

CAIRNS THE PREMIER DESTINATION FOR WOMEN'S SPORT ACTION PLAN

L&C | 52/8/4 | #7871296

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Endorses the "Cairns the Premier Destination for Women's Sport Action Plan"; and
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Nil

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At the 10 July 2024 Ordinary Meeting, Council stated its ambition to position Cairns as the 'Premier Destination for Women's Sport in Australia', recognising the significant opportunity to secure major infrastructure upgrades, events as well as grow participation and destination appeal to deliver long-term community and economic benefits.

Whilst the Vision established a clear strategic direction, Council officers have been working collaboratively with key industry stakeholders to develop a realistic and comprehensive action plan. This report outlines and seeks endorsement of the Action Plan which is provided in **Attachment 1**.

Alongside the development of the action plan, it should be noted that a number of major achievements have already been realised in pursuit of the Vision:

1. Major Events Sponsorship of the **AFLW Northern Nest** (2024–2026), which has established Cairns as a recurring host of elite women's sport and community engagement programs.
2. Confirmation of major **upgrades to Barlow Park** as part of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic Legacy program.
3. Council support for the **North Queensland Cowboys Community Development and High-Performance Centre (CDHPC)** at West Barlow Park to accommodate their **NRLW team** in Cairns as well as enable high performance training and major events at the upgraded Barlow Park.

Endorsement of the Action Plan will ensure a coordinated, long-term approach to establishing Cairns as the Premier Destination for Women's Sport in the lead up to 2032.

BACKGROUND:

Women's sport is experiencing rapid global and national growth across participation, viewership, attendance, and commercial investment. This momentum presents a significant opportunity for regional destinations to attract events, training camps, and sport tourism.

Key indicators that demonstrate the scale of this growth include:

- The FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 became the most attended women's football tournament in history, attracting more than 1.9 million spectators and a global broadcast audience exceeding two (2) billion. Matches hosted in Queensland generated strong visitation and tourism outcomes.
- The ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020 final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground attracted 86,174 spectators, setting a world record for attendance at a standalone women's sporting event at the time.
- National participation data indicates women and girls represent one of the fastest-growing segments in organised sport.
- Global sponsorship investment in women's sport has more than doubled in recent years, reflecting increased media value, audience demand, and brand alignment opportunities.

This sustained growth highlights a clear opportunity for Cairns to strategically position itself as a host destination for women's sporting events, training, and high-performance camps.

Cairns is uniquely positioned to capitalise on this growth due to its climate, existing high-quality venues, tourism appeal, and Council's established major event attraction capability. The city's ability to host elite competitions and training environments complements the State and Federal focus on leveraging the Brisbane 2032 Games to deliver long-term participation, infrastructure, and economic legacy outcomes across regional Queensland.

Building on Council's recent investments in venue partnerships, event attraction and sport infrastructure planning, the proposed action plan provides a coordinated pathway to strengthen Cairns' reputation as a Premier Destination for Women's Sport and to maximise economic, social and participation outcomes for the community.

COMMENT:

Whilst the Action Plan focuses on maximising the legacy of the upcoming Barlow Park redevelopment and the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games it also strives to strengthen partnerships, grow participation opportunities for women and girls, and enhance Cairns' reputation as a nationally recognised host of major women's sporting events and training camps.

The ten-point Plan provides a practical and scalable roadmap that builds on the strategic pillars previously adopted as part of the Vision. In order to test feasibility, early headway has been made to advance certain items. Future engagement and/or reporting to Council will demonstrate how an initiative aligns to an approved action.

1. Major Event at a redeveloped Barlow Park

The redevelopment of Barlow Park represents a transformational opportunity to attract a landmark women's sporting event to celebrate the upgraded venue. A major event of this scale will act as a catalyst to showcase the venue nationally, generate significant media exposure and visitation, and establish credibility in the national women's sport event market. This action directly supports Council's infrastructure advocacy and major event attraction objectives.

2. Signature Cairns Event

The development of a recurring annual women's sporting event will create a flagship event synonymous with the Cairns region. This will provide consistent national broadcast exposure, strengthen destination branding, and deliver long-term participation and pathway outcomes for local athletes.

3. Destination Women's Sport Investment Program

Establishing a strategic investment fund and program will ensure a coordinated and transparent approach to attracting elite teams, events, programs, training camps, and other opportunities year-round. This program will also create more funding opportunities for the local sporting community, ensuring grassroots clubs and organisations benefit alongside elite sport attraction.

4. Destination Prospectus

A dedicated sport destination prospectus will position Cairns as investment-ready and bid-ready. Showcasing the region's facilities, climate advantages, accommodation capacity, connectivity, and support packages will enable rapid responses to event and training opportunities and strengthen Council's competitiveness in national and international bidding environments.

5. Strategic Infrastructure Investment Plan

Embedding women's sport priorities into Council's capital works and advocacy planning will ensure long-term infrastructure investment aligns with future demand. Focus areas include female-friendly amenities, high-performance training environments and enhanced event hosting capability, ensuring facilities support both community participation and elite sport.

6. Destination Resource

The creation of a dedicated sports digital platform will act as a single digital front door for the community, event organisers, and partners. This platform will centralise information, resources, opportunities and promotion, improving coordination and accessibility.

7. Alignment of Council Grants

Aligning grant objectives with the women's sport destination Vision will create a funding ecosystem that reinforces Council's strategic direction. This ensures that local investment

supports participation growth, facility development, and event attraction in a coordinated manner.

8. Alignment of Council Programs and Events

Embedding a women's sport focus across Council programs and community events will increase participation, visibility, and engagement. This action ensures the Vision is reflected not only in elite sport attraction but also in community activation and grassroots development.

9. Partnerships

Formalising strategic partnerships with national and state sporting bodies as well as key stakeholders will ensure optimal delivery and co-investment. Strong partnerships will be essential to achieving shared objectives and maximising economic and social returns.

10. Women's Sport Reference Panel

Establishing a Women's Sport Reference Panel will provide ongoing stakeholder input, guide investment priorities, and strengthen community buy-in. This panel will play a critical advisory role in ensuring the initiative remains responsive, inclusive, and aligned with sector needs.

OPTIONS:

Option 1: (recommended)

Endorses the "Cairns the Premier Destination for Women's Sport Action Plan"

Option 2:

That Council **does not** endorse the Action Plan and adopts an alternate course of action.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

Key risks associated with implementation include competition from other destinations, reliance on external funding, event delivery risks, and capacity to deliver new initiatives. These risks will be mitigated through staged implementation, partnership development, diversified funding opportunities, and ongoing monitoring through Council reporting processes.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

Implementation of the Women's Sport Action Plan will be delivered through a combination of existing operational and capital budgets. Provision has been made in the upcoming Council operational draft budget for the Destination Women's Sport Investment Program any new items will be considered subject to these budget parameters.

As opportunities materialise in the future in relation to major event attraction and infrastructure advocacy, these will be subject to standard annual budget processes and

separate Council reports where required.

The coordinated approach outlined in this plan is intended to maximise external investment through tourism, State and Federal government, sporting bodies, and commercial partners.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

This report aligns with:

- Council's Operational Plan 2025-2026, in particular:
 - Community and Culture Action 23; Position Cairns as a Destination for Women's Sport.
- Council's Corporate Plan 2025–2030, including:
 - Focus 4 – Community and Culture
 - fostering a vibrant, healthy, and inclusive community; and
 - establish Cairns as the preeminent destination for women's sport in Australia.

Policy:

All partnerships, funding arrangements and event attraction activities will be undertaken in accordance with Council's procurement and grant policies and governance frameworks. Any future agreements or financial commitments arising from the Action Plan will be presented to Council for consideration where required.

Governance and Policy development will require future Council approval in relation to Destination Women's Sport Investment Program and Reference Panel.

CONSULTATION:

Development of "Cairns the Premier Destination for Women's Sport Action Plan" has been informed by a staged consultation process involving the community, Councillors, and key stakeholders.

- A community workshop and public survey were undertaken in late 2024 to gather feedback on opportunities, priorities and barriers relating to women and girls' participation, event attraction and facility need.
- A series of Council workshops were held on 27 November 2024 and 5 March 2025 to refine the Vision, priorities, and implementation approach.
- Ongoing correspondence and engagement have occurred with relevant internal departments and industry stakeholders, including sporting organisations, tourism bodies, event brokers, and industry/government partners, to ensure alignment and coordinated delivery.

This consultation process has helped shape the proposed Action Plan and ensure it reflects both community aspirations and stakeholder capability.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment #1 – Action Plan on a Page

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Dendle', with a stylized, cursive script.

Tim Dendle
Executive Manager Community Spaces

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Destry Puia', with a stylized, cursive script.

Destry Puia
Director Lifestyle and Community


Attachment #1 – Action Plan on a Page

CAIRNS THE PREMIER DESTINATION FOR WOMEN'S SPORT

ACTION PLAN

The redevelopment of Barlow Park and the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic legacy provide a catalyst to attract major events, grow participation and strengthen the visitor economy.



<p>1 Major Event at Redeveloped Barlow Park</p>  <p>Action Secure a landmark women's sporting event to celebrate the upgraded venue.</p> <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major media exposure and destination positioning Increased visitation and economic impact Event attraction credibility and momentum 	<p>2 Signature Cairns Event</p>  <p>Action Develop an annual women's sporting event that becomes synonymous with the city.</p> <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recurring national broadcast event Increased female participation and pathways Strong destination brand development 	<p>3 Destination Women's Sport Investment Program</p>  <p>Action Establish a strategic investment program to support the realisation of the vision.</p> <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-round pipeline of elite teams and events More funding opportunities for our community 	<p>4 Destination Prospectus</p>  <p>Action Develop a prospectus highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities and climate advantages Tourism and accommodation capacity National and international connectivity Incentives and support packages <p>Expected outcomes Ready-to-deploy bid document for event attraction</p>	<p>5 Strategic Infrastructure Investment Plan</p>  <p>Action Incorporate women's sport priorities into existing capital works priorities and advocacy plans.</p> <p>Focus areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female-friendly facilities High-performance training environments Event hosting capability <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term infrastructure investment pipeline
<p>6 Destination Resource</p>  <p>Action Develop a dedicated Women's Sport digital platform.</p> <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single online portal for event organisers 	<p>7 Alignment of Council Grants</p>  <p>Action Align grant objectives with the women's sport vision.</p> <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding ecosystem aligned with destination strategy 	<p>8 Alignment of Council Programs and Events</p>  <p>Action Embed women's sport focus across:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community events Participation programs Go Clubs <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased community engagement and participation 	<p>9 Development and Investment in Strategic Partnerships</p>  <p>Action Formalise partnerships across:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and state sporting bodies Tourism and accommodation providers Key stakeholders High-performance service providers <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve shared objectives Coordinated destination delivery and co-investment 	<p>10 Women's Sport Reference Panel</p>  <p>Action Establish a multi sector panel to support and guide the implementation of the vision.</p> <p>Expected outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide Destination Women's Sport Investment Program Community involvement Key stakeholder input

SUCCESS MEASURES BY 2032



More events all year



More participation



Better Facilities



Enhanced destination appeal, more visitors, more spend



Stronger community and partner collaboration

Together we can make Cairns Australia's Premier Destination for Women's Sport

