

**ORDINARY MEETING**

**11 FEBRUARY 2026**

**5.5**

**PROJECT LAUNCH APPROVAL: 601296 ESPLANADE FORESHORE  
EROSION PROTECTION**

CIA | 50/5/96-01 | #7794421

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council:

1. Approves the Project Launch Approval for Project 601296: Esplanade Foreshore Erosion Protection for Stages 3, 4 and 5 with a Project Launch Budget (PLB) of \$1.5M and an Approved End Date (AED) of 30 June 2027; and
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above project, subject to Council's normal procurement policies and practices.

---

**INTERESTED PARTIES:**

Nil

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

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Coastal erosion along the Cairns Esplanade Foreshore Parklands is exposing historic landfill material, threatening vegetation, and impacting the amenity of a key community and tourism asset.

Previous stages of rock-boulder erosion protection have performed effectively, and several unprotected sections now require similar treatment to prevent further degradation, particularly following damage sustained during the Tropical Low rain event of February 2025.

The proposed works will stabilise the shoreline, protect environmental and cultural values, and support the local economy, with funding to be sourced through the deferral of lower-priority projects.

Three options are presented, with comprehensive delivery of Stages 3, 4, and 5 recommended to ensure long-term resilience of the foreshore.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Esplanade foreshore parklands are located on a former landfill site that was reclaimed during the 1990s. The fill material is contaminated with building demolition waste.

Coastal erosion has been a persistent issue at this location, resulting in the exposure and mobilisation of building rubble, onto the beach and adjacent mudflats. These impacts are intensified during king tides and severe weather events.

An early management approach involved importing sand to maintain an artificial beach; however, this strategy was discontinued following concerns from environmental groups that sand deposition on the mudflats was adversely affecting migratory wader bird feeding habitat and would not provide a reliable long-term containment solution.

In 2015, Council engaged engineering firm GHD to assess hard-infrastructure options to mitigate ongoing erosion. GHD recommended a concrete seawall; however, due to poor foundation conditions and the significant structural demands associated with wave forces during severe weather events, this option was deemed cost-prohibitive.

Council subsequently adopted a more economical rock-boulder landscaped wall as a suitable alternative, acknowledging that periodic maintenance would be required, particularly following major weather events. An initial 80-metre section was constructed in 2015 near the volleyball courts, followed by a further 150-metre extension to the north in 2020. Minor repairs are currently underway, including installation of a concrete edge strip to address scouring that occurred during Tropical Cyclone Jasper in 2023. Emergency informal rock works were also undertaken immediately after the cyclone along a previously unprotected 100-metre section south of the skatepark to prevent undermining of the foreshore path.

In December 2025, concerned residents notified Council, via the Mayor, of additional scouring to the north and south of the existing works. While the foreshore path is not currently at structural risk in these areas, the erosion sustained during the Tropical Low rain event of February 2025 has resulted in the loss of foreshore vegetation—important for shade, amenity, and natural stabilisation—and further exposure of fill material.

To stabilise these sections and prevent further degradation, it is proposed to extend the rock-boulder landscaped wall and reinstate foreshore vegetation to enhance stability, shade, and visual amenity.

## **COMMENT:**

The existing and proposed works have been delineated on the attached staging plan to illustrate the relative timing, priority, and urgency of required interventions.

### **Stage 1**

This section was historically the most susceptible to coastal erosion and was the first area to be stabilised using the rock-boulder treatment in 2015. Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) repairs are currently in progress, including installation of a concrete edge strip to address minor erosion occurring between the upper boulders.

## **Stage 2**

Stabilisation works were completed in this area in 2020. As with Stage 1, DRFA repairs are presently underway to rectify minor erosion between the top boulders.

## **Stage 3**

This section remains unprotected, and ongoing coastal erosion is exposing the underlying landfill. The erosion poses a significant threat to numerous mature trees within the foreshore reserve.

## **Stage 4**

Similar to Stage 3, this area is unprotected and subject to active coastal erosion, resulting in exposure of landfill material and increasing risk to existing foreshore vegetation.

## **Stage 5**

This area sustained substantial damage during Cyclone Jasper, including undermining of the foreshore path and loss of several trees. DRFA emergency works were undertaken immediately following the event, involving placement of smaller informal rock to prevent loss of the path. While this treatment currently provides limited protection, it is not adequate as a long-term solution. The works also lack sufficient backfill to support re-establishment of vegetation and present a lower aesthetic standard, detracting from the amenity of the area.

## **OPTIONS:**

### Option 1 (Recommended)

That Council:

1. Approves the Project Launch Approval for Project 601296: Esplanade Foreshore Erosion Protection for Stages 3,4 and 5 with a Project Launch Budget (PLB) of \$1.5M and an Approved End Date (AED) of 30 June 2027; and
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application, subject to Council's normal procurement policies and practices.

### Option 2

That Council:

1. Approves the Project Launch Approval for Project 601296: Esplanade Foreshore Erosion Protection for Stages 3 and 4 only with a Project Launch Budget (PLB) of \$1.0M and an Approved End Date (AED) of 30 June 2027; and
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application, subject to Council's normal procurement policies and practices.

### Option 3

That Council does not approve Project 601296: Esplanade Foreshore Erosion Protection.

## **CONSIDERATIONS:**

### **Risk Management:**

There will remain a degree of residual erosion risk associated with the proposed works, as the rock-boulder treatment is not as structurally robust as the fully engineered and certified concrete seawall originally recommended by GHD. This level of risk is considered acceptable. Existing stabilised sections have performed satisfactorily to date, sustaining only minor damage during Tropical Cyclone Jasper, which is currently being addressed through installation of a concrete edge strip along the upper boulder row. This measure has been incorporated into the design of the new sections to further mitigate erosion risk.

There is also a financial risk associated with the potential need for future repairs. This is offset by the significantly lower upfront construction cost of the proposed treatment. Additional financial uncertainty exists because the project cost is an estimate and may be affected by factors such as wet weather, king tides, and scheduling delays due to community events. Notably, the proposed construction period during the tourism off-season will help minimise disruption to visitors and the broader community.

### **Council Finance and the Local Economy:**

The project will contribute to the local economy both directly and indirectly. Direct economic benefits will be realised through employment opportunities for local contractors engaged to deliver the works. Indirectly, the project will help preserve the city's appeal as a tourism destination by maintaining the amenity and functionality of the foreshore parklands.

The budget required for the project (\$1.5M) has been brought forward from the Shoreline Erosion Management Program line, which holds a \$2M allocation in 2030/31.

### **Community and Cultural Heritage:**

The project will help ensure that the Cairns Esplanade Foreshore Parklands continue to function as a central hub for community activity and an important place of cultural significance

### **Natural Environment:**

The project will protect the natural environment by preventing further coastal erosion exposing the historic landfill and releasing sediments and contaminants into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

These works have been considered against the Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy and align with the Local Adaptation Pathways for this locality in terms of short-term actions, specifically:

- maintaining existing sea walls to hold the shoreline in position; and
- updating existing or providing new infrastructure to ensure the coastline is resilient to coastal hazards

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The project aligns with Focus 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Corporate Plan.

Statutory:

Due to the urgency of the work it is proposed that the works be commenced as soon as possible under the emergency provisions of the Planning Act. Formal Development Approval for Prescribed Tidal Works will be obtained retrospectively.

**CONSULTATION:**

Standard public consultation procedures shall apply.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1 – Esplanade Foreshore Erosion Protection Staging Plan

Attachment 2 – Current DRFA Repairs to Stages 1 & 2

Attachment 3 – Current Foreshore Erosion in Stage 3

Attachment 4 – Current Foreshore Erosion in Stage 4

Attachment 5 – Current status of lesser standard DRFA emergency works in Stage 5

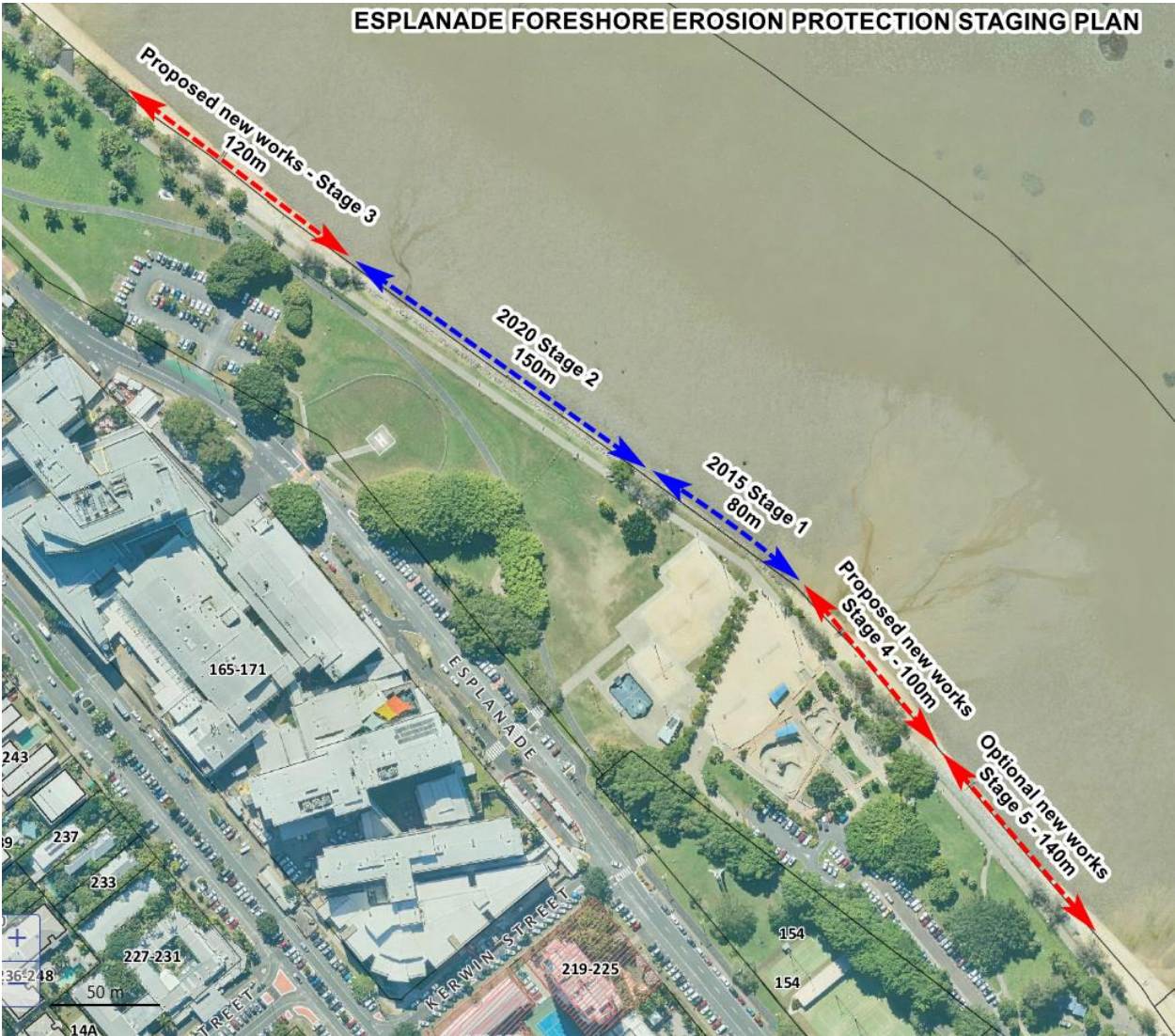


Martin Perkowicz  
Acting Associate Director Service Delivery



Mark Wuth  
Director Cairns Infrastructure & Assets

Attachment 1 – Esplanade Foreshore Erosion Protection Staging Plan



Attachment 2 – Current DRFA Repairs to Stages 1 & 2



Attachment 3 – Current Foreshore Erosion in Stage 3



Attachment 4 – Current Foreshore Erosion in Stage 4



Attachment 5 – Current status of lesser standard DRFA emergency works in Stage 5

