

CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL

AVIATION INDUSTRY

2024/25



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Industry Snapshot - 2024/25



\$1,150M

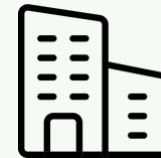
Output / Total Sales



1,686

Local Jobs

1.9% of total local jobs



74

Local Businesses

0.5% of total GST Registered Businesses

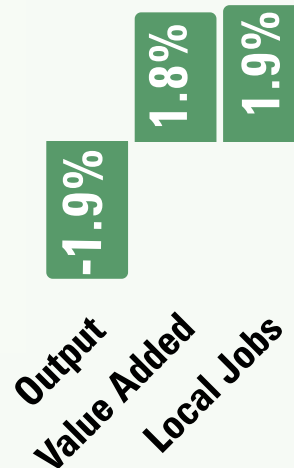


\$411M

Gross Value Added

3.9% of total industry value added

**5YR
GROWTH**



KEY SUB-INDUSTRIES



Air Transport and Airport Operations

\$372M Value Added

1,433 Jobs



Aircraft Manufacturing and Repair Services

\$39M Value Added

253 Jobs

Sources: NIEIR, 2026; ABS ABR 2026

Industry Size and Composition

	 Output/Sales	 Value Added	 Employment
Direct	\$1,150M	\$411M	1,686

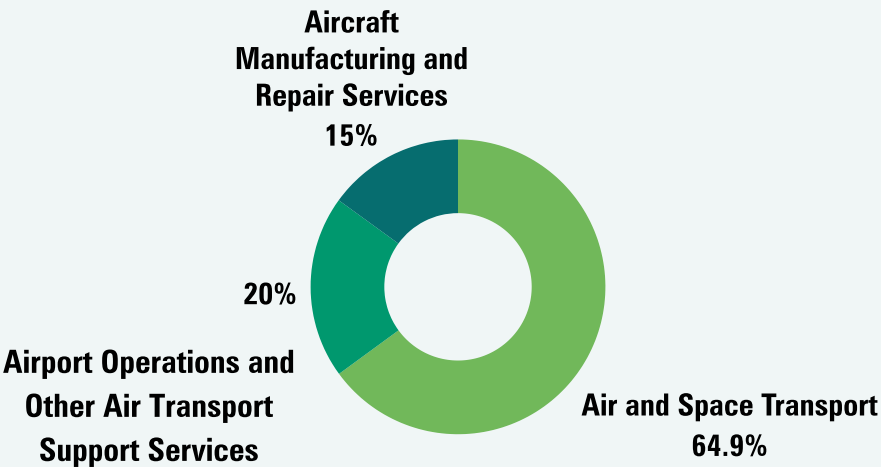
	Indirect/Flow-on Impacts		
Industrial	\$346M	\$175M	1,107
	+	+	+
Consumption	\$266M	\$141M	1,357

Total Impact	\$1,762M	\$727M	4,150

In 2024/25, the Aviation Industry in Cairns was estimated to have generated \$411M in direct plus an additional \$316M in indirect impacts for a total contribution of \$727M in Value Added. The industry supported 1,686 jobs directly and an additional 2,464 in indirect employment.

The largest sub-industry for direct employment was estimated to be Air and Space Transport with 65% of the total sector's employment.

Share of Total Sector Employment, 2024/25
Top Sub-Industries

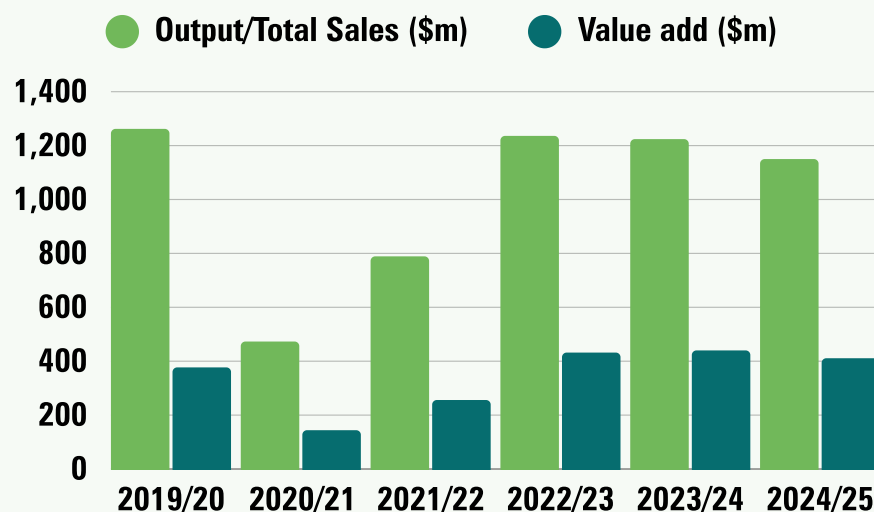


Sources: NIEIR, 2026

GROWTH TRENDS

In 2024/25, there were an estimated 1,686 employees working in the Aviation Industry in Cairns and 1,418 full-time equivalents. The industry generated \$411M in Value Added, or \$243,915 per employee (\$289,928/FTE). Change in the industry has averaged 1.9% p.a. for employment over the last five years and 1.8% p.a. for value added. Change in jobs has been below the state average but economic value has been on par. It is important to note the industry was considerably impacted by COVID based policy responses in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Economic Value, Cairns Region, Financial Year

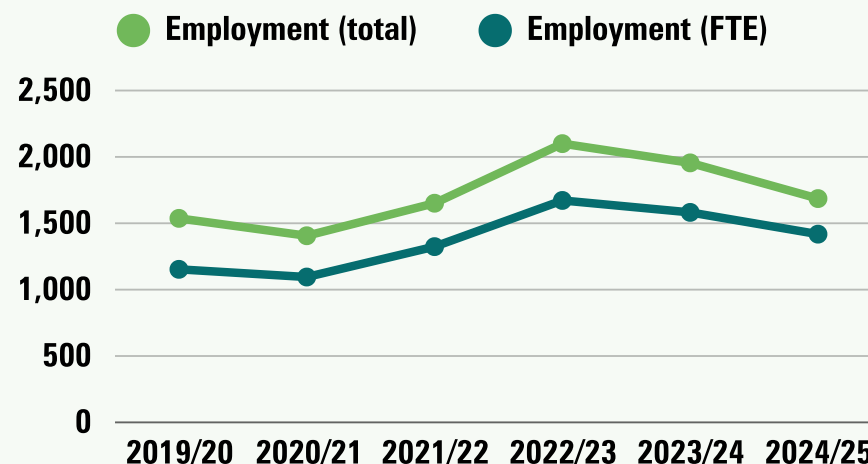


**5 YEAR
AVERAGE
ANNUAL
INDUSTRY
GROWTH**

-1.9%
Output/Sales
-2.2% p.a.

1.8%
Value Added
1.8% p.a.

Average Employment, Cairns Region, Financial Year



**5 YEAR
AVERAGE
ANNUAL
INDUSTRY
GROWTH**

1.9%
Employment
2.4% p.a.

4.2%
FTEs
4.6% p.a.

Sources: NIEIR, 2026



COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE



Cairns Airport is the 7th busiest airport in Australia servicing 4.7m passengers in 2024/25. The airport also supports smaller tourism based aircraft, FIFO routes and is a major base for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.



Cairns is home to major aircraft maintenance facilities that provide fixed and rotary wing service. Major companies include global players such as Jet Aviation and local players such as Skytek.



Cairns Aviation Skills Centre and the CQUniversity Aviation Campus are both located at Cairns Airport, delivering vocational and Bachelor level qualifications in aircraft maintenance engineering and flight operations.



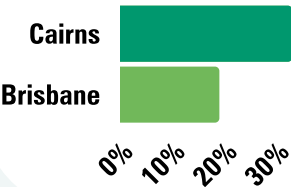
Cairns' role as a gateway to natural assets such as the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforests has encouraged the start of numerous charter flight operations.



Cairns is located near to highly populated countries in Asia which supports tourism and potential international air freight opportunities. Cairns is directly connected to nine international airports.



Domestic passenger numbers to Cairns Airport were growing faster than Brisbane pre-COVID.
Growth in Domestic Passengers decade to 2018/19



Sources: BITRE, 2026

WORKFORCE PROFILE

Workers in the Aviation Industry in Cairns in 2021 were slightly older than the state as a whole with a median age of 45. The workforce was male orientated and 28% were born overseas.

Only 18% of the workforce was degree educated compared to 26% at the state level, and 33% were working in professional or managerial roles.

In 2021, the FTE median income of the local workforce was lower than the state median, likely due to lower qualifications and a lower percentage of workers employed in professional roles.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AVIATION INDUSTRY, 2021 - CAIRNS REGION



45 years

Median Age

QLD - 43 years



\$87,711

Median Income FTE

QLD - \$94,517



68%

Male

QLD - 69%/31%



32%

Female



67%

Full Time

QLD - 72%



28%

Born Overseas

QLD - 29%



4.5%

Owner Manager

QLD - 3.9%



3.7%

Identified as First Peoples

QLD - 1.7%



33%

Professionals/Managers

QLD - 38%



18%

**Degree or
Above**

QLD - 26%

55%

**Certificate III to
Advanced Diploma**

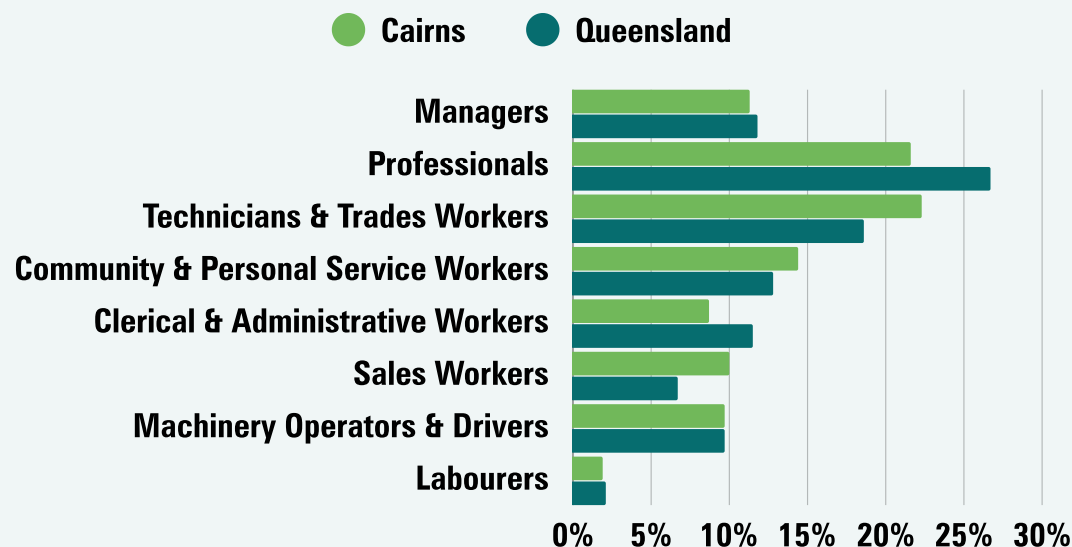
QLD - 48%

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

EDUCATION & SKILLS

The Aviation Industry in Cairns had a lower share of workers in professional occupations in 2021 (22%) compared to the QLD average (27%). The top occupations were Aircraft Maintenance Engineers and Air Transport Professionals. The industry had a slightly lower share of qualified workers (74%) than the QLD average (76%), but a much lower share with degree level qualifications (18% vs 26% for QLD).

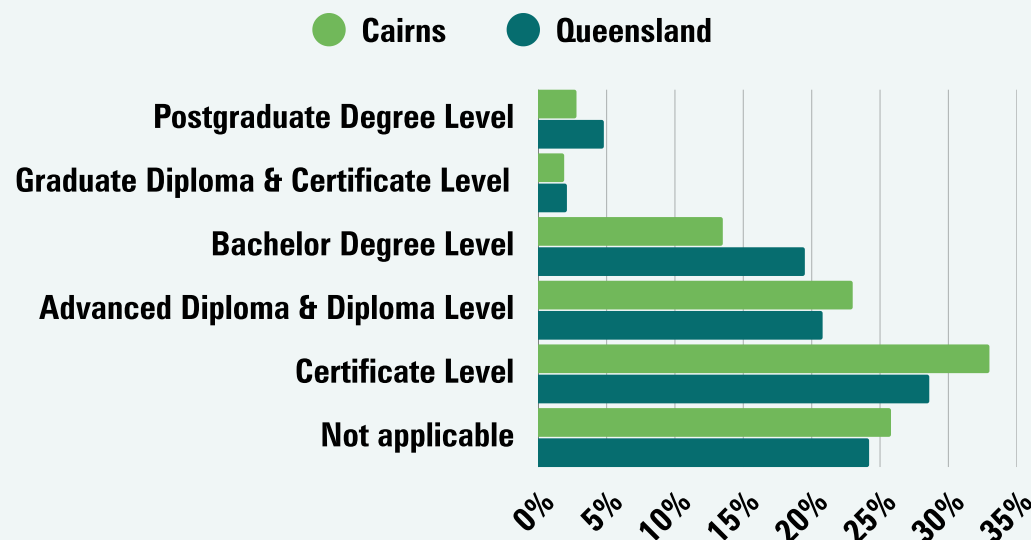
Local Workforce Occupations, 2021



Top Occupations

- Aircraft Maintenance Engineers
- Air Transport Professionals
- Travel Attendants
- Ticket Salespersons

Local Workforce Qualifications, 2021



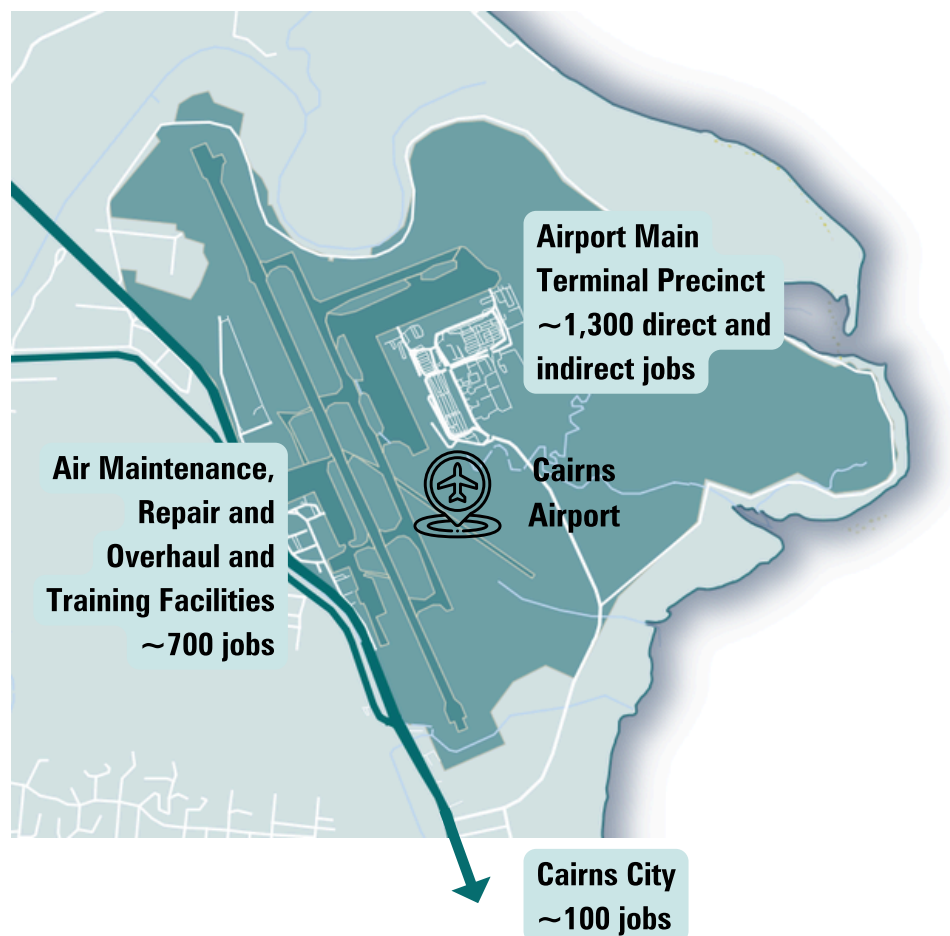
Top Study Fields

- Aircraft Operation
- Aircraft Maintenance Engineering
- Business and Management
- Engineering and Related Technologies

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Main employment precincts

Key employers



Estimated Industry Jobs, 2021



- All Calibration Services
- Cairns Airport
- Cairns Aviation Skills Centre
- CJ Aerospace
- Daintree Air Services
- EastAir
- FNQ Avionics
- Hinterland Aviation
- Jet Aviation
- Jetstar
- Nautilus Aviation
- Qantas
- Queensland Government Air (QGAir)
- Royal Flying Doctor Service
- Skytek
- Skytrans
- Zoom Helicopters

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021



PROJECTS & TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE



Cairns Airport Terminal upgrades

Cairns Airport Domestic Terminal received a major upgrade in 2020. The \$55 million international terminal redevelopment was completed in December 2025, with Stage 1 delivered in 2024. These projects will allow future expansion and maintain the competitiveness of the airport.



Cairns Regional Trade Distribution Centre

Air Freight Handling Services (AFHS) opened their Regional Trade Distribution Centre at Cairns Airport in March 2023. It supports the export of Far North Queensland's premium agricultural and aquacultural products through advanced cold storage facilities and efficient airfreight access to Asian markets.



Advanced manufacturing facilities

There is an early stage proposal for an Advanced Fibre Composites Maintenance and Repair Facility and access to 3D printing technologies in Cairns. If realised, this would assist local aviation businesses specialise in maintenance and repair work, particularly for small-to-medium sized aircraft.



Eastern Aviation Precinct

Work is commencing on a new precinct at Cairns Airport. Key features include four new aeronautical stands to enable quicker turnaround for aircraft, new aeromedical response facilities, a major common-use maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) hangar, and an area for renewable fuel and energy production. Helicopter operators will also have a new dedicated base, allowing for more frequent scenic flights and increasing tourism capacity. The site will also be home to SkyHaven, a \$60 million initiative designed to provide short-term accommodation for travellers and transient workers.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- Major airport with connections to domestic capital cities and overseas destinations
- Vital for connections to remote regional communities (esp. wet season and during periods of potential road closures)
- Natural assets that support tourism visitation and charter flight operations
- Established expertise in aircraft maintenance, repair and operations (MRO)
- Quality aviation training facilities (CASC)
- Established and reputable aeromedical services



WEAKNESSES

- Decline in air freight volumes in recent years due to loss of direct air services to Hong Kong
- Scale of industry is heavily reliant on tourism, therefore exposed to global factors (e.g. currencies) and strength of local tourism operators and assets
- Access to skilled labour is constrained by local market and challenges in requirements for occupational licencing
- Lack of accommodation for airport workers



THREATS

- Energy and labour costs will continue to impact profit margins in the near future
- Stringent CASA requirements for licencing continues to exacerbate skills shortages
- A weaker economy may impact travel numbers
- Climate change may impact natural assets to the extent that Cairns loses its attractiveness to tourists
- Ongoing conflict in the Middle East and its impact on fuel prices



OPPORTUNITIES

- Cairns Airport Terminal upgrades to support passenger growth
- Growing middle class in Asia (700M in 2025) and new long range fuel efficient aircraft (opening up new markets) can spur increased international visitation
- Develop Cairns as the Northern Gateway into Australia and a regional hub
- Expand freight exports and imports by securing year-round freight capacity to leverage the Cairns Regional Trade Distribution Centre
- The Eastern Aviation Precinct including the common user hangar and investments in composites manufacturing facilities will support Aircraft MRO growth





For more economic data on the
Cairns Region, visit economy.id

