

Small Business Friendly Councils



Cairns Regional Council

Progress Report

24 March – 30 September 2021

Queensland
Small Business
Commissioner



Queensland
Government

General information

Council details

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Reporting period

This report covers activities carried out between March – September 2021, inclusive of the following quarters of the 2020-21 financial year:

☐ Q1 (Jul-Sep) ☐ Q2 (Oct-Dec) ☐ Q3 (Jan-Mar) ☒ Q4 (Apr-Jun)

and to the following quarters of the 2021-22 financial year:

☒ Q1 (Jul-Sep) ☐ Q2 (Oct-Dec) ☐ Q3 (Jan-Mar) ☐ Q4 (Apr-Jun)

Date SBFC Charter signed

SBFC Charter signing date:	24 March 2021
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Date report lodged

Report lodgement date:	
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Charter elements

Communication and engagement

We are fulfilling this element:

☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Unsure ☐ Agree ☒ Strongly agree

Summary of achievements this reporting period:

- [Cairns Regional Council's \(CRC\) business e-newsletter](#) was emailed monthly to the local business community. This communicate includes information to help businesses grow, with a focus on useful information such as grants, events, open Council tenders, consultation and pertinent issues. The newsletters promote information on behalf of other (non-profit) stakeholders and other levels of Government and is sent to approximately 13,000 local businesses.
- When Cairns was placed into a three-day COVID-19 lockdown in August 2021, two extra email bulletins were sent out to assist to keep the business community up to date with changing circumstances and requirements.
- CRC engaged with local key stakeholders and other levels of Government on matters affecting small business through forums including the Federal Government's Cairns Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce and Trade and Investment Queensland's FNQ Trade & Investment Group.
- CRC also convened a number of forums to engage with key local business and industry representatives, including the Cairns Economic Development Priorities & Deliverables Group and the Gordonvale and Babinda Economic Development Stakeholder Groups. Also, as part of COVID-19 planning, CRC convened the Economic Response and Recovery Sub-Committee, which regularly met until stood down in July 2021.

For example: active engagement; being mindful of issues and priorities when decision-making; timely communication – formal and informal; publishing clear service standards.

Raising small business profile and capability

We are fulfilling this element:

☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Unsure ☐ Agree ☒ Strongly agree

Summary of achievements this reporting period:

- CRC has partnered with Renew Australia to launch ["Renew Cairns,"](#) a project to fill vacant shops and support local creative enterprises in the city centre. The project seeks to access properties for short-term periods, to offer local small businesses short-term rent-free premises in which to trial new ideas and grow their businesses. The program commenced in September 2021 and will initially run for 12 months.

- In April 2021, CRC awarded grant funding to the Cairns Chamber of Commerce's Tradelinked Cairns-PNG-Pacific sub-committee, through CRC's [Industry and Economic Diversification Fund](#). This research project, for the "Far North Queensland Export Capability Profile," will identify businesses with the capacity to serve Pacific Nations such as Papua New Guinea, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, and to identify service gaps in Cairns as opportunities for investment to service the Pacific Region. Tradelinked Cairns-PNG-Pacific are a membership-based group comprised of businesses who would like to do business with neighbouring countries in the Pacific such as Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, and the Solomon Islands.
- CRC's [Esplanade Dining Precinct](#) opened in June 2021 following a \$28-million investment. This project supported 164 construction jobs, the vast majority within small local contracting businesses. A key focus of the design supports local businesses by providing extended footpath dining trading zones with consistent building treatments and paving to enhance the distinct tropical character of Cairns. The project was fast-tracked in May 2020 to limit the disruption to traders and maximise the city's appeal once tourists return after COVID-19.
- CRC provided funding for the inaugural [Tropical Innovation Festival](#) to help support business innovation in the region. The event, managed by YEP Cairns, was held in June 2021 and featured more than 50 events and 60 speakers, including a world-first conference on the Great Barrier Reef. As the first event of its kind outside a capital city, the event brought global entrepreneurs, CEOs, government leaders, investors and subject matter experts to Cairns resulting in numerous investment deals and invaluable connections made with local small businesses.
- Multi-year funding agreements have been signed between CRC and four local industry organisations Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Study Cairns, the Babinda Taskforce and the Superyacht Group Great Barrier Reef. This funding will assist these membership-based groups, representing small businesses, to undertake new initiatives and diversify the local economy.
- CRC partnered with Plastic Free Cairns, a program run by the Boomerang Alliance and funded by the Queensland Government, to provide resources to assist businesses to transition into the single use plastic ban in September 2021.

For example: affirming value and importance; encouraging shop and buy local; opportunities to develop local networks; assist in accessing education and other capability-building opportunities; assist in accessing government, business and industry resources.

Supporting resilience and recovery

We are fulfilling this element:

☐ Strongly disagree
 ☐ Disagree
 ☐ Unsure
 ☐ Agree
 ☒ Strongly agree

Summary of achievements this reporting period:

- CRC instigated a Financial Hardship Policy to support ratepayers experiencing difficulty paying debts for Council rates and/or water usage charges due to COVID-19.
- CRC's [Cairns Resilient Businesses Network](#) offers free support for local businesses to become more resilient through training, workshops and planning templates, particularly for natural disasters, pandemics and other threats to business continuity. A "Strengthening our Protective Security in Cairns" webinar was held in July 2021 to assist businesses to prepare and adapt for potential national security threats.
- In response to COVID-19 impacts, in August 2020 CRC released the "[COVID-19 Cairns Local Recovery Plan](#)," a collaborative project that brought together over 100 local stakeholders to draft actions for recovery through two pillars, Economic as well as Human and Social. CRC continued to engage stakeholders and progress on the Plan was reported after 6 months and 1 year. Broadly, the Cairns economy is transitioning from recovery to expansion, however some industries are facing ongoing impacts, such as tourism and international education.
- CRC drafted the "[Our Cairns Coast: Adapting for the future](#)" strategy to provide guidance on managing natural threats to our coast from erosion, storm-tide inundation and sea level rise to the year 2100. Feedback on the draft Strategy was gathered throughout August 2021 from businesses and the community. CRC has also drafted a Climate Change strategy, in partnership with local industry to support businesses to adapt to potential impacts of climate change. In the process of developing the draft Climate Change Strategy, 11 sector-based workshops (e.g. electric vehicles, carbon credits) were hosted with 130 local industry participants.
- Within this period, CRC also partnered with numerous other key local stakeholders to hold events to support business resilience, including a "Cyber Security Industry and Opportunities Workshop" with RDA Tropical North in May 2021; an "E-mobility and Low Emissions Transport Workshop" with EnergyConnect in May 2021 and the "ecoBiz Leaders' Forum" with CCIQ in June 2021.
- CRC's "[Ecofiesta](#)," Queensland's premier sustainability festival, was held in June 2021 and promoted local sustainable businesses, who provided advice to other businesses and residents about how to adopt sustainable practices, to reduce overheads through efficiencies in energy, water and waste.
- CRC launched a new website for people considering a move to Cairns in response to a wave of regional migration in Australia. The [Choose Cairns](#) website brings together information about housing, jobs and living in the Tropics, as well as video stories from newly-arrived locals about settling into Cairns.

For example: deliver activities to support and assist with recovery and resilience building; minimise disruption during local capital works and adopt a business disruption management good practice guide.

Simplifying administration and regulation (reducing red tape)

We are fulfilling this element:

☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Unsure ☒ Agree ☐ Strongly agree

Summary of achievements this reporting period:

- As a result of industry feedback, the CRC Planning and Environment teams have undertaken a range of initiatives to improve customer services, including establishing the [Cairns Planning and Development Industry Reference Group](#) and committing to clear service standards in the [Planning and Development Service Charter](#).
- In July 2021, CRC was one of the first Councils in Queensland to be part of the Queensland Government's Business Launchpad program. This online one-stop-shop service assists new hospitality and construction businesses in Cairns to locate and complete the right permits, licences and approvals to commence trading.
- The SBFC Charter initiative was formally recognised in [CRC's Operational Plan 2021-22](#). Within the Plan, a strategy is listed to "promote and protect the growth of diverse industries and small business" and an associated action is identified to implement the commitments in the SBFC, which supports ongoing actions in line with the Charter.
- As part of a wider project to update and refresh the CRC's website, Council has streamlined and simplified many application processes through the widespread introduction of online forms.

For example: limit unnecessary admin burdens and implement business improvement processes; support to achieve compliance; apply licences and regulations in a consistent manner; undertake reviews of existing admin and regulatory requirements; maintain a dispute resolution process.

Ensuring fair procurement and prompt payment terms

We are fulfilling this element:

☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Unsure ☐ Agree ☒ Strongly agree

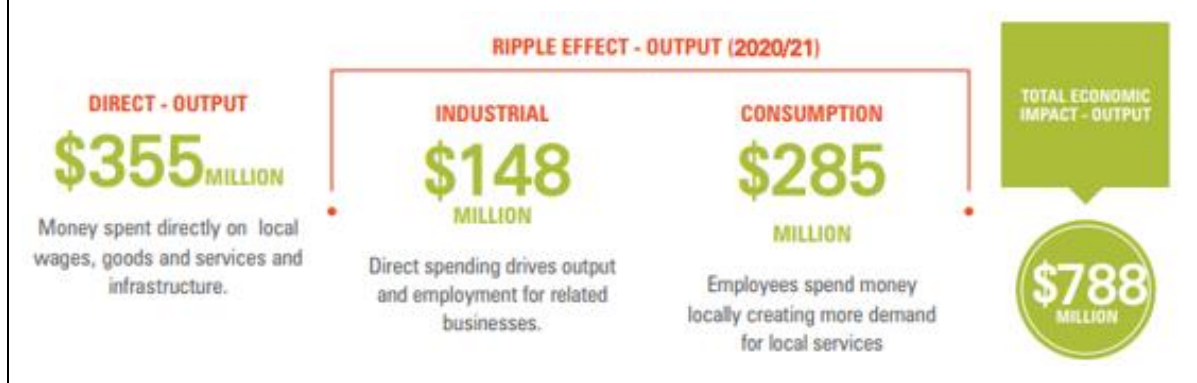
Summary of achievements this reporting period:

CRC's commitment to spending locally is enshrined in our [Procurement Policy](#). To enhance our understanding of the wider economic impact that local expenditure has on the region, CRC engaged a consultant to provide an economic impact assessment of Council's procurement activities for the 2020/21 financial year and calculate the economic benefits for Cairns. Key highlights of the [CRC "State of Procurement Report 2020/21"](#) include:

- CRC's total expenditure for 2020/21 was \$415 Million, with 86% (\$355M) being spent locally.

- Of the remaining 14% there was no local option for 7%, non-local suppliers were used for 4% and the remaining 3% is attributable to government grant expenditure.
- CRC's spending in the Cairns region directly creates and sustains local jobs and supports local business and industry.
- Furthermore, CRC's expenditure creates a ripple effect through linkages with other businesses and workers spending money in Cairns, generating an additional estimated indirect economic local impact of \$433M (the total of indirect/ripple effects).
- As such, the total economic impact of CRC's expenditure in 2020/21, inclusive of direct and indirect impacts, was estimated to be \$788M.

Figure 1: Extract from CRC State of Procurement Report 2020/21



For example: implement a procurement policy providing fair opportunities; raise awareness of local procurement opportunities and provide support to tender; agree to pay invoices in a timely manner (e.g. within 20 calendar days)

Promote and showcase small business

We are fulfilling this element:

☐ Strongly disagree
 ☐ Disagree
 ☐ Unsure
 ☒ Agree
 ☐ Strongly agree

Summary of achievements this reporting period:

- In June 2021, CRC held the first "Cairns Meet the Buyer" event. This speed networking session gave 40 local small to medium-sized businesses the opportunity to pitch directly to CRC and nine other large local 'buyers,' including Hutchinson Builders, James Cook University, Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service, Sea Swift Australia, TAFE Queensland, Cairns Convention Centre, FKG Group, HSA Group and Norship Marine. A number of other supporting services also provided information stalls at the event, including Local Buy, RDA Tropical North, the Queensland Government (Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning; and the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training), AusIndustry and local Small Business Financial Counsellors. The intent of the session was to give small businesses the opportunity

to learn more about the procurement processes of large organisations, as well as increase these large organisations' knowledge of the range of skills, goods and services available locally. The event was a great success.

- In order to support traders on the frontline of construction for the new Esplanade Dining Precinct CRC ran the "[Construction Cash](#)" campaign. Each week, \$1000 was on offer to be won. Patrons got a ticket in the weekly prize draw for every \$10 spent eating, drinking or shopping at participating businesses with restricted access during the construction period.
- Between 24 March – 30 September 2021, CRC awarded over \$47,562 funding to 11 practicing artists and creatives through the Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) program.
- To support the Cairns Chamber of Commerce, CRC sponsored the July 2021 Business Luncheon, where Mayor Bob Manning and Executive Project Officer Nick Masasso spoke about advocacy for the [Cairns Water Security Project](#). As part of this initiative, Council has showcased the logos of over 200 businesses publicly supporting the project to ensure continuity of water supply to the region.
- The inaugural Queensland Small Business Friendly Councils Conference was held in April 2021 in Brisbane. CRC was represented by Ellen Cox, Economic Development Officer, who gave a speech about the Cairns business community's journey through COVID-19 and CRC's process to become a Small Business Friendly Council.
- CRC Officers have regularly participated in SBFC network events including webinars and discussions with other Councils.

For example: promote participation in the SBFC initiative; share success stories.

Additional supporting information

Please provide any other information about your efforts to be more small business friendly.

- Cairns Regional Council is committed to implementing the Small Business Friendly Charter and the intent of the Charter guides activities throughout the organisation.