

FRIENDS OF THE BOTANIC GARDENS – RESOURCE AND PERFORMANCE AGREEMENT

L&C | 52/8/1 | #7881072

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Approves a Resource and Performance Agreement with the Friends of the Botanic Gardens for five years ending 30 June 2031; 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 agreement.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Friends of the Botanic Gardens committee.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Friends of the Botanic Gardens Cairns (the Friends) is a community group with the following aims and objectives:

- To stimulate interest and community awareness in the activities of the Cairns Botanic Gardens
- To raise funds for use in furthering the management aims of the Cairns Botanic Gardens
- Under direction of Council representatives, to undertake such work as necessary to further the aims of the Cairns Botanic Gardens; and
- To promote and support horticultural and botanical science in Cairns.

The partnership with Council has been in place for many years and was originally formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding, and recently a Resource and Performance Agreement that has now expired. Officers recommend entering into a new Resource and Performance Agreement with the Friends to formalise this long-standing arrangement and detail the Council resources provided to the organisation.

BACKGROUND:

The Friends of the Botanic Gardens have, for the past 5 years, operated under a Resource and Performance Agreement and prior to that under a Memorandum of Understanding for a further 16 years with Council. The most recent Resource and

Performance Agreement has now expired, and a new agreement needs to be finalised. It is anticipated that the proposed Resource and Performance Agreement will remain largely consistent with the previous document with only minor administrative changes. To align with the financial year, it is proposed to commence the new agreement on 1 July 2026 with an expiry date of 30 June 2031.

COMMENT:

The Friends make a meaningful contribution to the Botanic Gardens and to the Cairns community by way of capital projects as well as the provision of volunteer services. The Friends also provide a calendar of events for the year, which enriches the programs available to the community. The Friends were initially formed in 1989 and previously contributed to the upgrade of the Flecker Gardens Library and construction of the Gardens Conservatory. Some of the most popular activities facilitated by the Friends are the free guided walks that occur most weeks of the year, the Starry Night Theatre movie nights, Jazz Under the Stars, and their weekly and annual plant sales.

Funds raised by the Friends are used to further the management aims of the Cairns Botanic Gardens (e.g. purchase of plants, additional garden furnishings, interpretive signage).

From the Presidents Report, tabled at the Friends AGM this year it is noted that, in addition to the numerous volunteer hours contributed by members at the Botanic Gardens in 2025, the Friends has spent just over \$80,000 on projects such as:

- Interpretive signage
- Irrigation systems
- Saltwater Nursery Fence upgrade and new plant stands
- Steel Hanging Baskets in Conservatory
- Plant purchases for Flecker and Fitzalan gardens and
- An Honour Board

During the period 2021 – 2024 the Friends contributed a further \$186k towards projects and equipment to benefit the Botanic Gardens.

From a facility perspective, the Friends are based at the 'Friends House' which serves as a shop front for their activities. Volunteers man the Friends Shop 5 days a week to raise funds through sales and to give visitors to the Gardens information on what to see and do around the precinct. They also use the Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre from time to time for meetings and horticultural talks.

Through the proposed Resource and Performance Agreement Council will in turn:

- provide the Friends, at no cost, use of Friends House, the Visitor Centre and Botanic Gardens to enable the Friends to undertake their aims and objectives
- provide external services, such as water and electricity
- provide approved plant material to the Friends gardeners for propagation purposes and general nursery consumables

- waive Council costs associated with the delivery of Friends Events on an in-kind basis including application and usage fees for venue hire and technician costs associated with delivery of Starry Night Cinema events.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended):

It is recommended that Council:

1. Approves a Resource and Performance Agreement with the Friends of the Botanic Gardens for five years ending 30 June 2031; 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 agreement.

Option 2:

That Council does not support the recommendations and adopts an alternate course of action.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The partnership with the Friends is both a longstanding and reciprocal one with the Friends contributing over \$80,000 of investment to the Botanic Gardens over the last 12 months in addition to coordination of volunteer time supporting the objectives and promotions of the Botanic Gardens.

The Resource and Performance agreement provides the Friends with access to the “Friends Building” to run their operations as well as use of Flecker Gardens. An annual report is also to be provided by the Friends on the initiatives delivered each year.

Council’s In-kind venue hire provided annually:

Use of Flecker Gardens for Starry Night Cinema x 10	\$36,900 pa
Friends plan sales venue hire x 4	\$42,200 pa
Jazz under the Stars x 1	\$5,680 pa
Total	\$84,780

Corporate and Operational Plans:

This report aligns with Corporate Plan Focus 4: Community and Culture - Provide spaces and programs for the benefit of the community.

Policy:

The Friends have been assessed as a Community Organisation, therefore this

transaction falls under the remit of the Resource and Performance Section of the Community Grants Policy. In particular, officers consider this organisation's activities to be in the public interest and to be of substantial benefit to the Botanic Gardens and Cairns region.

CONSULTATION:

Council officers have consulted with the Friends of the Botanic Gardens Executive in the formation of this report and have reviewed the Resource and Performance Agreement with Council's legal representative, Preston Law.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – Friends of the Botanic Gardens Presidents report 2025



Kylie Richardson
Acting Executive Manager Community Spaces



Destry Puia
Director, Lifestyle & Community

Attachment 1 – Friends of the Botanic Gardens Presidents report 2025

Friends of the Cairns Botanic Gardens Annual General Meeting 11 March 2026: Presidents Report

I am pleased to present this report; my first as President

2025 has been a successful year with respect to the funding of projects within the Gardens. The Treasurer will give a more detailed report, however Friends has spent just over \$80,000 on projects such as

- Interpretive signage
- Irrigation systems
- Saltwater Nursery Fence upgrade and new plant stands
- Steel Hanging Baskets in Conservatory
- Plant purchases for Flecker and Fitzalan gardens and
- An Honour Board

We commenced a monthly meeting with the Gardens Curator, Dr Charles Clarke and the Works Supervisor, Mr David Paschetto, which has provided us an opportunity to comment and assist in the planning of changes associated with the new Botanic Precinct Master Plan and provide good lead times for Council support for major fundraising events such as plant sales. This has also resulted in an invitation to the monthly safety circle meetings where we can express any concerns and take away any safety issues raised to those FOBG volunteers working in the precinct.

We welcomed the delightful Melanie Constable into our Council Liaison role, and she has been outstanding in her contributions to Friends. Mel has produced the monthly talk posters and is currently looking at a way to live stream the monthly talks for members who are unable to attend in person. Mel also assists with Council volunteers such as the Down and Dirty's working with the Gardeneers to help maintain the area around the Saltwater Nursery.

We have also been included in meetings with the Cairns 150 (C150) committee who will be advertising our upcoming events across a wide range of media, and we will be assisting in the distribution of the C150 Viola plant handouts.

In 2025 we recognised 3 new Life Members.

Val Schier was recognised for her outstanding contribution as President of FOBG for 11 years. Her leadership ensured the growth of the Friends and saw significant contributions to projects that enhanced the Botanic Precinct.

Val Auld has been recognised for her outstanding contributions in leading the Gardening volunteers and raising over \$30,000 in 2025 from plant sales and Delys Van Mierlo has been recognised for her outstanding contribution as shop manager, membership, and paid walk member.

Gardeneers have had a very successful year breaking records for both the large plant sales and weekly trolley sales. With the acquisition of EFTPOS and an increase of advertising through our Face Book page, the sales have increased significantly. We welcomed Richard Barber and Wally Fisher to the team. Gardeneers have also

established a mini-Botanic Gardens at the Saltwater nursery. This will enable cuttings and rhizomes to be harvested in addition to the stock acquired from the main Botanic precinct. This garden is looking lovely, and I encourage members to visit and enjoy all the hard work, particularly that of James Sing and Lee Ross. James has departed Cairns for Canada with his family but will visit often and still contributes his expertise.

Monthly Talks have again been extremely well received including talks on Fungi, Practical uses of plants, Photographic look at animals in the Gardens and of course a favourite from Scott Ritchie on the birds of Costa Rica. Many thanks go to David Rentz for organising these talks.

Jazz Under the Stars was unfortunately cancelled in 2025 due to a total power failure across the Botanic precinct when a transformer was damaged by a car crash. Whilst this event had to be cancelled for safety reasons, a huge vote of thanks goes to Sue McCulloch for all her hard work, including introducing *TryBooking* and electronic check-in to all future Friends events.

Guided tours were again very popular with many visitors to the gardens both domestic and International and the shop has included a comments book that is full of praise for the beauty of Cairns Botanic Gardens. The professionalism of the tour guides are to be commended for passing on their knowledge of plants and anecdotes about the Botanic precinct to hundreds of visitors thereby enhancing the reputation of the gardens.

The Shop in Friends House was manned by volunteers 5 days a week to both raise funds through sales and give visitors to the Gardens information on what to see and do around the precinct. A big thankyou to all the shop volunteers who gave of their time.

I would personally like to thank the committee for all the hours spent making FOBG such a success in 2025. A special thankyou to Megan who will be standing down as Secretary after years of newsletters, minute writing and AGM preparations.

Finally, the Friends would like to thank the Curator, Dr Charles Clarke, the Supervisor Botanic Precinct, Mr Dave Paschetto, and all the Gardens staff for their invaluable assistance throughout the year and thankyou to all you members for your ongoing support.

Catie Williams AM
President