural benefits for the region.

Despite this strength, equity of access to sport and recreation remains a challenge. To address this, physical infrastructure, programming, and service design must proactively include marginalised groups—ensuring participation is safe, culturally appropriate, and meaningful.

Inclusive infrastructure and culturally safe programming are vital to growing participation among First Nations peoples, people with disability, and multicultural communities alike. Council's strategic frameworks—such as the Disability Action Plan 2022–2026, Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan, and Go Clubs program—provide a strong foundation, complemented by dedicated initiatives for multicultural communities, youth engagement, and free regional fitness through the Active Living Program.

Key considerations to guide strategy development for Inclusive infrastructure and programs.

KEY FOCUS AREA 2

1. Invest in capability building for community clubs to deliver culturally safe and inclusive programs.

2. Provide support to Council for training for clubs in inclusion, governance, and cultural competence via Go Clubs.
3. Pilot fitness qualifications for locals in remote and regional areas to build local delivery capacity with reciprocal community delivery commitments.
4. Fund grassroots and First Nations-led projects for greater local ownership and engagement which may entail adult-focused, culturally safe programs to improve participation and community wellbeing.
5. Strengthen partnerships with disability advocacy groups, First Nations organisations, multicultural associations, and youth service providers.
6. Request government co-investment in training programs for clubs and sport staff on cultural competency, disability awareness, inclusive coaching, and trauma-informed engagement. This will empower clubs to better support diverse participants and reduce unintentional barriers.
7. Assist clubs to promote sport as a social connector, not just a competitive outlet. Casual and social formats can help combat loneliness, encourage regular activity, and build inclusive, welcoming environments for people from all backgrounds and abilities.
8. Reignite programs such as the 'Get Out Get Active' program.

This program allowed women to explore many of the existing cycle paths and was the catalyst for many of these women to form social groups and continue their rides on a weekly basis with no formal club being developed. The recommendation is that this program be made available on an annual basis and run over a two year period to ensure the full value of developing and delivering these programs is achieved.

9. Support investment in grassroots initiatives that are led or co-designed by community members, particularly First Nations, multicultural groups, young people, and people with disability. These programs are more likely to build trust, reflect local needs, and encourage long-term participation.

KEY FOCUS AREA 3

10. Prioritise inclusive infrastructure tailored for youth, women, multicultural, First Nations, and disability groups. This includes features such as shaded viewing areas, accessible changerooms, prayer spaces, and culturally responsive signage.
11. Establish targeted funding streams to support participation initiatives for people with disability, First Nations youth, and culturally diverse communities.

KEY FOCUS AREA 5

12. Incorporate culturally sensitive features such as prayer spaces, shaded areas, and culturally safe changerooms in universal design guidelines.

13. There is also a significant gap in culturally appropriate adult fitness programs. While the FairPlay voucher program supports youth access to sport, adult pathways are underdeveloped. This is a missed opportunity, as adult participation in sport is known to reduce the risk of chronic health conditions, substance dependency, mental health issues, and social isolation.

Adult sport also fosters intergenerational benefits—when parents are active and engaged, their children are more likely to participate as well. Expanding adult-focused programs—especially those that are First Nations-led and culturally safe—will enhance community wellbeing, build local leadership, and provide long-term social and health returns for remote and disadvantaged communities.

An example of such initiatives is the Indigenous Marathon Project. Support is required for similar type programs.

KEY FOCUS AREA 8

14. Increased access to school facilities for not-for-profit community sport and recreation groups that may not be part of a formalised club. This will develop shared school use frameworks to open school grounds for culturally inclusive community use.

KEY FOCUS AREA 10

15. Ensure new and upgraded facilities are connected to public transport, footpaths, and bike networks to support access for those without private vehicles and consider funding improved connections.

OLYMPIC LEGACY

Key Focus Area 6

Cairns embraces Brisbane 2032 as a transformational opportunity for regional Queensland. The city is already a host venue with significant investment underway at Barlow Park:

- \$91 million for stadium upgrades and Olympic infrastructure.
- Lighting and broadcast enhancements to national standards.
- Future Community, Development, and High-Performance Centre in partnership with the North Queensland Cowboys.

To complement these upgrades, the surrounding environment must also be enhanced to create a cohesive, attractive setting that not only improves the user and spectator experience but also presents a visually striking backdrop for televised events—encouraging future visitation and investment.

In addition, Council is committed to maximising the Olympic legacy through:

- Completion of the Major Events Precinct Masterplan and Project Validation Report.

- Coordinated land-use and precinct planning alongside Cairns Showgrounds and neighbouring areas.
- Strategic branding of Cairns as Australia's premier regional destination for women's sport.

These efforts connect infrastructure investment with community activation, event attraction, tourism, and sustained economic development well beyond 2032. More than just a focus on facilities, Cairns recognises sport as a powerful tool for addressing broader social challenges and fostering inclusive growth.

Sport in Cairns—and Queensland more broadly—can also be a powerful driver to address key societal challenges: health, youth engagement, loneliness, and ageing. Harnessing the momentum of Brisbane 2032, innovative approaches can be embedded in the Olympic legacy to ensure broad community benefits:

- **Health:** Investing in inclusive, accessible sport and active recreation programs helps prevent chronic disease, supports mental health, and promotes lifelong wellbeing. Digital platforms and community health partnerships can increase reach and engagement.
- **Youth Engagement:** Flexible sport formats, integration with e-sports, and strengthened school-community links keep youth connected, build leadership skills, and encourage lifelong participation.
- **Loneliness and Social Isolation:** Group sport and recreational activities foster social connection and belonging. Intergenerational and adaptive sport models help address isolation, particularly among older adults and people with disability.
- **Ageing Population:** Age-friendly infrastructure and tailored programming support active ageing, helping seniors maintain health and social inclusion. This includes provision of footpath and cycle networks that are connected and safe.

Key considerations to guide strategy development for Olympic Legacy.

KEY FOCUS AREA 2

1. Develop a competition for young influencers to hash tag on their Tik Tok, You Tube channels to showcase the Cairns region (e.g. mountain bikers and skaters are good at this). There could be an incentive to the winner and the club.
2. Bring performance coaching to the athlete, by facilitating regional visits from elite coaches who work in partnership with local coaches. This supports both athlete development and local coach capacity building through hands-on, in-community professional development.

KEY FOCUS AREA 6

3. Secure ongoing funding for Olympic-aligned projects such as the Cairns Esplanade skate park, mountain bike trails. This includes not only the immediate infrastructure but enhancement to the surrounding areas to connect

the infrastructure (e.g. Barlow Park grandstand to incorporate active travel networks to the venue and landscaping as it will be televised around the world).

4. Include surrounding areas in funding eligibility to create visually appealing, cohesive precincts that enhance the visitor and broadcast experience. This includes upgrades of key tourist destinations to ensure the visitor experience is positive (this may include greening the city, upgrades of the Lagoon area/esplanade area, improve accessibility and amenities at Palm Cove).
5. Develop Cairns as a regional high performance talent hub for selected sports. Rather than be based in larger cities (e.g. AIS, QAS) consider a hub-and-spoke model where Cairns becomes the high-performance training destination – potential sports may be mountain biking, triathlon, skate.
6. Costs to travel for regional athletes remains high. Provide travel subsidies and scholarships for regional athletes to access elite pathways without having to move to a larger city.
7. Support regional elite athletes through elite coaching visits, scholarships, and cost-covering travel funds.
8. Create a documentary style product and follow local athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers in their quest for Olympic greatness. Explore the foundation and characters of grassroots sport in regional Australia and what makes them so committed (similar style to Netflix doco “Sunderland ‘til I Die” and ‘Matildas – the World at Our Feet’).
9. Explore how Cairns can be showcased in Esport initiatives to promote the Ironman Route or the Smithfield MTB Trails (e.g. AusCycling National Club Esports Series).

KEY FOCUS AREA 9

10. Use “Adopt-a-team/athlete” and Olympic programming in schools to build excitement and legacy. Create an ‘Adopt-an-athlete/team’ for schools to get behind and barrack for to create excitement in the lead up Brisbane 2032. This could be an Australian athlete that then visits the school. For Cairns hosting the preliminary rounds of football, they could ‘Adopt-a-team’ from another country and use it as a learning experience about that country and then go and watch and support that team/athlete. They will discover obstacles faced in other countries that athletes have to overcome and learn what the Olympic spirit is about.
11. Provide incentives and career pathways for young professionals, volunteers, and regional leaders.
12. Offer targeted financial support for regional athletes to access centralised training camps, competitions, and squad sessions. Funding should cover

essential costs such as flights, shared accommodation, transport, and meals to remove economic barriers.

PARTICIPATION

Key Focus Areas 2, 5, 9, 10

Discussion Paper: Making Sport Everyone's Game, More People in Community Sport, Places and Spaces.

Flexible, low-barrier participation options are critical to addressing inactivity and fostering life-long involvement in sport. Cairns continues to deliver standout results in physical activity due to its Active Living program, social sport infrastructure, and culturally inclusive approaches but more can be done with financial support.

Participation strategies should follow once inclusive infrastructure and activation partners (clubs, schools) are in place—focusing on flexible, accessible, and low-barrier ways for people to get active.

Key considerations to guide strategy development for participation.

KEY FOCUS AREA 2

1. Consider broader FairPlay-style programs to reduce financial barriers.
2. The cost of participation can be a significant barrier for families from lower socio-economic backgrounds, making involvement in sport unaffordable for many. While the FairPlay vouchers program is incredibly beneficial, greater effort is needed to promote it in culturally appropriate ways. This includes providing accessible information through trusted community channels and offering support for families who may not have smartphones or internet access to apply. Improved awareness and equitable access to the program are essential to ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in sport.
3. Insurance costs remain one of the most significant barriers to sport participation. For many clubs and participants, particularly in community and grassroots sport, high insurance premiums contribute to increased membership fees and limit access—especially for lower-income families and smaller regional organisations. A comprehensive review into the true cost of insurance across the sport sector in Queensland is recommended, to assess its impact on participation, club sustainability, and affordability.

Consider statewide insurance to lower cost of sport. The Government to consider a statewide insurance scheme linked to the office of fair trade that centralises all registrations and interaction with the government and SSO's. The programme to be delivered by an online portal. The portal should be able to deliver:

- OFT regulatory advice and electronic uploads of required forms:
- Blue Cards
- Standardised Registration and insurance for all clubs and sports at one place (information to be provided to the SSO's)
- Must be phone and tablet compliant

4. There is a need for pilot programs in remote and regional communities to train local youth and interested adults in Certificate III and IV in Fitness. These programs would help build local capacity to deliver sport and physical activity initiatives, especially in areas where qualified trainers are currently lacking. In addition to fitness qualifications, participants should receive training in how to run programs, promote participation, and foster safe, inclusive, and culturally positive environments.

To ensure local benefit and community ownership, participants could commit to delivering a set number of free community-based sessions in partnership with local councils. This reciprocal approach would not only support local activation but also ensure that participants remain engaged throughout the training period and beyond.

KEY FOCUS AREA 5

5. Expand “Active Living” and similar models for older adults, CALD communities, First Nations and people with disabilities. Funding should be for program initiatives and employment costs to run it.
6. Create drop-in, social, and non-competitive models that reflect modern lifestyles. Funding of both program and employment costs is essential.

KEY FOCUS AREA 9

7. Reinstate after-school programs and interschool competitions to target youth disengagement. With parents/ guardians becoming increasingly time poor, and the cost of sport increasing, initiatives that support clubs and students to participate in activities as part of the after-school program will be beneficial.
8. Strengthen connections between sports organisations and schools, universities, and TAFEs to support continued participation during key life transitions—for example, through models like the University of Sydney’s sports clubs, which serve both students and the wider community while offering pathways from grassroots to elite sport.
9. Integrate sport with education and health sectors for sustainable, cross-sector outcomes.

KEY FOCUS AREA 10

10. Fund footpaths and shared spaces as active recreation infrastructure including parkrun loops, walking paths, and accessible trails.

WOMEN IN SPORT

CROSS-CUTTING OF KEY FOCUS AREAS

Discussion Paper: Making Sport Everyone's Game, An Aspirational Games, More People in Community Sport Places and Spaces.

Although not identified as a standalone Key Focus Area, the advancement of women's sport is strongly supported across multiple priorities— including infrastructure investment, Olympic legacy, tourism, and participation programming. As a strategic strength for Cairns, women's sport brings together themes of leadership, visibility, inclusive infrastructure, and economic growth. It serves as both a unifying outcome and a powerful showcase of what Council's integrated approach can deliver for the region.

The partnership between Cairns Regional Council, the North Queensland Cowboys, and key government agencies underpins the development of a Community, Development, and High-Performance Centre (CDHPC). This facility will be home to the Cowboys NRLW team and will:

- Attract high-performance training camps, national and international women's competitions, and development programs.
- Provide elite-level infrastructure, accessible community spaces, and inclusive programming to support lifelong participation.
- Embed women's sport into the region's sport tourism identity, leveraging the Olympic legacy and national momentum.

Key considerations to guide strategy development for Women in Sport.

1. Establish dedicated regional funding streams for inclusive Infrastructure.
 - Invest in facilities that support women's sport, grassroots participation and inclusive community access.
 - Prioritise developments like the Community Development and High-Performance Centre (CDHPC) to attract elite teams and events while offering community access and long-term legacy benefits.
2. Support high-impact partnerships with elite women's teams and education providers.
 - Back collaborations between councils, elite teams (e.g. Cowboys NRLW), and educational institutions to build integrated training, education, and leadership pathways for girls and women in sport.
 - Promote mentorship programs, internships, and dual career pathways for female athletes.
3. 100% fund female-friendly facility upgrades across regional sport venues.
 - Offer grants and incentives for clubs and councils to retrofit or design facilities that are safe, inclusive, and appealing for women and girls.

- This includes changerooms, lighting, privacy features, shaded areas, and safe transport access.
4. Invest in women's sport programming and leadership development:
 - Fund sport-specific programs designed to increase female participation, coaching, officiating, and governance representation at all levels.
 5. Incentivise events that elevate women's sport in Cairns:
 - Support regional hosting of national and international women's sport competitions, festivals, and development camps.
 - Partner with broadcasters to amplify regional women's sport and promote local role models.
 - Inspire young athletes and celebrate local heroes to foster community engagement and participation in women's sports through community activation.
 6. Integrate women's sport into sport tourism and economic development Strategies.
 - Position women's sport as a driver of regional visitation, economic growth, and local pride—aligned with Cairns' unique tourism strengths and Olympic legacy.
 - Attract and host major women's sporting events to boost the region's profile and provide competitive opportunities.
 - Highlight Cairns' unique attractions to national and international teams and athletes, positioning the city as a premier sports destination.
 - Execute market research at events to analyse the key drivers, challenges, and success factors influencing consumer behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Cairns Regional Council's submission to the Queensland Sport Strategy (2025–2035) highlights the region's readiness to leverage the Brisbane 2032 legacy for lasting community benefits. The submission outlines ten key focus areas aligned with six strategic pillars, including Olympic legacy, inclusive infrastructure, and leadership in women's sport. Practical actions are proposed to tackle challenges and create sustained positive outcomes.

Council calls on the Queensland Government to adopt flexible funding models, encourage shared school facility use, and prioritise inclusive, adaptable participation to reflect the evolving nature of community sport. Investments in infrastructure, club sustainability, and grassroots development are critical to closing regional gaps and promoting lifelong activity.

By implementing these recommendations, the Queensland Sport Strategy can deliver meaningful, long-term results—reducing regional disparities, boosting community wellbeing, and expanding participation. Cairns is well positioned to play a leading role in this transformation, working in partnership with the State to ensure the legacy of Brisbane 2032 is not just a moment in time, but a catalyst for lasting impact across Cairns.