

ADVOCACY POLICY

EDA | 52/1/16 | #7805015

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

- 1. Rescinds the current Advocacy Policy; and**
 - 2. Adopts the revised Advocacy Policy as set out at Attachment 1 to this report.**
-

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:

Council's current Advocacy Policy was adopted in 2021. The existing policy has an emphasis on detailed processes and operational matters, which limits its flexibility and responsiveness.

Across the Local Government sector, there has been a shift towards more streamlined, principles-based advocacy frameworks that focus on governance, strategic alignment and leadership-led engagement, with operational delivery addressed through supporting Council procedures. A detailed review of the policy following recent State and Federal election cycles has also identified a number of areas where policy improvements can be made.

As a result, a revised Advocacy Policy has been developed to provide a simplified, contemporary and fit-for-purpose framework. The new policy focuses on core principles and governance arrangements, strengthens alignment with Council's Corporate Plan and strategies, and clearly defines roles and responsibilities across Mayor, Councillors and officers.

The revised policy reinforces a non-partisan, evidence-based and Councillor-led approach, and introduces clearer provisions regarding the establishment, management and conclusion of advocacy priorities, as well as clarifying Council's role in both leading and supporting advocacy initiatives.

The revised policy positions Council to deliver more strategic, coordinated and effective advocacy, enhancing its ability to influence government decision-making, secure external funding, and achieve priority outcomes for the Cairns community.

BACKGROUND:

Council's Advocacy Policy was first established in 2021. Whilst the current policy is not due for revision until mid-2026, it is considered timely to review the policy following recent State and Federal election cycles to consider whether it remains fit for purpose and what improvements could be made to ensure policy clarity and effectiveness.

This review was informed by recent experience across both State and Federal election cycles, which provided a practical test of Council's existing advocacy framework. These experiences highlighted the increasing importance of continuous, co-ordinated and strategic advocacy, rather than approaches that are election-driven. The review also incorporated benchmarking against contemporary local government best practice, which demonstrates a clear shift towards more principles-based, flexible and leadership-led advocacy.

Following the internal review, an initial discussion was held with Council's Executive Leadership Team to seek feedback on the current policy and identify opportunities for improvement. This feedback reinforced the need for a policy that is clearer in its intent, simpler in its structure, and better aligned with Council's strategic direction.

The review identified several key areas for improvement in the existing policy, including providing improved clarity around roles and responsibilities, providing more explicit alignment with Council's Corporate Plan and strategies, and simplifying the policy to improve its effectiveness and flexibility.

In light of the findings of this review, a significant update of the Advocacy Policy has been undertaken. This report provides an overview of the revised policy and recommends it to Council for adoption.

COMMENT:

Overview

The revised policy has been streamlined and refocused to provide a clear, principles-based framework that guides how Council determines and pursues its Advocacy priorities. It strengthens alignment with Council's strategic objectives, firms a non-partisan and evidence-based approach, and reinforces that advocacy is Councillor-led and officer-supported.

The revised policy also clarifies how advocacy priorities are established, managed and concluded, and introduces clearer governance arrangements regarding Council's role in leading its own or supporting advocacy initiatives.

The revised policy reflects contemporary best practice across the local government sector, shifting from a prescriptive, process-heavy document to a principles-based policy that provides clear governance while enabling flexibility in delivery. This approach aligns with leading councils where advocacy policies focus on "what" and "why" (strategic direction), with the "how" (operational delivery) addressed through supporting procedures.

This model ensures Council retains strong oversight and accountability, while also allowing advocacy activities to remain agile, responsive and fit for purpose in a dynamic

political and policy environment.

Policy Principles

The revised policy is underpinned by a clear set of principles that guide all advocacy activities. These principles ensure advocacy is strategic, coordinated and focused on delivering outcomes for the Cairns community:

- **Strategic alignment** - Advocacy Priorities should align with endorsed strategies and plans of Council (e.g. Council's Corporate Plan and Operational Plan).
- **Collaboration** - Council will seek to establish strong relationships and work constructively and collaboratively with external parties to advance Advocacy Priorities and objectives.
- **Non-partisan** - Advocacy will be apolitical and conducted in a fair and equitable manner.
- **Independence** - Council Advocacy will be conducted independently and free from undue political, commercial or external influence ensuring positions are based on what is in the best interests of the Cairns community.
- **Accountability and transparency** - Council will be open and transparent about its Advocacy objectives, activities and results.
- **Councillor-led** - Advocacy will be led by Council's elected representatives (Mayor and Councillors) supported by relevant Council Officers.
- **Adaptability** - Council will retain the ability to respond to emerging opportunities or issues in a timely manner whilst also remaining focused on longer term strategic priorities and community need.
- **Evidence-based** - Wherever possible, Council's Advocacy will be grounded in credible data and analysis to demonstrate the need/problem; the appropriateness of the solution being advocated for; and the benefits to the Cairns community.
- **Role-clarity** – Council will ensure its role in advocacy is understood and clearly communicated.
- **Strength of voice** – Council will advocate with a clear, strong, purposeful voice and will amplify Advocacy messaging as and when needed.

Policy Provisions

The revised policy also introduces clear provisions to strengthen governance and decision-making in six key areas:

1. Determining what matters become advocacy priorities
2. Determining when a matter ceases to be an advocacy priority
3. Council's role in advocacy
4. The role of Mayor and Councillors
5. The role of Council officers
6. Individual Councillor advocacy

The revised Advocacy Policy aims to provide a clear, contemporary and fit-for-purpose framework that strengthens Council’s ability to advocate effectively. It reinforces a unified, leadership-driven approach, improves governance clarity, and ensures advocacy remains aligned to Council’s strategic priorities. The revised policy is recommended to Council for adoption.

OPTIONS:

Option 1: (Recommended):

That Council:

1. Rescinds the current Advocacy Policy; and
2. Adopts the revised Advocacy Policy as set out at Attachment 1 to this report.

Option 2:

That Council **does not** adopt the revised Advocacy Policy and seeks further information or changes to it before reconsidering this matter.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

The proposed Advocacy Policy mitigates the risk of inconsistent or uncoordinated advocacy by ensuring a unified, clearly endorsed Council position which is aligned with Council’s Corporate Plan and related strategies.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The adoption of the revised Advocacy Policy has no direct budget impact; however, it strengthens Council’s ability to secure external funding. The revised policy further supports effective advocacy by Council. Such advocacy often has significant positive economic benefits where it results in increased State and/or Federal investment in the region.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The new Advocacy Policy directly aligns with Council’s Corporate Plan, particularly:

- A robust economy that supports our diverse and growing businesses; and
- Focused and informed decision-making that delivers positive outcomes for our community.

The policy also provides a clear framework to ensure all advocacy priorities are strategically aligned with Council’s Corporate Plan and Council-endorsed strategies.

CONSULTATION:

The revised Advocacy Policy has been written following consultation with other local governments, Councillors and Council’s Executive.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – Revised Advocacy Policy #7719957

Attachment 2 – Current Advocacy Policy #6648002

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Masasso". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Nick Masasso
Director – Economic Development and Advocacy

Attachment 1 – Revised Advocacy Policy [DM#7719957](#)

Attachment on following pages

ADVOCACY POLICY

- Intent** To provide a framework for how Council determines and pursues Advocacy Priorities.
- Scope** This policy applies to Councillors and all Council employees undertaking activities relating to Council's endorsed Advocacy Priorities and/or matters that may become Advocacy Priorities in future.

DEFINITIONS

- Advocacy:** The process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders, and ultimately, decision makers (including, and in particular, State and Federal Governments) take ownership of Council's Advocacy Priorities and subsequently act upon them.
- Advocacy Priorities:** Matters which relate directly to Council's strategic priorities or areas of responsibility and which Council has specifically determined to be advocacy priorities in accordance with this this policy.
- Council:** Cairns Regional Council.
- Council Meeting:** An Ordinary Meeting of Council pursuant to the *Local Government Act 2009*.
- Support Advocate:** A Councillor specifically nominated at a Council Meeting to support Council's Advocacy activities for a particular Advocacy Priority/ies pursuant to Provision 4 of this Policy.

PRINCIPLES

Council's Advocacy will be guided by the following principles:

1. **Strategic alignment** - Advocacy Priorities should align with endorsed strategies and plans of Council (e.g. Council's Corporate Plan and Operational Plan).
2. **Collaboration** - Council will seek to establish strong relationships and work constructively and collaboratively with external parties to advance Advocacy Priorities and objectives.
3. **Non-partisan** - Advocacy will be apolitical and conducted in a fair and equitable manner.
4. **Independence** - Council Advocacy will be conducted independently and free from undue political, commercial or external influence ensuring positions are based on what is in the best interests of the Cairns community.
5. **Accountability and transparency** - Council will be open and transparent about its Advocacy objectives, activities and results.
6. **Councillor-led** - Advocacy will be led by Council's elected representatives (Mayor and Councillors) supported by relevant Council Officers.
7. **Adaptability** - Council will retain the ability to respond to emerging opportunities or issues in a timely manner whilst also remaining focused on longer term strategic priorities and community need.

8. **Evidence-based** - Wherever possible, Council's Advocacy will be grounded in credible data and analysis to demonstrate the need/problem; the appropriateness of the solution being advocated for; and the benefits to the Cairns community.
9. **Role-clarity** – Council will ensure its role in advocacy is understood and clearly communicated.
10. **Strength of voice** – Council will advocate with a clear, strong, purposeful voice and will amplify Advocacy messaging as and when needed.

PROVISIONS

1. Determining what matters become Advocacy Priorities

From time to time, Council Officers will make recommendations to Council on potential Advocacy Priorities having regard to the Principles set out in this policy. Decisions on what matters become Advocacy Priorities will be made by the full Council at a Council Meeting. Once endorsed, they will remain Advocacy Priorities of Council until such time as they cease to be an Advocacy Priority in accordance with Provision 2 below.

Council may also choose to rank, prioritise or categorise Advocacy Priorities having regard to a range of factors including (but not limited to) the breadth and scale of impact on the Cairns community. Prioritisation (if any) in this manner will be a matter for the full Council to decide at a Council Meeting.

2. Ceasing to be an Advocacy Priority

A matter will cease to be an Advocacy Priority if:

- A successful advocacy outcome is achieved. For example, if the Advocacy Priority relates to funding for a particular project and that funding has been secured;
- Council resolves at a Council Meeting that the matter will no longer be an Advocacy Priority; or
- Council resolves at a Council Meeting that a number of Advocacy Priorities are to be a complete and current list of Council's Advocacy Priorities and the matter is not included in that list.

3. Council's role in advocacy

3.1 For Advocacy Priorities determined under this policy

Council will lead advocacy activities for those matters that have been determined to be Advocacy Priorities in accordance with this policy.

3.2 For advocacy being led by others

From time to time, Council may also be formally approached to support the advocacy being led by external parties for non-Council projects or initiatives. Such requests will be considered as follows

- Where there is **clear alignment** between the project or initiative and a Council strategy/ies or plan/s that has previously been endorsed at a Council Meeting, then Council's official support for advocacy can be provided subject to approval by both the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer. Where Council's official support for advocacy has been provided in this regard, details of the matter will be provided to all Councillors. It is noted that Council may rescind such support by resolution at a Council Meeting.
- Where there is **no clear alignment** between the project or initiative and a Council strategy/ies or plan/s that has previously been endorsed at a Council Meeting or where there is alignment but approval from the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer (or both) is not forthcoming, then Council's official support cannot be provided unless determined to the contrary by the full Council at a Council Meeting.

4. The role of Mayor and Councillors

The Mayor will be the primary lead for Council's Advocacy activities for endorsed Advocacy Priorities including engagement with ministers and elected representatives from other levels of government. Council may also choose, through resolution at a Council Meeting, to nominate an additional

Councillor/s as Support Advocate/s to provide support for Council's Advocacy activities for a particular Advocacy Priority based on their individual skills, experience, or interests. Where Council has nominated a Support Advocate/s in this regard, the Mayor, Support Advocate/s and Council Officers will work collaboratively to ensure Council's advocacy activities are coordinated and lines of responsibility are clearly understood.

It is also recognised that Advocacy is most effective when all elected representatives (Councillors) are actively engaged. Accordingly, the Mayor and Council Officers will ensure Councillors are kept informed regarding Council's Advocacy activities and that they are involved in such activities where relevant and wherever possible.

From time to time, Council's Advocacy activities may require engagement and interaction with the media. Council maintains a separate policy/ies relating to media interactions which is to be applied in such circumstances and which will govern Mayor and Councillor/s involvement in such interactions.

5. The role of Council Officers

This policy recognises effective Advocacy should be Councillor-led. Council Officers, in particular Council's Chief Executive Officer, Director – Economic Development and Advocacy and members of Council's Advocacy and Government Relations team, will support Council's Advocacy through a range of activities including (but not limited to):

- The provision of recommendations and advice relating to Advocacy Priorities (both existing, proposed and potential);
- The development and implementation of Advocacy strategies and plans for endorsed Advocacy Priorities;
- Reporting to, and engaging with, Council on Advocacy activities, outcomes and results;
- Proactively building relationships through regular engagement with key stakeholders involved in Advocacy; and
- Supporting Mayor and Councillor engagement with political representatives and other stakeholders in relation to endorsed Advocacy Priorities.

6. Individual Councillor advocacy

Councillors are elected to represent the interests of the Cairns community. Divisional councillors also have a particular focus on the geographic area they represent. In fulfilling this role, it is appreciated that Councillors may advocate for a range of projects and initiatives including those that are not Advocacy Priorities pursuant to this policy. Such advocacy may be directed towards other Councillors and/or external parties including representatives from other levels of government. This policy does not seek to restrict individual Councillors from undertaking such activities in their individual capacity, but they cannot commit Council resources, including delivery timeframes or funding, outside of the approved Council budget or a specific Council resolution. A matter should only be referred to as an Advocacy Priority of Council where it has been determined to be an Advocacy Priority in accordance with this policy.



This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.

Director responsible for Review:

Director Economic Development & Advocacy

**ORIGINALLY ADOPTED: 26/05/2021
CURRENT ADOPTION: 15/04/2026
DUE FOR REVISION: 15/04/2030
REVOKED/SUPERSEDED:**

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Ken Gouldthorp
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Attachment 2 – Current Advocacy Policy [DM#6648002v6](#)

Attachment on following pages

ADVOCACY POLICY

- Intent** To outline the process for identifying issues for which Council should consider adopting a formal advocacy position, including when Council should lead or support advocacy initiatives, the process for developing advocacy position papers, the process for Council endorsement and advocacy prioritisation, stakeholder engagement considerations, and ongoing advocacy review.
- Scope** This policy applies to the range of matters including human, social and economic for which Council may consider establishing and/or supporting an advocacy position for the benefit of the Cairns community.

PROVISIONS

Advocacy is the process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders, and ultimately, decision makers take ownership of your ideas, evidence and proposals and subsequently act upon them¹.

In addition to its role in the direct delivery of certain services, policy and infrastructure, Council has a role to undertake advocacy on behalf of the Cairns community regarding the services, policy and infrastructure delivered by others.

Advocacy is important as it allows Council to be strategic in addressing the issues that matter to our community, and it acts as an enabler of Council's Corporate Plan and related strategies. It also provides a framework for Council to engage more effectively with external stakeholders to ensure collaboration on issues that impact liveability.

The purpose of this policy is to outline the process for Councillors, Council Officers, and External Parties to raise potential issues for Council to consider establishing formal advocacy positions on, either as the lead proponent or in support of an external stakeholder partner.

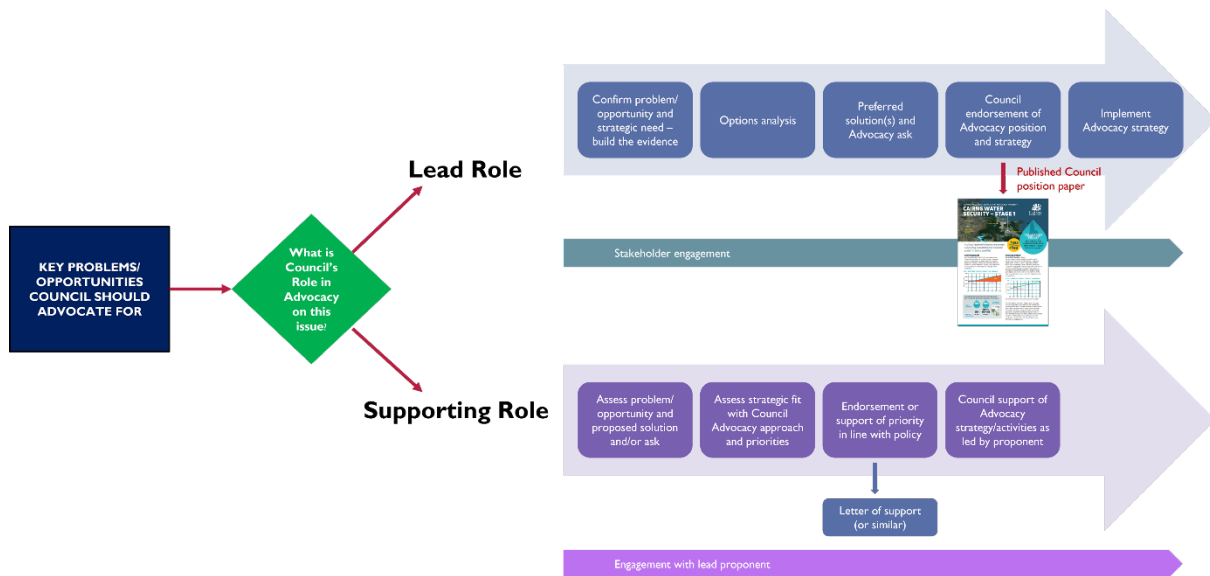
Once endorsed by Council, advocacy representations will be made to relevant parties (Federal Government, Queensland Government, Other) on behalf of Council regarding the endorsed issue. The issues could relate to services, policy or infrastructure projects that contribute to quality of life within the Cairns Local Government Area.

An overview of the proposed process for the identification, development, consideration and adoption of an advocacy position by Council is summarised in the diagram on the following page (Figure 1) with further detail on each of the steps in the paragraphs that follow.

The process will be coordinated by Council's *Director Economic Development & Advocacy* and *Program Leader – Advocacy* in consultation with Officers from the relevant Council teams and with external stakeholder partners relevant to each advocacy position.

¹ International Centre for Policy Advocacy

Figure 1: Summary of process for identifying and endorsing Council advocacy positions



1. Issue/Problem/Opportunity Identification and Defining Council's Advocacy Role

An issue/problem/opportunity is identified by Councillors, Council Officers, or External Parties and brought to the attention of Council's *Director Economic Development & Advocacy* and *Program Leader – Advocacy*.

In determining whether Council should establish an advocacy position on a particular issue (and its relative priority), a range of matters will be considered including how significant the impact of the issue is on the quality of life and liveability of the Cairns community, the impact and integration of a proposed advocacy position on existing policy and positions, and the relevance of the issue to Council's Corporate and other strategic plans.

Following an initial review by Council's *Director Economic Development & Advocacy* and *Program Leader – Advocacy*, and prior to commencing detailed analysis, a recommendation will be made to the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer on whether Council should pursue the issue being considered and if so, whether Council should lead or support the development of an agreed advocacy position. The recommendation on whether Council should take leading or supporting role in respect of a potential advocacy issue will be based on a range of factors including (but not limited to):

- For projects seeking State and/or Federal investment, who the project proponent is – i.e. Council or another entity. Council would normally expect to lead advocacy for projects where it is the proponent.
- The extent to which the issue to be advocated for impacts the community of Cairns only or has broader regional, state or national implications.
- Whether there is an established, reputable and representative organisation that can effectively represent the interests of the stakeholders impacted by a particular issue.

The decision on whether to pursue the issue being considered and whether Council should take a leading or supporting role should be approved by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer.

2. Where Council is considering Leading an Advocacy Position

a) Confirm Problem/Opportunity and Strategic Need

Using an evidence-based approach, Council's *Director Economic Development & Advocacy* and *Program Leader – Advocacy* will consider the advocacy issue in consultation with others to confirm the problem or opportunity and the strategic need. The assessment will generally be based on a detailed business case framework which, subject to the complexity of the issue, may include the use of investment logic mapping, options analysis, and a detailed business case report to determine the preferred solution(s) and advocacy ask. A recommendation on the advocacy position Council should/could take will then be made and a draft advocacy position paper developed by Council Officers.

The draft advocacy position paper will include a holistic consideration of the issue, including implications for Council, and as a minimum should clearly articulate:

- The issue/problem/opportunity and its relevance to the Cairns community
- The proposed solution/action required (based on the evidence) and how that addresses the issue/problem/opportunity
- The third party (Federal Government, Queensland Government, Other) Council is seeking support from and the particular action sought (policy, investment or service)
- The level of Council support to be provided as part of the overall investment or services delivery

b) Advocacy Position Workshopped with Council

The draft advocacy position is workshopped with Council. Council Officers will discuss considerations developed in the draft advocacy position paper. This is also an opportunity for Councillors to interrogate the issue and to direct Council Officers if further detail is required. The purpose of Councillor workshops is for Council Officers to present information for issues to be considered by Council.

c) Council Endorsement of Position Paper

The position paper will be submitted to Council with an accompanying Council report for consideration and endorsement. Any such report will include the recommendations of Council Officers however, the ultimate decision as to whether an advocacy position is adopted and what that position is, rests with Council. Accordingly, Council can choose to endorse the recommended position, endorse an alternative position or choose not to endorse any position on the matter.

Where endorsed by Council, an advocacy position paper will be made publicly available (unless matters of commercial sensitivity or confidentiality prevent it from being made available publicly) and can be utilised by Councillors, Council Officers and others when communicating Council's official position on a particular matter or issue.

d) Issue Specific Advocacy Plan Agreed

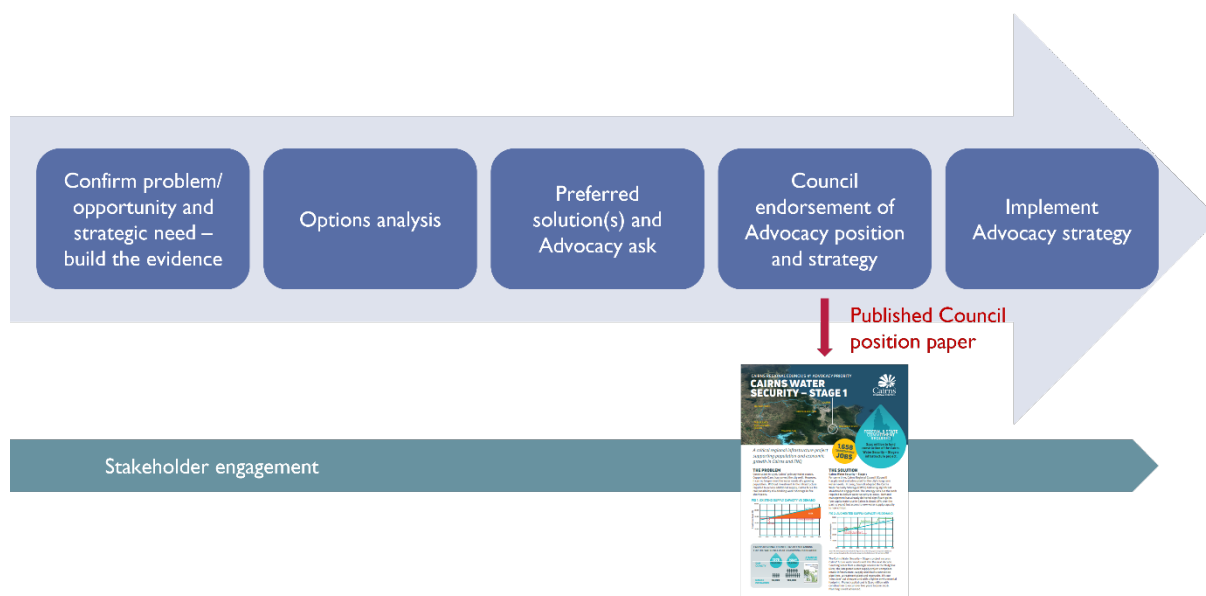
Where Council Officers prepare a report for Council recommending endorsement of a proposed advocacy position, that report should include an issue-specific advocacy plan that provides an overview of how the advocacy position will be prosecuted and which stakeholders will be involved.

e) Ongoing Review/Update of Advocacy Position Paper

Council Officers will be required to monitor activity relating to Council's endorsed advocacy position for any changes in the circumstances which may impact Council's position and/or advocacy efforts. Where there is any substantial change to a matter for

which Council has an established advocacy position, a revised position may be developed in accordance with the steps outlined above.

Figure 2: Council Leading Development of an Advocacy Position – process for development



3. Where Council is considering Supporting an Advocacy Position to be led by another party

a) Confirm Problem/Opportunity and Strategic Need

Using an evidence-based approach, Council's *Director Economic Development & Advocacy* and *Program Leader – Advocacy* will consider the proposed advocacy position in consultation with the lead proponent to confirm the problem or opportunity and the strategic need. The issue will also be discussed with relevant Council teams, then be assessed against Council's Corporate and other strategic plans, and against Council's own advocacy approach and priorities.

A recommendation to support the proponent's advocacy position will be made that as a minimum, clearly articulates:

- The issue/problem/opportunity and its relevance to the Cairns community
- The proposed solution/action required and how that addresses the issue/problem/opportunity
- A summary of the evidence provided in support of the advocacy position
- The third party leading the advocacy position (proponent), the third party the proponent is seeking support from (Federal Government, Queensland Government, Other), and the particular action being sought (policy, investment or service)

b) Endorsement or Support of Advocacy Priority

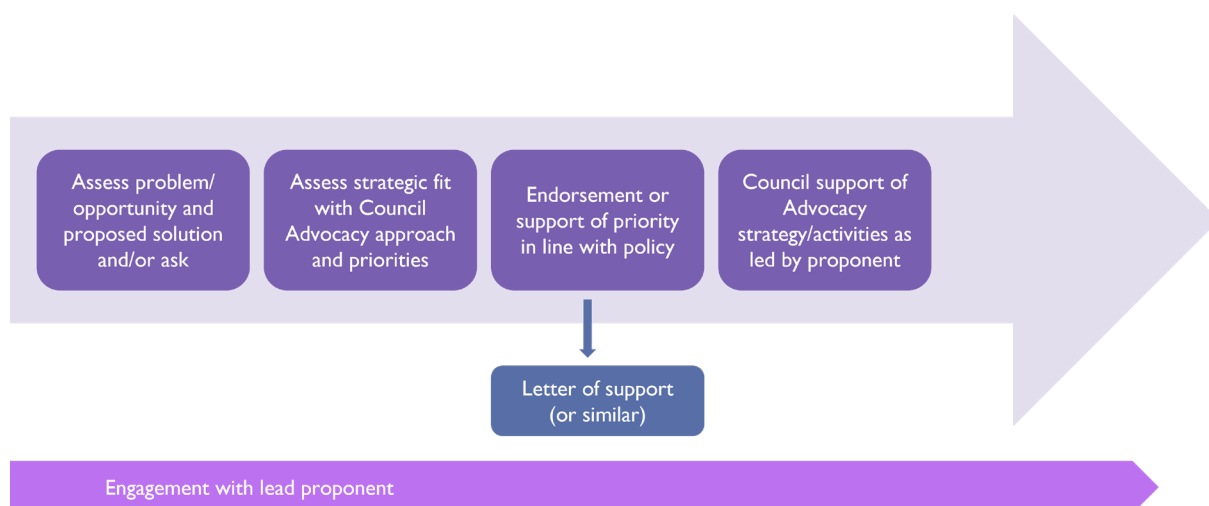
Where a proposed advocacy position is consistent with an existing strategy, plan or policy that has previously been endorsed by Council, Council support for the proponent's advocacy position can be approved by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer. Otherwise, support for the proponent's advocacy position is to be considered/approved by Council at a Council meeting.

Subject to the approval referred to above, Council would not develop a formal position paper but would provide a letter of support (or similar) and speak about the project

when appropriate to support a united position on the matter on behalf of the Cairns community.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to approve the use of Council's logo in support of the proponent's formal advocacy submissions. Approval for logo use should be at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer.

Figure 3: Council Supporting an Advocacy Position of an External Partner – process for approval



4. Additional Considerations

It is acknowledged that from time to time, a situation may arise where a Council advocacy position may be required to be established as a matter of urgency and within timelines that are unable to accommodate the process outlined in sections 1 to 3 above. In such situations the following approach should be adopted.

Where Council is leading:

- The advocacy position should be approved by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer.
- In all materials published for the advocacy position, it should be noted that the position has not yet been formally endorsed by Council.
- As soon as practicable, a report should be provided to Council for consideration in respect of the advocacy position so established. Council may choose to endorse the position or rescind it.

Where Council is supporting:

- The advocacy position put forward by the proponent should be approved by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer
- The use of Council's logo should be withheld from any materials published by the proponent in relation to the advocacy position
- As soon as practicable, an assessment of the evidence base should be undertaken by Council's *Director Economic Development & Advocacy* and *Program Leader – Advocacy* and a briefing provided to the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer
- If required, an updated recommendation should be provided for consideration in respect of the proponent's advocacy position. Pursuant to section 3 of this policy, Council may choose to retain support for the position or rescind it.

The process outlined in this policy will be coordinated by Council's *Director Economic Development & Advocacy* and *Program Leader – Advocacy*. Support from other areas of Council will be obtained as and when required when developing advocacy positions on specific issues.

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This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.

Director responsible for Review:

Director Economic Development & Advocacy

ORIGINALLY ADOPTED: 26/05/2021
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REVOKED/SUPERSEDED:



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Mark Wuth
A/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER