

SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN AUSTRALIA INQUIRY INTO PREPARING FOR EMERGING INDUSTRIES ACROSS NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

EDA | 58/6/3-01 | #7794247

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Approves the attached submission to the Australian Government's Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia Inquiry into Preparing for Emerging Industries across Northern Australia; and
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise and lodge the submission and deal with any queries or other matters arising from it.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Australian Government

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On 28 October 2025, the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, the Hon Madeleine King MP, referred revised Terms of Reference for an inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia into Preparing for Emerging Industries Across Northern Australia. The Inquiry focuses on how governments can better position Northern Australia to support new and expanding industries through enabling infrastructure, workforce development, and regional collaboration.

In response, Council officers have prepared a draft submission that highlights Cairns' role as a strategic northern hub for emerging industries and economic development more broadly.

The draft submission recommends targeted investment in enabling infrastructure and workforce education and training to unlock industry growth and deliver long-term diversification and high-value employment for the region. The draft submission positions Cairns as a key regional centre capable of supporting emerging industries, while emphasising that targeted Commonwealth investment in infrastructure and skills is essential if the Cairns region and Northern Australia more broadly are to achieve their full economic potential.

In particular, the draft submission highlights the importance of unlocking new housing supply at scale in order to support the skilled workforce growth, attraction and retention needed for long term sustainable economic development. For Cairns, this means

delivering on Council's Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan which seeks to unlock around 18,500 new homes for approximately 42,500 people in Cairns' Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor. The Plan's implementation requires fast tracked land use and infrastructure planning (through a formal Priority Development Area declaration – already secured) and a tri-partite funding arrangement for essential infrastructure delivery.

A copy of Council's submission is attached (Attachment 1) and is recommended for Council approval.

BACKGROUND:

Northern Australia is experiencing growing interest in emerging industries. Regional centres such as Cairns are well placed to support these industries due to their existing economic base, strategic location, and access to transport, logistics and services.

However, many emerging industries face barriers that inhibit growth and delay investment. These barriers are particularly acute in Cairns and include:

- Insufficient enabling infrastructure, including transport, utilities, digital connectivity and industrial land; and
- A shortage of skilled labour and limited training pathways aligned to emerging industry needs.

The Australian Government's Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia is undertaking an Inquiry into Preparing for Emerging Industries across Northern Australia (the Inquiry), with a focus on identifying the infrastructure, workforce and policy settings required to support future economic growth and diversification. The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are reproduced below:

Terms of reference

The Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia shall inquire into and report on preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia, with reference to:

- a. The global transition to net zero and furthering renewable energy, decarbonisation and carbon abatement;*
- b. Developing the critical minerals industry;*
- c. Supporting the development of export industries;*
- d. Supporting the decommissioning industry;*
- e. Supporting the defence industry;*
- f. Supporting infrastructure;*
- g. Managing biosecurity risks;*
- h. Training, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce;*
- i. Empowering and upskilling local First Nations people;*
- j. Barge landings and marine access for remote communities; and*
- k. Research and development.*

From a Council perspective, the role of supporting infrastructure (*item f.*) and the training, attraction and retention of a skilled workforce (*item h.*) are of particular relevance.

Council officers have prepared a draft submission (Attachment 1) to the Inquiry and this report provides an overview of the draft submission and recommends it to Council for approval.

COMMENT:

The draft submission reflects Cairns' role as a strategic regional gateway and primary service centre for Far North Queensland. The draft submission draws on Council's Economic Development Strategy 2022–2026 and other adopted strategies to outline Cairns' capacity to support emerging industries aligned with national priorities, including renewable energy, health and research, advanced manufacturing, logistics and defence-adjacent industries.

While Cairns has strong foundations, including globally connected transport infrastructure, established industry precincts and world-class education and training institutions, Council's submission highlights that the region's ability to realise emerging industry opportunities is constrained by structural shortages in housing supply, enabling infrastructure and workforce availability. In response, the submission positions housing and trunk infrastructure as critical enablers and outlines Council's Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan as a solution to unlocking the housing supply needed to support the skilled workforce required for industry and economic development.

The submission recommends that the Commonwealth Government:

1. Formally recognise housing supply and enabling infrastructure as critical economic infrastructure supporting emerging industries.
2. Prioritise Commonwealth investment in trunk infrastructure that unlocks housing in strategic growth areas, including the Mount Peter PDA.
3. Through the 2026-27 Budget process, establish a permanent funding program dedicated to supporting local governments in the delivery and upgrade of trunk infrastructure necessary to unlock housing supply, put downward pressure on rents and housing prices, and accommodate population growth. Council would seek to access funding from such a program to support the delivery of our Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan.

The draft submission highlights that Cairns' acute housing shortage and affordability challenges, characterised by extremely low rental vacancy rates and rapid increases in rents and house prices, is constraining growth and limiting workforce mobility. These pressures directly affect priority and emerging industries by increasing labour costs, delaying project delivery, reducing investor confidence and undermining long-term workforce stability.

The submission also aligns with the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029, particularly its emphasis on infrastructure to unlock growth. Council's proposed shared-investment model provides a practical pathway for Commonwealth, State and local governments to work in partnership to address structural housing constraints that, if left unresolved, will continue to limit Northern Australia's economic potential.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (recommended):

That Council:

1. Approves the attached submission to the Australian Government's Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia Inquiry into Preparing for Emerging Industries across Northern Australia; and

2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise and lodge the submission and deal with any queries or other matters arising from it.

Option 2:

That Council **does not** approve the attached submission to the Australian Government's Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia Inquiry into Preparing for Emerging Industries across Northern Australia or requests amendments to it.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

The risk associated with the advocacy outlined in this report is reputational. Council aims to mitigate any potential reputational risk by adopting a collaborative advocacy approach underpinned by comprehensive stakeholder engagement and communication.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

Securing additional external funding to support delivery of the Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan (which is included within the draft submission recommendations) would have a positive impact on Council's financial position as without funding, Council would be required to borrow funds to support project delivery and repay these borrowings (together with interest) over time with repayments funded through increased rates and/or charges, cuts to services and investment in other areas or a combination of these actions. Such a situation would place an added cost burden on Cairns residents at a time when many are already struggling with cost of living pressures.

A three-way funding partnership between the Australian Government, Queensland Government, and Council ensures the costs of essential enabling infrastructure are shared equitably and reduces the direct impact on rate payers.

Housing supply shortages in Cairns have a significant impact on the region's economic growth. With rental vacancy rates below 1%, employers struggle to attract and retain workers. Tight housing supply also escalates rental and purchase costs, increasing cost-of-living pressures.

Likewise, a failure to properly develop and retain a strong workforce poses a wider risk for the region. If education and training, housing and enabling infrastructure are not addressed in a coordinated way, Cairns faces a significant risk of ongoing workforce shortages that will constrain economic growth.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The themes of housing and workforce development and retention as set out in this report align with three key focus areas in Council's Corporate Plan 2025-2030:

1. Robust economy - supporting a diversified and growing economy.
2. Design for liveability - a place-based approach that celebrates our community.
3. Community and culture - fostering a vibrant, healthy and inclusive community.

This report also progresses the following action contained in Council's 2025-26 Operational Plan:

- *Continued advocacy for Council's Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan - Implementing a Priority Development Area (PDA) to accelerate housing supply in the Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor.*

CONSULTATION:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Draft Cairns Regional Council Submission - Preparing for Emerging Industries across Northern Australia ([DM#7790912](#))



Nick Masasso
Director – Economic Development & Advocacy

Attachment 1: Draft Cairns Regional Council Submission - Preparing for Emerging Industries across Northern Australia

Inquiry into Preparing for Emerging Industries across Northern Australia (the Inquiry)

Submission by Cairns Regional Council

28 January 2026



Executive summary

This submission from Cairns Regional Council (Council) focuses on the critical and interdependent role of housing supply, enabling infrastructure, and workforce development in supporting the attraction, retention and growth of emerging industries in Cairns and Far North Queensland.

While the submission references several emerging industries of strategic interest to Cairns, its primary focus is on the following items in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

- f. Supporting infrastructure and*
- h. Training, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce*

The submission emphasises the need for investment in essential infrastructure to enable new housing supply to be delivered at scale. New housing supply is required to address housing availability and affordability, thereby contributing to the attraction and retention of the skilled workforce needed to support emerging industry development in the Cairns region and throughout Northern Australia.

Recommendations

That the Commonwealth Government:

1. Formally recognise housing supply and enabling infrastructure as critical economic infrastructure supporting emerging industries.
2. Prioritise Commonwealth investment in trunk infrastructure that unlocks housing in strategic growth areas, including the Mount Peter PDA.
3. Through the 2026-27 Budget process, establish a permanent funding program dedicated to supporting local governments in the delivery and upgrade of trunk infrastructure necessary to unlock housing supply, put downward pressure on rents and housing prices, and accommodate population growth. Council would seek to access funding from such a program to support the delivery of our Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan.

Introduction

Cairns is a strategic regional gateway for Northern Australia, supporting a diverse economy encompassing aviation, logistics, health, education, tourism, research, defence-adjacent services and regional service delivery. As the primary service centre for Far North Queensland, Cairns plays a critical role in supporting economic activity across Cape York, the Torres Strait and the broader Indo-Pacific region, providing essential infrastructure, workforce capability and connectivity for Northern Australia.

The region is well positioned to support the growth of emerging industries aligned with national priorities, including renewable energy, critical minerals supply chains, health and research, biosecurity, and defence industries. However, Cairns' capacity to realise this opportunity is

increasingly constrained not by a lack of demand or interest, but by structural shortages in housing, enabling infrastructure and skilled labour.

These constraints limit economic growth. Workforce attraction and retention challenges are exacerbated by an acute housing shortage with a rental vacancy rate of less than 1%¹. Housing affordability is also an issue, with median rents and house prices rising by 65% and 84% respectively over the five-year period to 2025. Addressing housing shortages and improving housing affordability is a challenge that requires interventions from all levels of government, the development industry and other stakeholders. The key to addressing housing availability and affordability challenges in Cairns is unlocking new housing supply at scale.

Without coordinated action, these constraints will continue to undermine the establishment, scaling and long-term viability of emerging industries in the Cairns region and across Northern Australia.

In response, Council has developed the [Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan](#), an infrastructure-led approach to unlocking housing supply at scale. The Plan recognises housing as a form of economic infrastructure that underpins workforce availability, productivity and economic growth. It focuses on accelerating investment in essential trunk infrastructure to enable the timely delivery of new housing in strategic growth areas, particularly Cairns' Mount Peter Priority Development Area.

This submission therefore focuses on the systemic barriers and enabling conditions that must be addressed to support emerging industries in Northern Australia, with particular emphasis on the critical role of housing supply, enabling infrastructure and co-ordinated, place-based investment.

Cairns' priority and emerging industries

Overview

Council's approach to emerging industries is guided by its [Economic Development Strategy 2022–2026](#) (the Strategy), which identifies a set of priority industries based on their contribution to the regional economy, employment potential, alignment with State and Commonwealth priorities, and capacity for sustainable growth.

The Strategy recognises that Cairns possesses a diverse economic base, supported by strong regional service functions, globally connected aviation and port infrastructure, world-class education and training institutions, and established industry precincts. Rather than pursuing a wider spread of sectors, including some emerging industries, Council's focus is on scaling and evolving industries where Cairns has demonstrated capability, competitive advantage and workforce depth.

¹ SQM Research

Council's priority industries include:

- Aviation
- Marine and defence-related industries
- Healthcare and social assistance
- Education and training
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Tourism
- Arts and culture

Across these priority industries there are common requirements including access to serviced industrial land, reliable transport infrastructure, utilities, digital connectivity, and critically a stable and skilled workforce.

Council's Strategy also highlights the importance of place-based industry development, with key employment precincts including the Cairns Airport Precinct, Portsmith Marine Precinct, FNQ Health and Innovation Precinct and the Southern Cairns Precinct, which incorporates the Cairns South State Development Area (SDA) and the Mount Peter Priority Development Area (PDA). These areas concentrate industry and employment opportunities but are constrained by housing availability and infrastructure capacity.

For Cairns, the challenge in preparing for emerging industries is not identifying which sectors to support, but ensuring housing supply, trunk infrastructure and a skilled workforce are delivered when required.

Smart Green Economy

Council's Smart Green Economy project provides a framework through which several of the region's priority and emerging industries are being supported. The Smart Green Economy is not a discrete sector, but an approach that leverages Cairns' existing competitive advantages to support sustainable industry growth, innovation and job creation².

Cairns and Far North Queensland are uniquely positioned to participate in the transition to a low-emissions and climate-resilient economy. The region benefits from abundant renewable energy resources, established research and training capability, globally significant natural assets, and proven expertise in operating in tropical, remote and environmentally sensitive conditions. These attributes underpin emerging economic opportunities that align closely with national priorities, including renewable and distributed energy systems, circular economy activity, sustainable manufacturing, biodiversity management, and carbon and environmental markets.

² Cairns Regional Council - Economic Development Strategy 2022 -2026

There are three main activation opportunities within Council's Smart Green Economy. They enable the delivery of sustainable economic growth, innovation, diversification and resilience outcomes in the region across an expansive list of industrial sectors.

Priority activation areas include:

- Net zero energy systems (incl renewables);
- Circular economy initiatives; and
- Biodiversity and carbon markets.

These sectors require sustained investment in enabling infrastructure and workforce capability to transition from pilot activity to commercial scale.

From an emerging industries perspective, the Smart Green Economy reinforces the need for coordinated investment in enabling infrastructure and workforce capability. Many green economy activities, such as renewable energy deployment, circular manufacturing, and environmental services, are labour-intensive during establishment and require a mix of technical, trade, engineering and research skills. Without sufficient housing supply and supporting infrastructure, Cairns' ability to attract and retain this workforce is constrained.

The Smart Green Economy is an integrated component of its broader approach to preparing for emerging industries. Investment in enabling infrastructure, training pathways and housing supply - particularly through the Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan - is essential to ensuring these opportunities translate into durable economic outcomes, rather than remaining aspirational.

Defence and Marine

Cairns hosts an established defence and marine industry, anchored by HMAS Cairns, the Cairns Sea Port and a network of specialist enterprises delivering sustainment, maintenance and repair services.

Council's submission to the Defence Strategic Review in 2022 highlighted constraints for the industry and these remain relevant, as the structural challenges it identified have not materially changed and, in several cases, have intensified.

The submission focused on three enduring constraints to defence and industry capability in Northern Australia: infrastructure capacity, workforce availability, and investment certainty. While subsequent national strategies (Defence Strategic Review 2023 and Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029) have reinforced the strategic importance of the north, delivery remains uneven and demand continues to outpace enabling infrastructure and workforce supply.

Defence industry growth in Northern Australia should be viewed as a foundation for broader emerging industry development rather than a discrete sector as defence-related infrastructure can deliver dual-use benefits, supporting both operational requirements and civilian industrial activity. Priority infrastructure considerations include:

- Port and maritime infrastructure capable of supporting increased operational tempo and larger vessels;
- Logistics, fuel, storage and hardstand infrastructure to strengthen regional supply chains; and
- Digital and cyber-enabled precincts to support next-generation vessels and systems.

A key project underpinning our marine capabilities is the Cairns Marine Precinct (CMP) which incorporates the Common User Facility (CUF). The precinct supports a diverse marine ecosystem spanning Defence and Border Force, the tourism-reef fleet, commercial fishing, shipping and towage, specialist vessel construction, cruising yachts, superyachts and visiting cruise liners. The CMP also underpins workforce development through education and training delivered by the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College and plays a strategic role as Australia's northern gateway to the Pacific, supporting regional engagement and capability building.

The Commonwealth and Queensland governments have jointly committed \$387 million toward delivery of the CUF to expand the capacity and capability of the CMP and position the precinct to capture future defence and maritime industry opportunities. Since the Queensland Government's detailed business case in 2022, project ownership transitioned to Ports North in late 2024, triggering a review of scope and cost assumptions. This review identified inconsistencies requiring a recast of the cost estimate, which exceeded existing funding commitments.

Ports North is now undertaking a reassessment of scope and costs to ensure the CUF is commercially viable and aligned with industry needs. Once this work is complete and revised cost estimates are available, a renewed commitment from the Federal (and Queensland) Government will be critical to ensuring the CUF can proceed and deliver its full economic, defence and regional development potential.

Workforce availability is a critical constraint across defence and marine industries, particularly in Northern Australia. Cairns supports a skilled civilian workforce across marine engineering, aviation, logistics and systems maintenance, underpinned by established training providers.

In relation to this, Council's 2022 Defence Strategic Review submission identified the need for:

- Coordinated defence-industry-education workforce planning;
- Long-term defence commitments to support workforce attraction and retention; and
- Targeted reskilling and apprenticeship pathways aligned to future defence and allied requirements.

These workforce investments are transferable across defence, renewables, logistics, port operations and advanced manufacturing, reinforcing their relevance to emerging industries.

Cairns South State Development Area (SDA) opportunities

The Cairns South State Development Area (SDA) has the potential to be a critical enabler for emerging industries in Cairns, Far North Queensland and Northern Australia. Declared in November 2018 and varied in February 2020, the 1,159-hectare SDA was established to facilitate long-term economic growth, industry diversification and job creation for the Cairns region.

The SDA provides a strategically planned, investment-ready industrial land supply that directly supports the objectives of this Inquiry by addressing key constraints to emerging industries—namely land availability, infrastructure coordination, regulatory certainty and workforce accessibility.

The Cairns South SDA addresses a recurring barrier to Northern Australia development - the lack of appropriately zoned, serviced and strategically located industrial land. Key infrastructure and planning benefits include:

- Direct access to nationally significant transport corridors (road and rail);
- Capacity for intermodal and freight-related development;
- Streamlined and coordinated development assessment processes; and
- Best-practice land-use planning to reduce regulatory burden and improve investor confidence.

A sustainable workforce for emerging industries requires not only access to jobs, but also the availability of affordable housing, supporting services and connected communities. The Mount Peter PDA, situated adjacent to the Cairns South SDA, is planned to accommodate the region's significant population growth through the staged delivery of new housing, community facilities and services. When considered alongside the Cairns South State Development Area, it creates a coordinated “work, live, play” growth corridor, where:

- The SDA provides land for large-scale, regionally significant employment;
- The Mount Peter PDA delivers housing at scale for a growing workforce; and
- Supporting community infrastructure enables long-term liveability.

However, the ability to realise this is contingent on timely investment in essential trunk infrastructure, including water, sewerage, transport, stormwater and community facilities. Without this infrastructure, both industrial land and housing supply remain constrained, limiting the region's capacity to attract and retain the skilled workers required for emerging industries.

Education and Training

Education and training is a priority sector within Cairns' economy as outlined in Council's Economic Development Strategy 2022–2026 (the Strategy). It is also a critical enabling platform for skills development across all priority sectors and emerging industries. As outlined in the Strategy, education and training is one of Cairns' largest contributors to employment and economic output, supported by a strong ecosystem of world-class universities, TAFE and

specialist training providers. This sector not only generates direct economic returns, but also underpins long-term workforce capability, regional resilience and population growth.

Education and training in Cairns play an important role in enabling skills development for sectors such as health and social assistance, aviation, marine, construction, manufacturing, renewable energy and the broader Smart Green Economy. The Strategy recognises that locally delivered, industry-aligned training is essential to attracting, retaining and upskilling the workforce needed to support emerging industries, particularly in regional and remote areas. Investment in education infrastructure, workforce training pipelines and partnerships between industry and training providers represents both an economic opportunity and a critical enabler of the region's workforce sustainability.

Workforce attraction and retention

Across all existing and emerging industries, skilled workforce availability remains a constraint to growth. In Cairns and Northern Australia, these challenges are compounded by limited housing choice, high construction costs and competition for skilled labour.

The Strategy highlights the importance of world-class universities and other training providers in supporting workforce development, including James Cook University, CQUniversity, TAFE Queensland, the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre and the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College. These institutions provide a strong foundation for skills development across engineering, aviation, marine, health, construction and applied research disciplines.

State and Commonwealth skills initiatives, including the Queensland Government's Skilled Queenslanders initiative, emphasise the need for regionally tailored workforce solutions, increased apprenticeship and traineeship pathways, and stronger alignment between training provision and industry demand.

Whilst training capacity is critically important, perhaps the biggest barrier to workforce attraction and retention is housing as without homes, regions like Cairns are simply unable to accommodate the skilled workforce needed to unlock the region's enormous economic potential.

Housing as enabling infrastructure

Current challenges

Cairns is experiencing an acute housing shortage, with rental vacancy rates consistently below 1 per cent. These supply pressures have translated directly into affordability pressures, with median rents increasing by around 65 per cent and median house prices rising by approximately 84 per cent over the five years to 2025. The lack of available and affordable housing is now limiting the region's ability to attract and retain workers, constraining economic growth and cost-of-living pressures for residents.

From Council's perspective, housing is not a secondary social issue but a core component of economic infrastructure. The inability to secure suitable housing is already limiting the capacity of local employers to attract staff, retain skilled workers and expand operations. Without intervention, these pressures will directly undermine the viability of emerging industries across Northern Australia.

The lack of housing supply in the Cairns region has measurable flow-on effects for emerging industries, including:

- Delays in project commencement and delivery;
- Increased labour costs and staff turnover;
- Reduced ability to attract interstate and international workers; and
- Heightened business risk and reduced investor confidence.

These impacts disproportionately affect Northern Australia, where workforce mobility and housing choice are already more limited than in southern capital cities.

However, unlocking housing at this scale is contingent on timely investment in essential trunk infrastructure, including roads, water, sewerage, drainage and community facilities. Without State and Federal investment to help fund this infrastructure, a significant cost burden would fall to local residents at a time of heightened cost-of-living pressures. Unlocking housing supply at scale through coordinated planning and infrastructure investment is key to addressing Cairns' housing challenges and supporting the region's long-term economic and workforce needs.

Our solution – the Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan

The Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan is Council's long-term response to accelerating housing supply and improving affordability across the region. The Plan is centred on the Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor.

The Mount Peter Southern Growth Corridor has long been identified as the region's primary growth area and represents the last remaining greenfield development site of this scale within the Cairns LGA. Covering approximately 3,300 hectares (around half of which is developable), the corridor has the capacity to deliver around 18,500 new dwellings for an estimated 42,500 people and is forecast to accommodate the majority of Cairns' long-term population growth beyond 2046.

The Plan seeks to unlock this housing potential through the declaration of a Priority Development Area (PDA), enabling coordinated land-use planning, streamlined approvals and the staged delivery of essential trunk infrastructure. Independent analysis commissioned by Council has identified that approximately \$450 million in new and upgraded infrastructure is required to unlock the first stage of development alone, enabling around 3,800 housing lots in the first stage and laying the foundation for future growth. By adopting a shared investment model across local, State and Federal governments, the Plan accelerates housing delivery, improves affordability, supports workforce attraction and retention, and ensures infrastructure is

delivered where and when it is needed to support Cairns' long-term economic growth and liveability.

Northern Australia Action Plan 2024-29

Council's Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan directly aligns with the broader Northern Australia Action Plan 2024-2029 - especially the priority of "Infrastructure to unlock growth". The Action Plan recognises that unlocking the north's full potential requires not just economic investment but also the enabling infrastructure - roads, water, sewerage, drainage and transport - that allow growth and housing supply to follow.

Housing is top of the agenda for the Northern Australia Ministerial Taskforce, recognition that workforce attraction, population growth and regional productivity cannot occur without a lift in housing supply. The Taskforce is progressing work to address structural barriers to housing delivery across the north, including the need for coordinated investment in enabling infrastructure.

Council's Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan presents a practical model for how the Federal and State governments can work together with local government in a true partnership approach to fund critical trunk infrastructure and accelerate housing supply. By proposing a shared-investment model and focusing on the Mount Peter Priority Development Area, the Plan provides a ready-made pathway for Federal and State collaboration to lift housing supply in Northern Australia and support the Taskforce's broader objectives.

Conclusion

Cairns is well positioned to support the growth of emerging industries across Northern Australia. However, without action to address housing supply through targeted enabling infrastructure investment, this potential will remain constrained as regions like Cairns will simply be unable to accommodate the workforce needed to drive industry and economic growth.

Council's Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan provides a practical model for addressing the challenges of housing supply and affordability. By unlocking housing supply at scale in the Mount Peter Priority Development Area through coordinated planning and shared investment in essential infrastructure, the Plan supports workforce attraction and retention outcomes.

With this in mind, Council urges the Commonwealth Government:

- Formally recognise housing supply and enabling infrastructure as critical economic infrastructure supporting emerging industries.
- Prioritise Commonwealth investment in trunk infrastructure that unlocks housing in strategic growth areas, including the Mount Peter PDA.
- Through the 2026-27 Budget process, establish a permanent funding program dedicated to supporting local governments in the delivery and upgrade of trunk infrastructure necessary to unlock housing supply, put downward pressure on rents and housing prices, and accommodate population growth. Council would seek to access funding

from such a program to support the delivery of our Securing Cairns Housing Foundations Plan.

These actions are essential to ensuring Cairns, and Northern Australia more broadly, can attract and retain the skilled workforce required to support emerging industries and deliver sustained economic growth.