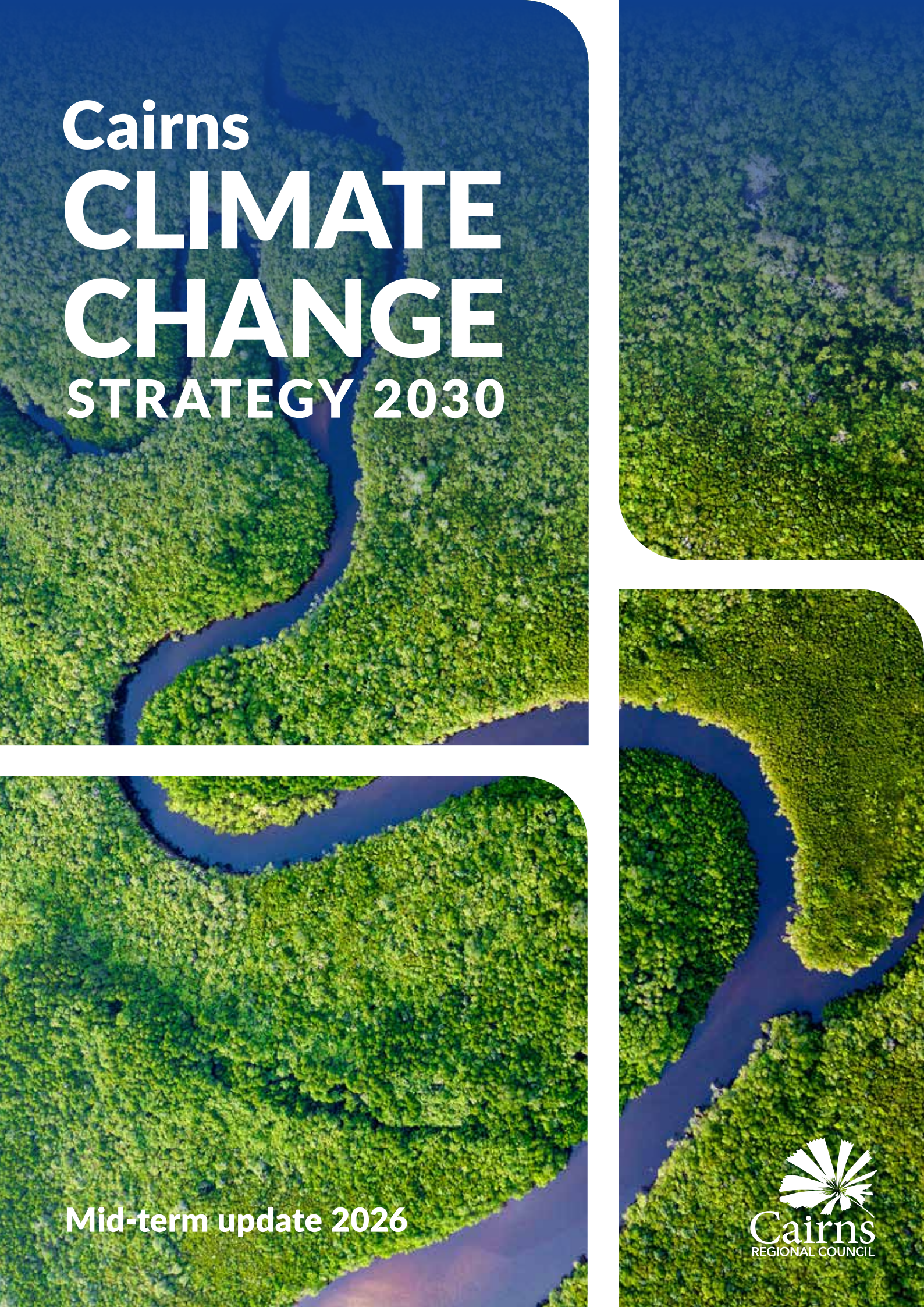


Cairns CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2030

Mid-term update 2026

Cairns REGIONAL COUNCIL

Acknowledgement of Country

Cairns Regional Council acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Custodians of our region, the Djabugay; Yirrganydji; Buluwai; Gimuy Walubara Yidinji; Mandingalbay Yidinji; Gunggandji; Dulabed and Malanbarra Yidinji; Bundabarra and Wadjanbarra Yidinji; Madjandji; Mamu and Ngadjon Jii peoples. We extend this respect to all elders past, present and future, and other First Peoples within our region.

Council also acknowledges other First Peoples who live within this region, and recognises the 2021 First Nation Peoples Statement on Climate Change:

When Country is healthy, we are healthy. Our knowledge systems are interconnected with our environment and it relies on the health of Country. This knowledge is held by our Elders and passed on to the next generation. Solutions to climate change can be found in the landscapes and within our knowledge systems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the tools, knowledge, and practices to effectively contribute to the fight against climate change. We have lived sustainably in Australia for over 100,000 years.

We are seeing changes in the environment and the declining health of Country and people. We can see our native flora and fauna are suffering and the conditions of our lands, waters, seas and skies declining. For some of our people it is an emergency because the climate crisis has already caused widespread damage. Our connection to Country represents climate science developed over countless generations, listen to us, work with us and together we can enact a change that will shape our future for all Australians.

Reference: Morgan-Bulled D, McNeair B, Delaney D, Deshong S, Gilbert J, Mosby et al. 2021. National First Peoples Gathering on Climate Change: Workshop Report. Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub Report No. 29. Earth Systems Climate Change Hub, Australia. Published. June, 2021. Accessed 10 march: https://nespclimate.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/National-First-Peoples-Gathering-on-Climate-Change-Report_final.pdf

Contents

Foreword

We are facing the biggest challenge of our generation.

The *Cairns Climate Change Strategy 2030* is Cairns Regional Council's blueprint for facing this challenge.

We have an opportunity to work together to design and deliver solutions for a healthy natural environment, community and future, to:

- balance the needs of our growing city with the region's natural resources
- work with Traditional Custodians to protect and restore natural environments
- make our communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change
- work towards Council and the community's transition to a low-emissions economy.

The Traditional Custodians of this region have a long history of caring for Country, and enduring cultural connections. They have shared stories of adapting to rising sea levels, sustaining resilient communities and applying traditional ecological knowledge to fire management, revegetation and the monitoring of species and ecosystems.

The regions reefs, rainforests and connected ecosystems are at risk of climate related impacts.

It is important that we act now to minimise impacts on these ecosystems to ensure that we and our future generations can continue to live, enjoy and care for the environment that we value and love.

Introduction

The Cairns Climate Change Strategy 2030 sets out a pathway for Cairns Regional Council to manage climate risks and to support the climate aspirations of our community.

The decade of 2020-2030 is critical for climate action. This Strategy sets out the actions we must take to achieve our climate commitments, and to accelerate progress towards the Australian Government's emissions reduction targets.

Council has consulted with subject matter experts, community members, Traditional Custodians, sector representatives and climate action advocates over a two-year period in the process of developing the Cairns Climate Change Strategy 2030. We hosted climate summits to listen to and inform the community, as well as workshops, surveys and internal audits.

What we have heard is that a strong majority of people in Cairns want Council to show leadership and to act on climate change.

This Strategy is our commitment to our community on climate action.

2026 Strategy mid-term review

In 2026, the Strategy was reviewed to make Council's role and priorities clear in delivering on this community commitment. This included updates on:

- implementation progress between 2022 and 2025
- some actions (more specific updates, and consolidation, where appropriate)
- the changing policy landscape and methodologies
- a refined organisational emissions reduction target.

A copy of the original version can be found at ***cairns.qld.gov.au/climate.***

My favourite place is North Queensland. It has, for a naturalist, everything. It has an amazing rainforest which is quite unlike any other rainforest in the world. Not only does it have that but down on the coast it has the Great Barrier Reef.

Sir David Attenborough

Our vision

Shaping a tropical future

Our values

Trust
Honouring the trust of our residents, each other and staff

Responsibility
Transparency and accountability to our community

Cairns-ness
Pride in who we are and where we live

Resilience
Adapting, enduring, growing stronger

Our purpose

Shaping our tropical future through actions that mitigate, adapt and build resilience to the impacts of climate change through:

Community
Educating and empowering climate resilient communities.

Robust Economy
Supporting the transition to a Smart Green Economy.

Natural assets
Promoting, protecting and enhancing our iconic natural environment now and for generations to come.

Focused Council
Strengthening Council's resilience through improved energy management, governance and informed decision making.

Quadruple Bottom Line

Planning for change

We have identified six focus areas where the most significant gains can be made to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in the Cairns region and assist the natural environment, our communities and our economy to adapt to climate change impacts.

This strategy sets out more than 70 actions over 6 focus areas.

These objectives and actions will form the basis of our planning for climate action through to 2030.

Our commitments

1

43%
emissions reduction for Council operations by 2030
on 2007/08 levels

2

82%
of Council electricity supplied from renewable energy by 2030

3

Prepare Council & the community
to adapt and prosper in a changing climate

4

Support community & businesses
to adopt sustainable practices

Our roles

We recognise the range of roles invested in climate action in our region. In delivering on this Strategy, Council undertakes the following roles, as appropriate:

Advocate
Promoting participation of businesses, the community or other decision makers.

Lead
Delivering services, including undertaking planning, project delivery or construction works.

Collaborate
Forming partnerships and strategic alliances with other parties, including with Traditional Custodian communities, youth, industry, government and community groups.

Educate
Building awareness and sharing reliable knowledge.

1. Context

From 2002 to 2022, we have experienced our warmest 20 years on record; Australian average temperatures are 1.44ºC higher than when national records began in 1910. Even with this modest rise in average temperature, we are feeling the effects of climate change, with erratic weather patterns including bushfires, heatwaves, flood, severe storms, drought and rising sea levels. This will only worsen if global warming intensifies.

A global transition is underway to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the impacts of climate change, to decarbonise our economies and move to cleaner energy sources. Here in Australia, this is driven by Australia's net zero emissions target for 2050 and interim reduction targets for 2030 and 2035 – both of which Council supports in its own transition approach.

The Cairns region is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Cairns Regional Council, in collaboration with local communities, Traditional Custodians, other levels of government and local industries, must address climate change - to adapt to its impacts and mitigate the risk by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. The longer we wait, the more difficult and costly it will become. A focused transition can build resilience, realise the benefits of renewable energy and efficiency across Council operations, and deliver improved outcomes for our community, in our planning and service delivery.

As a region we are fortunate to be guardians of a unique natural environment including two World Heritage Listed natural areas. With a passionate community, strong industry and a diverse economy, we are perfectly positioned to build environmental, social and economic resilience to the impacts of climate change and to harness the opportunities associated with the transition to a Smart Green Economy.

Climate change in Cairns

The natural environment, particularly the two World Heritage Areas of the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest, have immeasurable intrinsic value. They are also the foundation of our region's prosperity.

Unfortunately, these areas of outstanding universal value are under increasing threat from climate change. As a result of climate change, land-based heatwaves are driving species to the brink, with many Wet Tropics species such as Lemuroid possum and Spectacled Flying Fox unable to withstand extreme heat.

Reef bleaching events are also becoming more frequent and severe due to rising sea temperatures and ocean heatwaves. The resulting impact on marine biodiversity and reef tourism is well documented. Urgent action is required to address the impacts of climate change and improve the resilience of our local environment, community and economy.

Climate-related risks and opportunities:

Physical risks

Physical climate change-related risks are caused by changes in the physical climate and include both increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events (acute risks), and increasing intensity of continuous, on-going climate hazards (chronic risks). Examples include:

- Higher temperatures
- More intense tropical cyclones
- Hotter and more frequent hot days
- Rising sea levels
- More intense downpours
- More frequent sea level extremes
- Warmer and more acidic seas

Transition risks

Climate change transition risks are caused by changes in the economy due to a transition (or a delayed transition) to a net zero emissions economy, and include community, policy and legal impacts, technology, market and reputation risks. Examples include:

- Technology disruption (e.g. renewables, EVs, AI)
- Reputational risks (e.g. tourism)
- Speed of transition failing to keep pace with community expectations
- Policy uncertainty and associated investment hesitancy
- Insurance affordability and accessibility concerns
- Skills shortages
- Increasing adaptation costs
- Impacts of extreme weather events

Opportunities

Climate change opportunities are created by the global transition to a net zero emissions economy and adaptation, including increased resilience, diversified energy sources, resource efficiency, access to new and emerging markets, and demand for low emissions products and services. Examples include:

- Low emissions transport
- Workforce development
- Nature-based solutions
- Renewable electricity and alternative fuels
- Energy, waste and water efficiency
- Circular economy
- Biodiversity and carbon markets
- Increasing private and public sector investment in green economy initiatives
- Partnering with Traditional Custodians

If we don't protect our gorgeous natural environment then we lose the region's greatest asset and both our economy and health suffer. - SURVEY RESPONDENT

Climate change is the greatest threat to the Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is an Australian Government agency and the lead management agency for the Great Barrier Reef. According to GBRMPA, climate change is the greatest threat to the Reef, and emissions reductions are the strongest and fastest possible action to reduce these impacts to the reef.

A report by Deloitte found that the Great Barrier Reef is worth $95 billion, supporting 77,000 full time jobs and contributing $9 billion annually to the Australian economy (At What Cost? Safeguarding the Great Barrier Reef's Role in Australia's economy, 2025).

Strategy development & engagement

During two years of consultation and engagement in developing the Cairns Climate Change Strategy 2030, the community appealed to all levels of government and industry to take action to address climate change in our region.

Throughout the consultation and engagement process, Council spoke with and listened to subject matter experts, industry representatives, climate action advocates, community members, First Peoples, youth representatives and researchers.

Commit & get ready

- **Nov 2019** - Cairns Youth Climate Summit #1 (35 students from 15 schools)
- **Aug - Oct 2020** - Our Cairns community and youth surveys (8065 respondents)
- **Nov 2020** - Clean Jobs Forum (60 attendees)

Collect inputs and shape the strategy

- **2021** - in-house engagement with subject matter experts and elected representatives
- **May 2021** - community and industry workshops (130 engaged in 11 sector-based workshops)
- **May - Jun 2021** - Community Climate Change Survey (571 respondents)
- **2021** - Cairns Ecofiesta and Cairns Show (1402 people engaged)

Obtain feedback, validate and refine

- **Sept 2021** - Cairns Youth Climate Summit #2 (30 students, 16 schools)
- **Sept 2021** - Community and Industry Climate Summit (~60 people)
- **Sept 2021** - Climate Change Public Forum (~50 people)
- **Dec 2021 - Jan 2022** - draft strategy community review
- **March 2022** - strategy endorsed by Council

Implementation

- **2023** - dedicated project governance established for executive and senior management oversight of implementation, together with the Our Cairns Coast (Coastal Hazards Adaptation Strategy)

Mid-term review

- **Aug 2025** - strategy review commencement
- **Dec 2025** - community implementation snapshot
- **July 2026** - strategy update endorsed by Council

88% **of residents (571) who completed the Climate Change Strategy Survey**

want Council to show leadership and action on climate change.

91% **of residents (1402) at the Cairns Show and Ecofiesta**

were concerned about the impacts of climate change on the Cairns region.

Youth Climate Summits

Through two Youth Climate Summits in 2019 and 2021, the young people of Cairns highlighted the need for action and showed a strong desire to contribute to the solutions, below is their hope for the future.

Youth climate change aspiration

"Our hope is that by 2030 Cairns will be a place where everyone feels empowered, fuelled with passion and moving forward with obligation. Amid this global crisis, we will be the light in the dark, leading by example, as we transition to a more sustainable and climate-conscious future.

Climate action must begin with our own mindsets. How can we progress if what we do and say contradict? Without community, any individual effort will be futile.

We hope to see Council transition to 100% renewable energy by 2030 and implement an effective education system that ensures that climate-awareness is not disproportionate in our society.

We are all responsible, but we can all be part of the solution.

Let's work together to build Cairns into a city of the present, driven by the future, using knowledge of the past.

Let future generations live in a beautiful world."

Climate action 101

The following terms are used throughout this document:

Baseline and target years: for this Strategy, the baseline year is when Council's emission reporting started, in 2007/08, the closest to the Federal Government's emissions baseline (2005). The target year of 2030 refers to 2029/2030, or the period 1 July 2029 to 30 June 2030.

Carbon sequestration: means using processes that remove greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere, such as planting trees, regenerating mangroves and increasing soil carbon.

Climate change adaptation: responses to climate change that seek to improve the resilience of ecosystems, communities and economies to help withstand the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Climate change mitigation: actively reducing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions released to the atmosphere.

Net zero emissions: refers to achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere. As an organisation, this means reducing emissions as far as possible and balancing remaining emissions through carbon sequestration.

Carbon and renewable energy certificates (ACCUs and LGCs): Market-based instruments that represent renewable energy generation or emissions reduction. LGCs are created from eligible renewable electricity generation, while ACCUs are issued for projects that avoid or remove emissions, such as from closed landfills. These certificates can be bought, sold or surrendered to support emissions reduction and help meet climate targets.

SCOPE 1 EMISSIONS

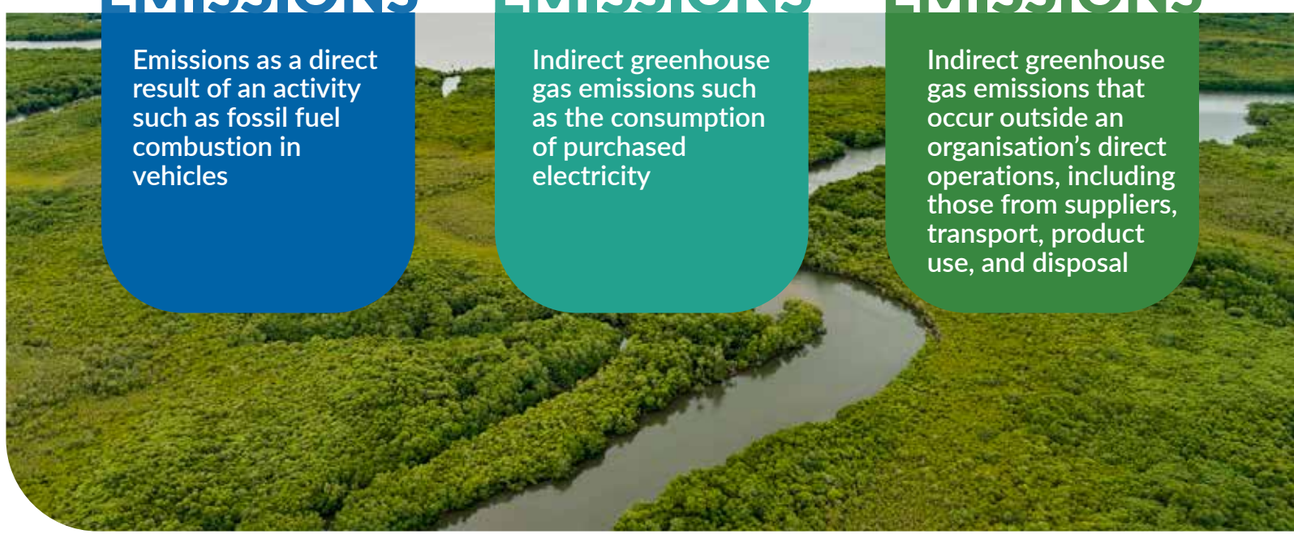
Emissions as a direct result of an activity such as fossil fuel combustion in vehicles

SCOPE 2 EMISSIONS

Indirect greenhouse gas emissions such as the consumption of purchased electricity

SCOPE 3 EMISSIONS

Indirect greenhouse gas emissions that occur outside an organisation's direct operations, including those from suppliers, transport, product use, and disposal



The policy landscape

Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework to drive development in an environmentally, socially and economically responsible manner. This strategy contributes to a number of sustainable development goals, including:

- Good health and wellbeing (SDG 3)
- Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6)
- Affordable and clean energy (SDG7)
- Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)
- Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG9)
- Sustainable cities and communities (SDG11)
- Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12)
- Climate action (SDG13)
- Life below water (SDG14)
- Life on land (SDG15)

Global climate commitments

The Paris Climate Agreement sets a global goal of net zero emissions no later than 2050. As part of international agreements, some countries have committed to earlier targets and investments to curb emissions. Regions with high exposure and vulnerability to climate risks, such as Far North Queensland, should consider the social and economic impacts of delayed emissions reductions, as well as the advantages of a proactive economic transition prior to 2050.

Australia's climate commitments

The Federal Government has a commitment to addressing climate change through emissions reduction and progressing adaptation and has targets of:

- 43% emissions reduction by 2030
- 62-70% emissions reduction by 2035
- Net zero emissions by 2050

The Federal Government is a signatory to the Paris Climate Agreement. Climate action is driven by the following strategies:

- Net Zero Plan
- National Climate Risk Assessment
- National Adaptation Plan

Council has adopted the Australian Government's emissions reduction and renewable energy targets.

World Heritage-listed areas

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Wet Tropics Management Authority, together with their partners, oversee the management of climate risks on world-heritage listed UNESCO sites connected to the Cairns region. These key strategies include:

- Climate Adaptation Plan for the Wet Tropics 2020–2030
- Reef 2050 Long-term Sustainability Plan

Council works in partnership with these agencies, including through the Reef Guardian Program.

Queensland's climate commitments

Queensland's climate programs are critical in driving the investment and action needed to transition Queensland's economy to a low emissions future.

The Queensland Government has set targets of:

- 30% emissions reduction below 2005 levels by 2030
- Net zero emissions by 2050

These commitments are complemented by:

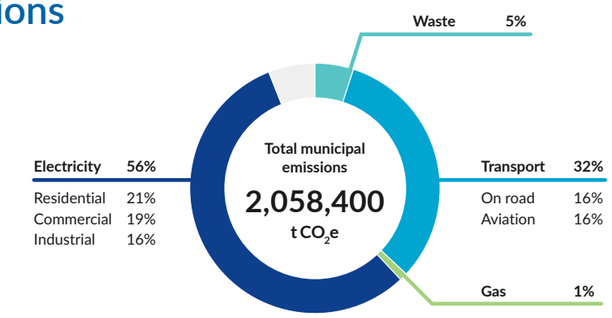
- Queensland Energy Roadmap
- Queensland Climate Adaptation Strategy
- CleanCo Queensland - a Queensland Government Owned Corporation established to drive sector investment and pathways for QLD corporations and councils to power their businesses with renewable energy.

The Queensland Government's investment in renewable energy projects facilitates Council's uptake of renewable energy, a major pillar in our emissions reduction journey.

2. Cairns community and Council carbon emissions

Cairns community emissions

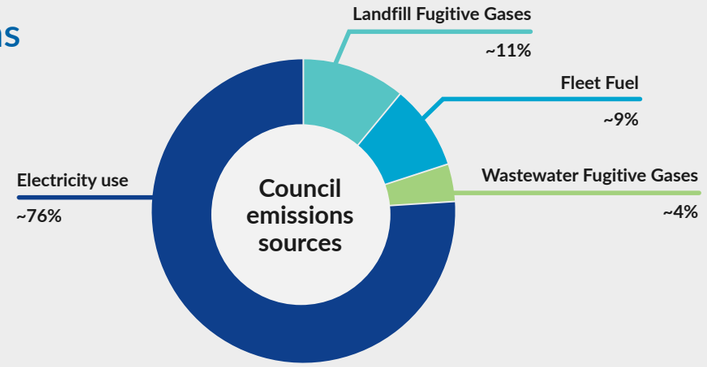
Electricity (55%) and transport fuels (32%) are the largest contributors to Cairns' residential, commercial and industrial greenhouse gas emissions according to the Ironbark Snapshot Tool. Grid-scale renewable energy (e.g. wind and solar farms), behind-the-meter renewable energy (e.g. rooftop solar) and vehicle electrification are key to lowering community emissions.



Council's carbon emissions

A target of 43% emissions reduction by 2030 for Council's own operations can be achieved by reducing consumption of non-renewable electricity and fuels, and fugitive emissions management.

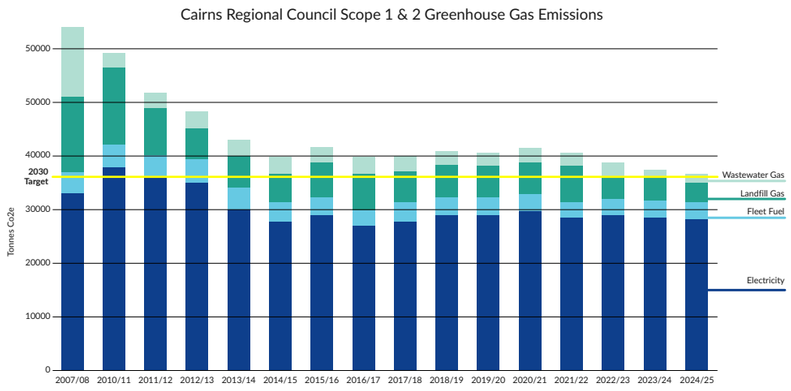
The pie chart on the right summarises Council's 2024/25 emissions profile.



Our journey to date

Between 2010 and 2025, Council reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 42%. Emissions reduction initiatives during that time include:

- Landfill gas flaring
- 2.8 megawatts of behind-the-meter solar
- Process optimisation at the four largest wastewater treatment plants
- Increased use of hybrid and electric vehicles
- Improved monitoring of electricity consumption
- Annual emissions reporting



Note: in 2025, Council resolved to sell its held Carbon Credit Units and Large-Scale Generation Certificates (for renewable energy). This graph has been updated to reflect these changes from previous reports.

Looking forward

Council is currently on track to meet its nationally aligned target of 43% emissions reduction by 2030. New infrastructure and the treatment of Large-Scale Generation Certificates will play a key role in target progress between now and 2030.

As part of the mid-term review, Council has also sharpened its focus on Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions. This approach recognises Council's emission reduction priorities of renewable energy, electrification, energy efficiency and fugitive gas management.

This Strategy will also align Council with Australian Government targets post-2030 and the global target of net zero emissions by 2050.

Emissions reduction and renewable energy pathway

Our commitments

82% Renewable energy by 2030

43% Emissions reduction by 2030

Energy efficient design of new assets

Electric vehicles Fleet electrificaiton powered by renewable energy

Energy efficiency improvements of existing facilities

Fuel efficiency Fit-for-purpose efficient Fleet vehicles

On-site solar at high energy use facilities

Wastewater gas emissions Water efficient households help reduce fugitive emissions

Renewable energy for top consuming sites (via CleanCo Agreement)

Landfill gas emissions Flaring gas to destroy methane

3. Climate action focus areas

Community

Foster climate-resilient, informed and inclusive communities through supporting emissions reduction and increasing resilience to the physical, transition, social and economic impacts of climate change.

Industry

Collaborate to support the transition to a low-carbon, resilient smart green economy.

Energy

Improve energy efficiency, emissions reduction and accelerate the transition to renewable energy.

Transport

Enable a connected, resilient and efficient transport network, while advancing Council and community uptake of low emissions vehicles.

Built environment

Enable low-emissions, climate-resilient buildings, infrastructure and urban spaces through sustainable planning, nature-based solutions and resilient Council assets and services.

Natural environment

Protect, restore and enhance the resilience of a connected and thriving natural environment through strengthened catchment and biodiversity management, education and collaborative landscape restoration.

Community

Community refers to the individuals and groups within the Cairns Local Government Area.

The community of the Cairns region is concerned about the impacts of climate change on their family, the environment and their work. Surveys and engagement showed that the community also want Council to lead by example and take strong action on climate change.

Council's commitment to the community is to collaborate on local initiatives that accelerate our region's progress towards the Federal Government's targets, while simultaneously working to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities, ensuring they are not disproportionately impacted by climate change.

A community that is proud of its city's action on climate change, informed about risks and actively engaged in supporting their homes, natural environment - with opportunities for clean jobs.
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Community focused initiatives include:

- Community Sustainability and Climate Action Grant
- Nature-based Learning Grants
- Clean Up Cairns
- Cairns Ecofiesta
- Tropical Tree Day
- Green Space Our Place program
- Natural Area Management Grants and Conservation Partnerships
- Walking and cycling network
- Waste and Resource Recovery education, including Trash to Treasure Day
- World Wetlands Day
- Gifted Global Green student program
- Clean Creeks and Conservation Partnerships

Community objectives and actions

Advocate Lead Collaborate Educate

Objective	Success looks like	Actions to achieve success	Our Role	2026 Status	
Progressing to low emissions communities	Accelerated progress on emissions reduction across the community	C.1 Support a community emissions inventory to be available for the Cairns local government area.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		C.2 Support community emissions reduction initiatives through grants and educational events and educational events, including the annual Cairns Ecofiesta.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		C.3 Update and continue to implement Council's Waste Reduction and Resource Recovery Strategy.		In progress	→
Climate resilient communities	A community that is resilient to the physical, transition, social and economic impacts of climate change	C.4 Update and continue to implement the Local Disaster Management Plan in line with contemporary climate risk management practices and increase preparedness through disaster resilience initiatives.		In progress	→
		C.5 Participate in government programs and funding opportunities to improve community resilience capabilities.		In progress	→
		C.6 Develop a Social Resilience Strategy and collaborate to help address the social impacts of climate change.		In progress	→
		C.7 Deliver education and collaborate with community to monitor, plan and address extreme climate hazards, to build resilience.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		C.8 Partner with Traditional Custodians in climate change planning and initiatives, respecting and valuing their knowledge.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		C.9 Involve youth in climate change planning, education and action.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		C.10 Collaborate with the health sector on research, education and emergency response for heatwaves to better understand and address health impacts of climate change in the Cairns region.		In progress	→

We will measure our success through:

- Number of grant projects with a climate action focus
- Number of workshops or educational events

Industry

Industry refers to all sectors of the economy, from small to large businesses in the region

All sectors of the economy produce emissions and are vulnerable to climate change disruption, from service industries, including tourism, health, retail and education, to manufacturing and construction.

Commercial and industrial sectors account for over one-third of the region's electricity-related emissions. Our region's sustainable products and services, tropical expertise, environmental management, renewable energy and low emissions transport options position Cairns as an attractive region for investment and diversification. Cairns and FNQ can position itself as a leader in the Smart Green Economy through collaborative action across all sectors to address climate and environmental challenges, helping to protect our reef, rainforest, and economy.

In addition to reducing emissions, business and industry can benefit from addressing climate risks and opportunities, to improve their resilience in a changing climate. Potential risks from climate disruption can be mitigated by planning for changes in areas such as technology, supply chains and construction disruption from severe weather events, or managing health and safety concerns.

CASE STUDY: Supporting a smart green economy

Wedged between the blue of the Great Barrier Reef and the green of the Wet Tropics Rainforest, Cairns businesses have a competitive advantage when it comes to environmental alignment. Businesses and industry sectors are well positioned to maximise these advantages to attract new investment into the region across three identified opportunity clusters: Net Zero Energy Systems, Circular Economy Activation, and Biodiversity and Carbon Markets. Find out more at: ***cairns.qld.gov.au/smartgreeneconomy***

Industry objectives and actions

Advocate Lead Collaborate Educate

Objective	Success looks like	Actions to achieve success	Our Role	2026 Status	
Support the transition to a low emissions economy	Council procurement encourages local, low carbon and sustainable goods and services	I.1 Improve capabilities to track emissions from key Council contracts over the long-term.		In progress	→
		I.2 Embed consideration of sustainability in Council's procurement including whole of life costs.		Delivered ongoing	✓
Recognise and respond to climate risks and opportunities	Support businesses to reduce emissions and respond to the physical and transition risks of climate change	I.3 Collaborate on education for businesses to address climate risks and opportunities, including disaster resilience planning and emissions reduction.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		I.4 Share information and collaborate with industry and government in our region.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
A leading Smart Green Economy	Collaborating to strengthen Cairns and Far North Queensland's Smart Green Economy	I.5 Deliver a Smart Green Economy strategic planning study and conduct a situational and economic analysis of opportunities.		Complete	✓
		I.6 Continue to promote Smart Green Economy activities and contribute to developing opportunity areas through progressing identified Council actions and supporting stakeholder projects where practicable.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		I.7 Explore a sustainability charter in collaboration with business and industry.		In progress	→
		I.8 Investigate circular economy opportunities and new technologies for local waste streams and Council operations, including opportunities through procurement and project delivery.		In progress	→

We will measure our success through:

- Number of initiatives that support businesses to adopt sustainable behaviours, products or services
- Number of tender briefings and documents which encourage suppliers to provide options for sustainable goods and services
- Number of businesses engaged in the Smart Green Economy Working Group and Case Studies

Energy

Energy is the supply of electricity and fuels to power our homes and businesses. This excludes transport fuels, which are addressed in their own focus area.

Energy underpins economic activity and represents a significant component of operational costs for businesses and households. A transition to renewable energy is underway in the Cairns and Far North Queensland region and has been accelerated by Queensland's Northern Renewable Energy Zone.

With electricity consumption accounting for 66% of the region's total emissions in 2020, Council is taking the lead in this focus area by committing to 82% renewable electricity supply for its operations and continually driving-down its energy demand through efficiency measures and energy management.

Cairns needs to engage and be on the front foot of the renewable energy process in order to attract new business, employment and sustainable and renewable energy projects and initiatives
SURVEY RESPONDENT

CASE STUDY: Renewable energy

In 2021, Council switched on 1.8 megawatts of ground-mounted solar at five wastewater treatment plants, adding to the 1.2 megawatts of rooftop solar already in operation. Each year, Council's 3 megawatts of solar generates over 4.5 gigawatt hours of renewable energy, which can enable a reduction of 3,600 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions (tCO2e).

Energy objectives and actions

Advocate Lead Collaborate Educate

Objective	Success looks like	Actions to achieve success	Our Role	2026 Status	
Improve energy efficiency and transition to renewable energy	Best practice energy efficiency of Council assets	E.1 Manage and report on energy consumption, applying best practice controls in Council assets.		In progress	→
		E.2 Update and apply Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) to all Council assets in the design and delivery of capital projects, renewals and maintenance.		Not yet commenced	
		E.3 Continue to implement a LED bulk replacement program for streetlights and traffic lights in collaboration with partners.		In progress	→
	Source 82% of Council's electricity from renewable sources	E.4 Develop an Energy Management and Renewables Plan to: • assess additional behind-the-meter solar PV, battery storage and demand management options • investigate options for low-cost supply of renewable electricity for large assets.		In progress	→
		E.5 Source electricity through Renewable Electricity Sale Agreements where environmentally and financially favourable.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		E.6 Utilise Large-scale generation certificates where applicable for progressing renewable energy and emissions reduction commitments.		Not yet commenced	
	Collaborate to accelerate the transition to renewable energy in region	E.7 Support and deliver educational programs for community and businesses to unlock renewable energy and energy efficiency opportunities.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		E.8 Consider support for renewable energy projects where they deliver local benefits, strengthen community resilience, and minimise environmental impacts (e.g. community energy storage, renewable microgrids, or local renewable energy generation).		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		E.9 Work with government and the energy industry on renewable energy programs, and the integration of emerging technologies (e.g. battery storage) into the electricity network and our facilities.		Delivered, ongoing	✓

We will measure our success through:

- Council's total annual electricity consumption
- Percentage of Council annual electricity use supplied from renewable sources
- Progress and achievement of emissions reduction and renewable energy targets

Transport

Transport refers to the movement of goods and people from one place to the next, as well as the infrastructure associated with this movement. It includes public, shared and active transport.

Transport is third largest source of emissions in Australia, and the fastest growing. While transport emissions in Cairns are rising due to population and economic growth, the transport sector offers a range of emissions reduction opportunities. Transport emissions (from fuel consumption) accounted for 8% of Council's operational emissions (Scope 1 & 2) and approximately 28% of community emissions in 2020.

Accelerating the transition to low emissions transport requires a collaborative effort to build the right infrastructure at the right time, switching to vehicles powered by renewable energy, and increased use of public, shared and active transport options. Improving the climate resilience of the transport network also creates socio-economic benefits, allowing our communities to be more connected and move more efficiently.

Case study: Fuelling change

Council's fleet fuel use fell by 36% between 2010 and 2020, an annual emissions reduction of 1,481 tonnes CO2(e) in that period. Hybrid passenger vehicles, fleet rationalisation and GPS monitoring were significant contributors to these outcomes. In 2024, Council introduced four new all-electric vehicles into its vehicle fleet as part of a pilot, powered by renewable electricity. The pilot promoted the benefits of electric vehicles to community and staff, and demonstrated operational cost reductions of 45-70% (depending on fuel pricing), compared with fuel-consuming hybrid-electric vehicles.

Transport objectives and actions

Advocate Lead Collaborate Educate

Objective	Success looks like	Actions to achieve success	Our Role	2026 Status	
Accelerate transition to low emissions transport	Deliver efficient and low emissions transport options for Council operations	T.1 Develop a Fleet Efficiency Plan for Council, utilising data to improve efficiency of vehicle-based operations.		Not yet commenced	
		T.2 Pilot electric vehicle options powered by renewable energy and assess benefits.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		T.3 Deliver staff initiatives and facilities for employees to encourage use of active, public, shared and electric transport.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
	Community and business uptake of electric vehicles powered by renewables	T.4 Encourage a network of public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs).		Not yet commenced	
		T.5 Encourage uptake of EV's through educational initiatives.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
	Increased uptake of public and active transport	T.6 Encourage uptake of public and active transport through education and events.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		T.7 Support uptake of active travel through appropriate planning mechanisms, including provision of end-of-trip facilities and bicycle storage in developments.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		T.8 Improve access to and use of public and active transport by reducing the impacts of heat through infrastructure, greening and shade structures.		In progress	→
An integrated and sustainable regional transport network	Collaborate to deliver an integrated sustainable regional transport network that is resilient to climate impacts, connected and accessible	T.9 Collaborate on an Integrated Transport Strategy with partners, including public and active transport options.		In progress	→
		T.10 Share information on climate hazards relating to transport infrastructure and collaboratively build resilience in the network, including evacuation routes.		In progress	→
		T.11 Implement and update Council's Active Transport Strategy, increasing and maintaining the city's network of neighbourhood paths and cycleways.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		T.12 Integrate transport-oriented design in planning for future growth and master planning.		Delivered, ongoing	✓

We will measure our success through:

- Percentage of hybrid and electric vehicles in Council's passenger vehicle fleet
- Total annual fuel consumption (ULP and diesel) by Council
- Number of electric vehicles registered in Cairns region

Built environment

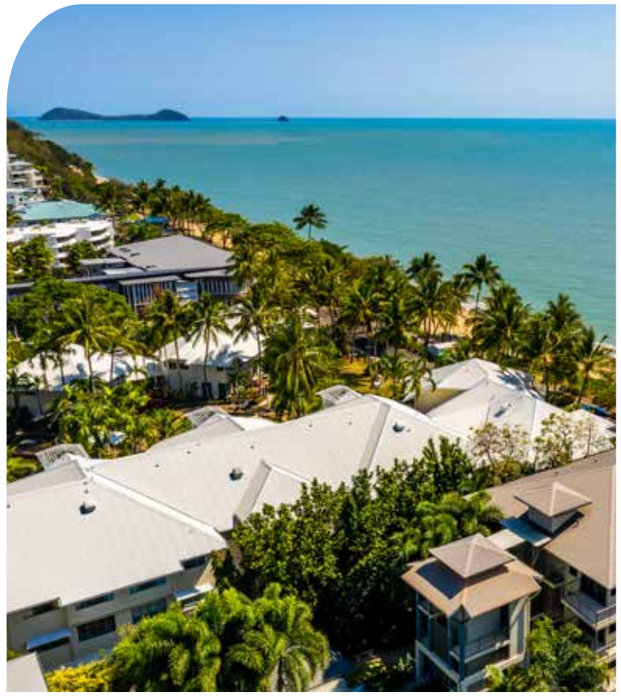
The built environment refers to all public and private buildings, urban spaces and infrastructure, including above and below-ground services.

Much of Cairns' built environment is exposed to the physical impacts of climate change. These hazards include sea level rise – increasing erosion-prone and storm surge areas, as well as increased temperatures, changes in rainfall and fire conditions, and extreme weather events such as cyclones and floods.

Reducing emissions in the built environment can be addressed by reducing embodied emissions in construction materials such as steel, bitumen and concrete, as well as the energy related emissions associated with powering our homes, businesses and community infrastructure.

Through urban and tropical building design, improving the energy efficiency of buildings and increasing density around our centres, whilst minimising the impact on our natural environment, there is great potential for reducing the impacts of a changing climate.

Built environment needs to respond to climate, but also needs of population: being easily accessible to main centres while also responding to natural environments. WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT



Case study: Towards 2050 Cairns Growth Strategy

With the city's population expected to grow by 72,000 people by 2050, the Towards 2050 Growth Strategy lays out a roadmap to ensure Cairns remains one of the most liveable and sustainable cities in Australia.

In shaping the future of Cairns, Council developed a comprehensive framework, guided by technical studies and community expectations. The framework emphasises the city's blue-green elements, ensuring that future development safeguards our tropical climate, natural environment, and cultural heritage.

This blue-green framework underpins six foundational guiding principles for growth:

- Protect and celebrate our blue-green tropical landscape
- Diverse housing for our changing community
- Proactively plan for natural hazards
- Consolidated, focused growth
- Create great tropical neighbourhoods
- Support a thriving economy

Further technical analysis identified a final settlement pattern, with spatial allocation for growth around key focus areas and economic clusters. The framework reinforces connections between coastal areas, waterways and open, green spaces while providing for urban development that responds to natural hazards, impacted by climate change.

Built environment objectives and actions

Advocate Lead Collaborate Educate

Objective	Success looks like	Actions to achieve success	Our Role	2026 Status	
Accelerate the transition to a sustainable built environment	Low emissions Council buildings and infrastructure	B.1 Review the Environmentally Sustainable Design policy and develop a guideline for Council facilities.	Lead	Not yet commenced	
		B.2 Research heat reduction opportunities for urban areas in collaboration with partners.	Lead	Not yet commenced	
	Resilient and efficient housing and development	B.3 Encourage delivery of sustainable, resilient buildings and higher density housing through targeted education, design guidelines and urban planning in collaboration with industry.	Lead, Collaborate, Educate	Delivered, ongoing	✓
		B.4 Advocate for climate resilient planning and design, at a regional, state and federal level and pursue funding opportunities.	Advocate	Delivered, ongoing	✓
A climate resilient city	Council services, planning and assets are resilient to climate impacts	B.5 Conduct a climate risk and natural hazards assessment of Council's critical services and assets.	Lead	In progress	→
		B.6 Integrate mitigation of climate impacts when planning new assets and renewals, including disaster management related infrastructure.	Lead	In progress	→
		B.7 Coordinate Council's approach to natural hazard resilience through an Integrated Resilience Plan, providing a decision-making framework to proactively plan for resilience across the different delivery functions.	Lead	In progress	→
		B.8 Trial deployment of flash flood monitoring systems to improve warnings for at-risk localities.	Lead	In progress	→
		B.9 Deliver the Cairns Water Security Strategy and ensure the future resilience of our water supply.	Lead, Collaborate	In progress	→
		B.10 Deliver and implement the Cairns Water Efficiency Strategy.	Lead, Collaborate	In progress	→
		B.11 Deliver Our Cairns Coast Strategy and integrate coastal hazards adaptation into decision making and planning.	Lead, Collaborate	In progress	→

Objective	Success looks like	Actions to achieve success	Our Role	2026 Status	
Plan for sustainable growth	Climate risk management is incorporated into planning for growth, development, buildings, and urban spaces	B.12 Embed climate change risk management and resilience into Council's planning scheme and master planning.		In progress	→
		B.13 Identify and address urban heat island exposure and collaborate to cool our cities and suburbs.		In progress	✓
		B.14 Deliver the Towards 2050 Growth Strategy to support sustainable growth of the region and build resilience to the long-term impacts of natural hazards.		Complete	✓
		B.15 Take an all-hazards approach to growth and land use planning (i.e. prepare fit-for-purpose risk assessments for flood, storm tide and erosion, bushfire and landslip prone areas).		In progress	→
		B.16 Prepare a master mitigation and adaptation plan for the Cairns CBD and Environs to ensure the future resilience of our city (including identification of finer-grain precincts).		Not commenced	
	Working with nature to protect and restore our city and suburbs	B.17 Develop an Urban Greening Strategy to manage heat, improve biodiversity and increase canopy cover.		In progress	→
		B.18 Collaborate on guidance for nature-based and hybrid engineering solutions to address climate hazards such as sea level rise- storm surge and erosion, flooding, heat and fire.		In progress	→
		B.19 Build resilience to natural hazards through integrating water sensitive urban design opportunities where feasible.		In progress	→
		B.20 Protect biodiversity corridors and maintain ecological connectivity to strengthen ecosystem resilience and support species adaptation to environmental change.		In progress	→

We will measure our success through:

- Number of planning policy initiatives which aim to reduce the impacts of natural hazards exacerbated by climate change
- Number of Council initiatives which reduce urban heat island effect and increase shade, or deliver water-sensitive urban design
- Percentage of canopy cover in urban areas

Natural environment

Refers to the reef, rainforest and wetlands of Cairns. It is also the plants, trees and local parks, agricultural land, fisheries, forests and other natural resources.

Cairns' natural environment is under increasing pressure from climate change. Prevalent impacts in recent history include more frequent and severe reef bleaching events from increased marine heatwaves/reef water temperatures, and significant losses of sensitive species, like the Spectacled Flying Fox from land-based heatwaves.

The natural environment, as a carbon sink, is an important resource in achieving Australia's net zero emissions targets. There are growing opportunities in the carbon and nature market through the generation of Australian Carbon Credit Units from improved agriculture, revegetation and fire management.

We can improve our resilience to climate change by strengthening the health of the natural environment and minimising pressures on ecosystems - strengthening nature-based risk reduction. As well as improving biodiversity outcomes, maintaining healthy natural environments can increase opportunities for carbon sequestration.

Council is a proud Reef Guardian Council and works in collaboration with key stakeholders to improve the natural environment's resilience to climate impacts and associated pressures. This includes Terrain Natural Resource Management, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, Wet Tropics Management Authority, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils, Indigenous land and sea ranger groups, the Cairns River Improvement Trust, Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership, OzFish, land care, coast care groups and others.

CASE STUDY: Reef, rainforest and healthy waterways partnerships

The Cairns region is globally renowned for its two remarkable World Heritage areas - the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rainforest. Council contributes to the resilience of these natural assets by taking strong action on emissions reduction, supporting healthy catchments and reducing the impacts of land-based activities on the Reef ecosystem.

Council is also an active member of the Wet Tropics Waterways Partnership. The Partnership, comprised of more than 50 organisations, aims to improve the condition of freshwater and estuary waterways that flow into the Great Barrier Reef.

As an initiative of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, the Partnership provides a means of measuring the effectiveness of land management practices across the catchment, their cumulative benefit on water quality, and the prioritisation of further actions.

Natural environment objectives and actions

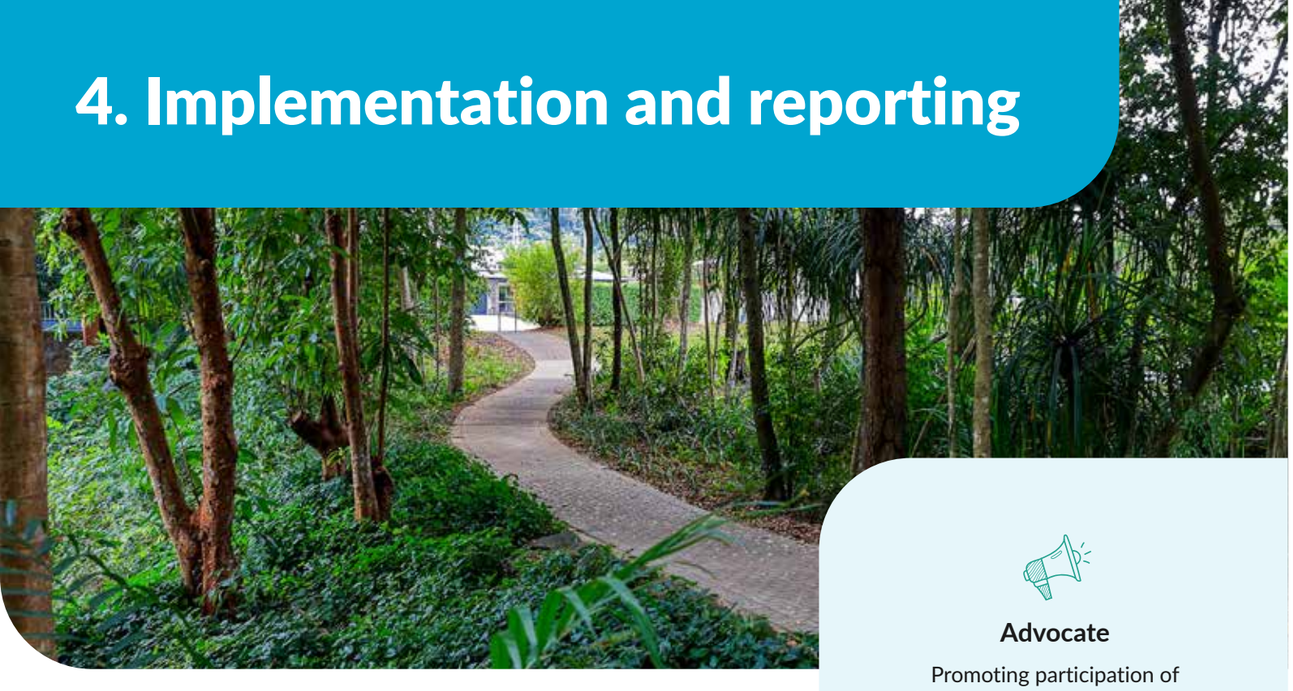
Advocate Lead Collaborate Educate

Objective	Success looks like	Actions to achieve success	Our Role	2026 Status	
A protected, valued and thriving natural environment	Impacts of land-based activities are managed and the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef is enhanced	N.1 Active participation in the Reef Guardian Council Program (including delivery of an updated Reef Guardian Action Plan), and Wet Tropics catchment management partnerships.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		N.2 Management of point-source discharges from the region's wastewater treatment plants.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		N.3 Management of diffuse-source discharges from the region's urban stormwater network.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
	Leading land biodiversity and catchment management	N.4 Collaborate with land managers and key stakeholders to revegetate riparian zones, restore degraded landscapes and improve the connectivity of ecosystems through facilitating access, providing grant opportunities and other conservation partnership models.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		N.5 Develop Integrated Catchment Resilience Management Plans and collaborate to improve urban water ways, habitat connectivity and water quality.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		N.6 Reduce and manage the impacts of biosecurity and fire risks, regularly updating the Cairns Pest Management and Bush Fire Management Plans, considering updated climate science.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		N.7 Develop a strategic approach to vegetation and natural assets management to improve ecosystem resilience and biodiversity in collaboration with stakeholders.		Not yet commenced	
	Species at-risk from climate change impacts have access to habitat required for their resilience and survival	N.8 Manage, communicate and protect the conservation values of Council-managed natural areas and open/green spaces in collaboration with stakeholders and community volunteers.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
		N.9 Collaborate with stakeholders and researchers to identify, plan and respond to pressures on at-risk species in the region, including on recovery after extreme events.		In progress	→
		N.10 Actively enable revegetation initiatives led by the community, through advice and native-plant supply from Council's nursery.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
	Indigenous land management, Traditional Ecological Knowledge is applied to restore ecosystems, connect landscapes and country	N.11 Collaborate with Traditional Custodians to design and deliver conservation and climate action initiatives that monitor, manage and restore the natural environment, supporting cultural connections.		Delivered, ongoing	✓
Accelerated carbon sequestration capacity in the natural environment	Increased regional revegetation projects, delivering carbon sequestration, environmental and social co-benefits	N.12 Collaborate with partners to investigate and support opportunities that improve environmental outcomes, strengthen natural resource management and create potential economic benefits for the region and Traditional Custodians.		In progress	→
		N.13 Consider options for best utilisation of Council managed organic waste streams in agriculture or other markets.		In progress	→

We will measure our success through:

- Number of conservation initiatives led by Council with its partners
- Number of seedlings raised in the Council nursery

4. Implementation and reporting



Council's role in climate action

Cairns Regional Council plays an important role in leading by example in our region, as we continually improve our climate risk management. By reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for both the physical and transition risks of climate change, we can collaborate for greater impact, and share our journey with community and businesses.

Climate-related partnerships and programs

Council works in partnership with State and Federal government agencies, local industry and businesses, research agencies and its Traditional Custodian partners. It is also a member of the following partnerships, programs and networks:

- Queensland Climate Resilient Councils (QCRC) – Local Government Association Queensland
- Climate Resilience Technical Committee - Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils
- Cairns Local Disaster Management Group, and District Disaster Management Group
- Reef Guardian Councils Program
- Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership
- Smart Green Economy Working Group – Cairns and Far North Queensland
- Coastal Councils Adaptation Taskforce (C-CAT)
- QCoast2100 Councils Leading Coastal Adaptation
- Cairns River Trust
- Queensland Heat Health Community of Practice

Advocate

Promoting participation of businesses, the community or other decision makers.

Lead

Delivering services, including undertaking planning, project delivery or construction works.

Collaborate

Forming partnerships and strategic alliances with other parties, including with Traditional Custodian communities, youth, industry, government and community groups.

Educate

Building awareness and sharing reliable knowledge.

Governance and transparency

Actions outlined in this Strategy cover areas of Council responsibility and, as such, sound governance is required for effective implementation across Council.

Governance refers to strategic direction, decision-making, transparency, accountability and having well-aligned risk management procedures to proactively identify, mitigate and adapt to climate risks and impacts.

To keep track of the Strategy and communicate progress, Council regularly evaluates and reports on delivery of the broader objectives of this strategy.

Council's climate change governance and leadership:

- Council provides the strategic direction in line with its Corporate Plan, which includes key commitments such as progress towards the Federal Government's emissions reduction and renewable energy targets.
- Officers monitor the latest climate science and best practice standards for addressing climate change and recommend updates to Council's response accordingly.

Communication:

- Council engages with business and industry to communicate our commitment to emissions reduction and climate risk management.
- The Cairns community is updated on what Council is doing in the climate change and resilience space, and how everyone can be involved.
- Council engages with the community to hear their views and input into relevant actions (e.g. surveys, engagement at events like the Cairns Ecofiesta).

Improved governance and risk management:

- Council uses an internal implementation plan addressing corporate planning procedures, risk management and budget planning.
- Climate change considerations are incorporated in the development of strategies, policies and plans.

Monitoring, reporting, evaluation and improvement

Council will report on the implementation of this Strategy and its progress towards the Federal Government's emissions reduction and renewable energy targets, through Strategy progress updates, Council's Operational Plan and State of Environment reporting.

This is evaluated through implementation plan tracking, active monitoring of corporate energy and emissions, and internal climate risk governance maturity assessments (suitable for Queensland local governments).

Council's approach is informed by stakeholder engagement, operational priorities, updates to best practice and other emerging advice from State or Federal Governments.

Project management teams and internal working groups identify and progress improvement opportunities for impactful implementation, with an overarching project management team, made up of senior Executive Managers. Regular updates on implementation are provided to Council's Executive Leadership Team and Councillors.

119-145 Spence Street, Cairns, QLD, 4870, Australia
Phone: 1300 69 22 47
cairns.qld.gov.au

Cairns
REGIONAL COUNCIL