ORDINARY MEETING 28 OCTOBER 2026	5.4

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

EDA | 58/6/3-01 | #7952304

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. **Endorses the suite of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities as listed in Attachment 1 as the complete and current list of Council's Advocacy Priorities;**

2. **Continues to work collaboratively with regional stakeholders to support other advocacy projects and initiatives where appropriate; and**

3. **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.**

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Not applicable

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report presents Cairns Regional Council's proposed Advocacy Priorities (as set out at Attachment 1) and seeks Council endorsement of a focused advocacy agenda to guide engagement with governments and key stakeholders.

The priorities have been identified through a review of Council's strategic objectives, current advocacy commitments, emerging regional issues, and Council's capital budget planning process, including projects identified in Council's 10-year Capital Works program.

While the priorities have been developed through an assessment process, delivery of some of the outcomes are dependent on external funding decisions, government policies, and legislative processes.

Endorsing these priorities will provide Council with a clear framework to advocate for initiatives that support the long-term economic growth, liveability, and sustainability of the Cairns region.

BACKGROUND:

Following Council's adoption of the revised Advocacy Policy in April 2026, a comprehensive review was undertaken to develop a Councillor-endorsed advocacy agenda and identify Council's Advocacy Priorities to guide engagement with other levels of government and key stakeholders.

Consistent with the Advocacy Policy, the review sought to ensure Council's advocacy efforts remain focused on matters of significance to the Cairns region, align with Council's Corporate Plan and endorsed strategies, and reflect current and emerging opportunities where advocacy can deliver positive outcomes for the community.

A series of workshops were conducted with Councillors to identify and prioritise advocacy matters. These workshops considered a broad range of potential advocacy issues and assessed them against the principles and intent of Council's Advocacy Policy, including strategic alignment, community benefit, regional significance, and evidence of need.

The workshop process also provided Councillors with the opportunity to review advocacy matters previously endorsed by Council, identify new and emerging priorities, and determine their relative importance. Through this process, proposed Advocacy Priorities were consolidated and categorised to ensure advocacy efforts and resources are focused.

This report sets out the outcomes of the review process and recommends a suite of proposed Advocacy Priorities (Attachment 1) to Council for endorsement.

COMMENT:

In accordance with Provision 1 of the Advocacy Policy, Council may choose to rank, prioritise or categorise Advocacy Priorities. As a result of the review process, the proposed Advocacy Priorities have been categorised into two tiers:

- Tier 1 Advocacy Priorities represent matters of high priority and community impact (breadth and/or scale) requiring proactive and coordinated advocacy.
- Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities represent important, yet more targeted, matters to Council and the community that may be pursued as opportunities arise or circumstances require.

The proposed Tier 1 and Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities are included in Attachment 1 to this report.

The establishment of these priorities will provide Council with an endorsed list of Advocacy Priorities. The review undertaken by Council Officers included reviewing previously endorsed Advocacy Priorities of Council that may no longer be relevant or no longer need to be progressed (for example where the advocacy outcome sought has been achieved). Accordingly, the proposed suite of Advocacy Priorities set out at Attachment 1 represents the recommended complete and current list of Council's Advocacy Priorities at this time. In accordance with the Advocacy Policy, Council may choose to add an item to, remove and item from, or amend an item on the endorsed suite of Advocacy Priorities in future where emerging opportunities, government policy changes, funding programs or unforeseen issues warrant advocacy action.

In arriving at the recommended suite of Advocacy Priorities, consultation was also undertaken with key regional advocacy and industry bodies to identify areas of shared interest, ensure alignment with the advocacy priorities of partner organisations, and avoid duplication of effort where common regional outcomes are being pursued. The review considered Council's role in supporting advocacy initiatives led by these external organisations and stakeholders. Such requests will continue to be considered in accordance with the provisions of Council's Advocacy Policy and assessed based on their alignment with Council's endorsed plans and strategies.

While this report identifies current priority issues, it is acknowledged that new opportunities, challenges and projects will continue to arise. Council Officers have identified a range of emerging priorities that are at varying stages of development. These matters will continue to be monitored and assessed on a watchlist, with issues progressing to the advocacy priority program for Council consideration and endorsement as supporting strategies and project planning mature.

The endorsement of Council's Advocacy Priorities does not restrict the ability of individual Councillors to advocate on issues relevant to their division, the broader community or matters of personal interest. Consistent with Provision 6 of the Advocacy Policy, Councillors remain able to undertake advocacy in their individual capacity, whilst Council's endorsed Advocacy Priorities represent the organisation's collective and formally adopted advocacy agenda.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended):

That Council:

1. Endorses the suite of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities as listed in Attachment 1 as the complete and current list of Council's Advocacy Priorities;

2. Continues to work collaboratively with regional stakeholders to support other advocacy projects and initiatives where appropriate; and

3. 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.

Option 2:

That Council **does not** endorse some or all of Council's Tier 1 and Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities as listed in Attachment 1 and provides further direction to Council Officers in this regard.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

Failure to maintain a strong advocacy agenda may reduce Council's ability to effectively influence government policy and secure external funding opportunities.

Consultation with key stakeholders has taken place to ensure the proposed advocacy priorities are also appropriate to community need. This consultation also ensures there is broad stakeholder support for the initiatives being advocated for.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The Advocacy Priorities outlined in Attachment 1 would deliver a range of economic benefits to the Cairns community through investment and infrastructure delivery.

Many of the proposed priorities seek to secure external funding and investment, supporting Council's long-term financial sustainability and reducing reliance on Council resources alone.

Alignment with Council's approved budget and long term financial plan have been key considerations in the review of proposed advocacy priorities undertaken by Council Officers.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The proposed advocacy priorities set out in this report align with the following areas of strategic focus in Council's Corporate Plan 2025-30:

- Robust Economy
- Natural Assets
- Design for Liveability
- Community and Culture
- Focused Council

Policy:

Council's endorsed Advocacy Policy has been applied in developing the priorities outlined in this report.

CONSULTATION:

The proposed Advocacy Priorities were developed through consultation with Councillors, Council's Executive Leadership Team and relevant Council Officers as part of the Advocacy Priority Workshop process.

The review also considered feedback obtained through Council's ongoing engagement with regional advocacy partners and industry bodies to ensure the proposed priorities reflect community needs and wider opportunities for the Cairns region.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Cairns Regional Council Tier 1 and Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities

Nick Masasso
Director – Economic Development & Advocacy

Attachment 1 Cairns Regional Council Tier 1 and Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities

Table 1: Tier 1 Advocacy Priorities

Tier 1 Advocacy Priorities	Ask
Cairns Housing Foundations	Long term State and Federal Government infrastructure funding partnership to support the ongoing development and delivery of the Mount Peter Priority Development Area (PDA). State and Federal Government funding for critical trunk infrastructure across the Cairns region more broadly to unlock housing supply.
Sustainable Tourism Funding	State Government support for a local Cairns funding mechanism that will deliver increased and sustainable tourism funding and cost of living relief for ratepayers and residents.
University 2 Reservoir	State and/or Federal Government funding to support the construction of the University 2 Reservoir.
Cairns - Premier Destination for Women's Sport	State and/or Federal Government support for the implementation of the Cairns Premier Destination for Women's Sport Action Plan.

Table 2: Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities

Tier 2 Advocacy Priorities	Ask
Cairns Destination Mountain Biking	State Government to deliver the Cairns Destination Mountain Biking Project, including Primary Trailhead for the Smithfield Mountain Bike Park and Wangetti Trail trailhead, building on the funding committed to the Smithfield Mountain Bike Trail network expansion.
Redlynch Sporting Precinct	State funding to support delivery of the Redlynch Sporting Precinct.
Smithfield Leisure Precinct	State and/or Federal funding, matched by Council, to deliver stages 1 and 2 of the Smithfield Leisure Precinct Masterplan.
Trinity Beach Sporting Precinct	State and/or Federal funding, matched by Council, to support delivery of Stage 1 of the Trinity Beach Sporting Precinct.
Cairns Botanic Gardens Interpretive Nursery (and related)	State and/or Federal Government funding, matched by Council, to support delivery of the Botanic Gardens Interpretive Nursery and related projects.
Sugarworld Adventure Playground and Sugarworld Botanic Gardens upgrade	State and/or Federal Government funding, matched by Council, to support delivery of the Sugarworld Adventure Playground and Sugarworld Botanic Gardens upgrade.
Cairns Community Projects < $2 Million	State and/or Federal Government funding to support delivery of Community Projects (with an individual value less than $2 million) listed in Council's 10 Year Capital Works Program (up to 30 June 2032).