

EVENT FUNDING APPLICATION FROM TOURISM TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND – 2027 AUSTRALIAN TOURISM AWARDS

EDA | 58/6/1 | #7912551

RECOMMENDATION:**That Council:**

1. Approves Tourism Tropical North Queensland Limited utilising \$25,000 (ex GST) of the \$300,000 (ex GST) Events Funding allocation specified in their Resource and Performance Agreement with Council for the 2026/27 financial year to support the attraction of the 2027 Australian Tourism Awards event to Cairns in March 2028; 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:

Tourism Tropical North Queensland Ltd (TTNQ) - Directors:

- John O'Sullivan (chair)
- Wayne Reynolds
- Janet Hamilton
- Richard Barker
- Ben Woodward
- Janine Bowmaker
- Alan Wallish
- Nikki Giumelli
- Rachael Hodges

Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Cairns Regional Council works in partnership with Tourism Tropical North Queensland Limited (TTNQ) to attract and grow visitation to the region through a Resource and Performance (R&P) Agreement, which includes funding of \$3.65 million for the 2026/27 financial year and each subsequent year of the Agreement ending 30 June 2029. From this sum, an allocation of \$300,000 (ex GST) per annum was specifically to be utilised by TTNQ to fund the Crankworx Cairns major event (in partnership with Council and others),

or an alternate major event/s approved by Council. The Crankworx Cairns major event was discontinued in 2025.

TTNQ are developing a consortium proposal with co-contributions from a number of stakeholders with the aim of securing the 2027 Australian Tourism Awards event for Cairns in March 2028 and seek Council approval to apply \$25,000 (ex GST) of the above mentioned \$300,000 (ex GST) Event Funding allocation for the 2026/27 financial year to help secure this event. Council Officers have assessed this request and recommend it be approved.

BACKGROUND:

Council works in partnership with Tourism Tropical North Queensland Limited (TTNQ) whose role is to facilitate sustainable economic growth in the tourism sector and the development of broader opportunities for the tourism industry in the Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) region.

In December 2024, Council approved a four-year Resource and Performance (R&P) Agreement with TTNQ for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2029, which included \$3.525 million (ex GST) of financial support for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026, and funding of \$3.65 million (ex GST) per annum for each subsequent year of the Agreement.

Within the total annual funding referred to above, the R&P Agreement specifically allocates a sum of \$300,000 (ex GST) per annum as Event Funding which was to be utilised by TTNQ to fund Crankworx Cairns (in partnership with Council and others) or another major event/s approved by Council. Any reallocation of this Event Funding for an alternate purpose/s is subject to Council's approval at its sole discretion. In the absence of any such approval, the funding is to be repaid. The Crankworx Cairns major event was discontinued following the 2025 event which was held in May of that year.

TTNQ also allocate a portion of their total funding mix for use in attracting business events to Cairns through subvention funding. This is not a mandated amount in the R&P Agreement. TTNQ note, however, that the cumulative total of this allocation over the period of the Agreement is already committed.

TTNQ have the opportunity to submit a proposal for the 2027 Australian Tourism Awards (the Awards) to be held in Cairns in March 2028 and seek Council approval to apply \$25,000 (ex GST) of the above mentioned \$300,000 (ex GST) Event Funding allocation for the 2026/27 financial year to help secure this event. TTNQ are also seeking financial co-contributions from other local and State partners to secure this event.

This report provides an overview of the event, Council Officers' assessment of the TTNQ request and associated recommendations.

COMMENT:

Event Overview

The Awards are expected to attract approximately 800 delegates from the tourism sector across Australia which will assist in raising the profile of the Tropical North Queensland destination. It will also bring much needed visitation to the destination during the shoulder season. The awards attract all levels of government, tourism organisations and

associations as well as the finalists from all states and territories. Accordingly, there is also a destination and region profile benefit from hosting the event in Cairns.

In addition to the Awards event, there will also be a business forum component with approximately 200 delegates, which will provide an opportunity to highlight the region's leadership in areas such as sustainability and Indigenous tourism opportunities.

TTNQ have estimated the event would provide over \$1.8 million of direct economic impact based on the delegate numbers mentioned above and average length of stay. Anticipating some pre- and post-event visitation, the economic impact could potentially reach \$2.8 million, in addition to the potential publicity value.

Council Officers' assessment and recommendations

The intention of the \$300,000 (ex GST) per annum Event Funding, as stipulated in the R&P Agreement, was to support either the retention of the Crankworx Cairns event or another major event/s approved by Council. Major events include spectator and participation-based events which aim to deliver economic benefits through increased visitation and associated expenditure and enhanced destination profile (including visible media coverage). Major events also aim to deliver secondary benefits including fostering community pride and social cohesion through event attendance and participation and contributing positively to liveability which in turn supports population (and workforce) attraction and retention.

It is noted that business events (including conferences) are generally distinct from major events and are not classified as major events pursuant to the Council endorsed *Cairns and Great Barrier Reef Major Events Strategy 2026-2035*.

Having said this, the 2027 Australian Tourism Awards differs from most business events/conferences by virtue of the potential for the event to deliver significant profile enhancement for the region (including with elected representatives from both State and Federal Government who are expected to attend the event) and media coverage. Such benefits are closely aligned with some of the key benefits normally generated by major events. Given these factors, it is recommended that the TTNQ request be approved.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended):

That Council:

1. Approves Tourism Tropical North Queensland Limited utilising \$25,000 (ex GST) of the \$300,000 (ex GST) Events Funding allocation specified in their Resource and Performance Agreement with Council for the 2026/27 financial year to support the attraction of the 2027 Australian Tourism Awards event to Cairns in March 2028; 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.

Option 2:

That Council **does not** approve Tourism Tropical North Queensland Limited's request to utilise \$25,000 of the \$300,000 (ex GST) Events Funding allocation specified in their Resource and Performance Agreement with Council for the 2026/27 financial year to support the attraction of the 2027 Australian Tourism Awards event to Cairns in March 2028.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

TTNQ have demonstrated through strong performance over previous years that Return on Investment for events such as these are significant and contribute to TTNQ's overall performance in attracting high-value visitation to the region. If Council were not to support this proposal, there would be a high risk of the event not being secured to be held in Cairns in March 2028.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

As mentioned in the comment section of this report, the potential economic impact of this event is expected to be significant with an estimated \$1.8 million direct economic impact.

The amount request by TTNQ of \$25,000 (ex GST) for will come from the total of \$3.65 million (ex GST) operational allocation for TTNQ for the 2026/2027 financial year. Accordingly, approval of the request would not result in an adverse variance to Council's operational budget for 2026/27.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

This proposal aligns with Council's Corporate Plan 2025-2030 Focus Area 1 (Robust Economy), where growth in visitation, yield, and high-profile events are each key performance indicators.

The event is also strongly aligned with Council's Economic Development Strategy 2026-2030 through Priority Industry alignment (Tourism) and several actions included in Pathway 3: Major events and visitor economy.

Policy

TTNQ has been assessed as a Community Organisation and therefore falls under the remit of the Resource and Performance Agreement section of Council's Community Grant Policy.

CONSULTATION:

Tourism Tropical North Queensland



Nick Masasso
Director - Economic Development & Advocacy