

WHAT DO COUNCILS DO?



Why do We need council?

There are three tiers of government in Australia, with each having a specific set of functions and responsibilities. All levels of government put rules and systems in place to benefit the community as a whole.

Federal government

(also called the Australian Government or Commonwealth Government)

Decides on matters that affect the whole country.

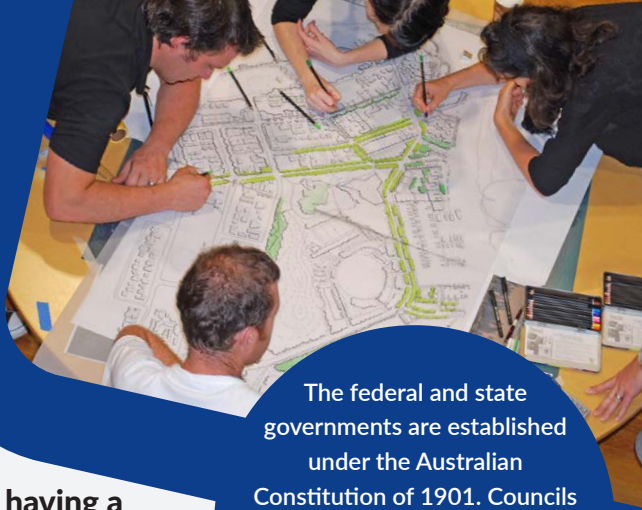
- Comprises the Prime Minister and a team of ministers, each of whom must be a member of the Australian Parliament (which comprises the House of Representatives and the Senate). The Australian Public Service carries out the decisions of the federal government.
- Examples of federal responsibilities include:
 - national laws
 - telecommunications
 - postal services
 - foreign affairs
 - immigration
 - taxation
 - welfare system (social security, pensions etc)
 - customs
 - defence and national security
 - trade and customs
 - seven off shore territories

State government

- Each of Australia's six states and two mainland territories (Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) has its own locally-elected government.
- Decides on matters that affect each state or territory.
- The leader is the Premier (states), Chief Minister (territories).
- Examples of responsibilities include:
 - public hospitals
 - conservation
 - police, fire and ambulance services
 - education
 - main roads
 - railways

Local government

- Local governments (also known as local councils) operate in the six states and the Northern Territory. (The Australian Capital Territory does not have its own local government.)
- Local government is controlled by the state or territory government above them.
- There are more than 530 separate local governments in Australia, and their areas may be known as regions, shires, cities, towns or municipalities.
- Each council plays an important role in improving the liveability of their communities by providing a range of important services and facilities.
- The leader is the Mayor (or Lord Mayor in capital cities).
- Examples of local government responsibilities in Queensland include:
 - community infrastructure – parks, playgrounds, gardens, sporting fields, footpaths, cycleways etc
 - arts and cultural services and facilities – libraries, civic events, community celebrations, performing and visual arts centres etc
 - building regulation and development controls
 - sewerage and wastewater treatment
 - water supply
 - waste collection, disposal and recycling
 - cemeteries
 - animal management
 - town planning and land use management
 - local roads, kerbing and drainage
 - building approvals



The federal and state governments are established under the Australian Constitution of 1901. Councils are set up by state legislation. In Queensland, their powers come mainly from the *Local Government Act 2009*.

What do councils do?

Cairns Regional Council provides community services and facilities, and it is also responsible for making and enforcing local laws. Traditionally, councils have provided services such as roads, water supply and sewerage, but more and more they are becoming involved in the social, economic and cultural development of their communities, and in improving local living environments.



Looking after **essential infrastructure**

ROADS, PARKS AND PUBLIC WORKS

- building new roads, bridges and footpaths
- controlling traffic flow
- providing and maintaining car parks
- maintaining street lighting and traffic lights
- building and maintaining community/ neighbourhood centres and other public facilities
- caring for parks and gardens.

WATER AND SEWERAGE

Councils collect and treat sewage and trade waste from industries.

Councils care for the local water supply by:

- storing and treating water for drinking
- piping water to homes, businesses and factories
- collecting and treating residential and industrial wastewater (sewage)
- removing stormwater through the drainage network.

FLOOD CONTROL

Councils reduce the risk of flood damage by:

- building drainage systems
- constructing levee banks
- controlling development on flood plains.





Looking after **the environment**

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Councils are responsible for regulating many activities that affect the quality of the environment.

LAND USE

Councils control and regulate how land is used in their area. They decide:

- where commercial development takes place
- where housing developments should go
- what areas are protected as bushland and reserves, and
- how many buildings can be developed in certain areas.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Our communities generate large amounts of waste. Councils:

- arrange for household and industrial waste to be collected, sorted and recycled
- operate transfer stations (waste collection) and waste recycling facilities
- clean streets, footpaths, parks and other public areas.

LAND AND PEST MANAGEMENT

Councils play an active part in protecting, enhancing and restoring natural areas while maintaining the environment's biodiversity values.

Councils:

- control declared pest animals and noxious weeds
- revegetate local sites
- undertake controlled burns to reduce the risk of wildfires, and
- encourage residents to plant suitable native trees in urban backyards.

BUILDING CONTROL

Most types of building and development activity are regulated by Council and State rules. Anyone who wants to do building work needs to obtain approval before starting construction. This includes new buildings, alterations, extensions, removals and demolition, carports and sheds, patios, swimming pools and spas.

Rules also apply to protect the environment from sediment and soil erosion.



Looking after **people**

Community development

Councils provide a wide range of services and facilities, including public libraries, community halls and neighbourhood centres, and activities for youth, seniors and multi-cultural communities. They also work in partnership with other levels of government through programs designed to enhance community wellbeing.

Recreation and cultural development

Some councils support arts activities, festivals and other special events.

Many councils provide:

- libraries and art galleries
- community events
- public spaces for community use
- entertainment centres
- parks, public gardens and playing fields
- swimming pools and tennis courts
- boating facilities
- sports centres.

Public health and safety

Councils help keep their communities healthy by:

- preparing for and responding to natural disasters
- controlling mosquito breeding
- destroying rats and mice in public areas
- making sure public buildings are clean
- providing public toilets
- registering dogs and cats, and collecting stray animals
- ensuring buildings are safe and well built.

Promoting economic growth

Councils also encourage and attract businesses to establish, invest and diversify in their area, which in turn creates jobs for local people.



Paying for what councils do

There are five main ways councils raise money to fund public facilities and services.



Rates

A form of general taxation by which most of Council's revenue is raised. Rates are levied against residential and commercial land values (these values are set by the Queensland government), to finance the general functions of council.

Utilities charges

Usually consumer-based. In other words, they are charges paid for services received such as water, sewerage and rubbish collection.

Grants and subsidies

Councils receive money from state and federal governments. This may be via grants. On some occasions councils can decide how that money will be spent; on other occasions the grant is for a specific purpose such as a new building or piece of major public infrastructure. Councils also receive funding to help them meet some of the costs of providing infrastructure such as water supply and sewerage systems. Those subsidies usually represent a percentage of the cost of the project.

Fees

Some council services involve a fee, including dog registrations, swimming pool entry fees, building approvals, parking fines, and waste disposal charges, to defray the cost of administering and processing licences etc.

Loans

Like individuals and businesses, councils often have to borrow money for major projects.



Who works for council?



Chief Executive Officer

Every council employs a Chief Executive Officer (in some councils, this role may be called a General Manager), who is the link between council and its employees.

Their job is to:

- provide executive leadership to the organisation
- implement council policies and decisions
- manage council operations
- keep councillors informed

Other occupations

Councils are often the biggest employer in their respective communities. They comprise a large, multi-disciplinary workforce with many different roles involved in delivering a wide range of services and functions.

Occupations include:

- planners and engineers
- accountants and clerical officers
- road workers and gardeners
- mechanics, plumbers and electricians
- librarians and lifeguards
- animal control officers
- parking and security officers
- laboratory technicians
- computer programmers
- surveyors



What do Councillors do?

Councillors are elected to represent the interests of everyone in the community. Their role is to make decisions relating to facilities and services in their local area. They make local laws to help provide a safe and orderly community.



Councillors have regular meetings at which they make decisions and discuss local issues. Meetings are usually held at the council chambers. The Mayor presides at council meetings and represents the council on formal occasions. Members of the public can attend all council meetings.

Electing your council

A council consists of a Mayor and Councillors. The people who live in each local government division choose who they want to be their representative on their council and they also vote for the Mayor. Local government elections in Queensland are held every four years (the next one is due in 2028).

Voting

As with state and federal elections, voting is compulsory at council elections. Any person on the electoral roll must vote.

Who can stand for council?

Anyone can stand for election as a Councillor if they:

- are an Australian citizen on the electoral roll
- are 18 years of age or older
- live in the local government area and
- are not disqualified for specific reasons such as bankruptcy.

How can I have my say?

Councils represent the interests of everyone in the community. It is important for councils to work together with their communities to decide what is needed locally. Councils must consult their communities on local laws, as well as on their Corporate Plan, the document which sets the directions for what each local council is planning to do.

Locals can have their say when their council asks for feedback. They can also attend council meetings, inspect public documents, and meet with their local Councillor.

How do I find out more?

- Obtain a copy of Council's Corporate Plan or Annual Report.
- Attend a council meeting.
- Speak to your local Councillor.
- Visit the Council website (for Cairns, this is www.cairns.qld.gov.au).
- Check with your local library for books and publications.