

# Towards 2050

# Growth Strategy Framework



Shaping Cairns  
from the beaches to the boulders





# Contents

<b>Why we need <i>Towards 2050: Shaping Cairns</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
Growth brings opportunities and challenges .....	5
<b>The story of Cairns</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Where have we come from? .....	6
Cairns is growing .....	8
Cairns today .....	10
Cairns in 2050 .....	12
<b>How are we developing the <i>Growth Strategy</i></b> .....	<b>13</b>
Planning framework .....	13
Corporate plan .....	14
Project phases .....	14
Community engagement .....	16
Technical studies .....	18
<b>Guiding principles for the next phase</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Housing that meets our changing needs .....	20
Supporting a thriving economy .....	21
Recognising and respecting our diverse cultures and heritage .....	22
Creating great tropical neighbourhoods .....	23
Delivering sustainable infrastructure .....	24
Improving our resilience to natural hazards and climate change .....	25
Protecting our natural environment .....	26
<b>How you can get involved</b> .....	<b>27</b>

Cairns Regional Council acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Custodians of our region, the Djabugay; Yirrganydji; Buluwai, Gimuy Walubara Yidinji; Mandingalbay Yidinji; Gunggandji; Dulabed and Malanbara Yidinji; Bundabarra and Wadjanbarra Yidinji; Wanyurr Majay; Mamu and NgadjonJii peoples. We extend this respect to all elders past, present and future, and other First Peoples within our region.

# Why we need *Towards 2050: Shaping Cairns*

Cairns is a popular place to live and work, thanks to our special character - our 'Cairns-ness'.

This is a very special part of the world and our residents enjoy a relaxed lifestyle, tropical climate and strong community spirit.

Cairns is a vibrant and globally-connected city, alive with charm and spirit. Our unique position as the international gateway to two of the world's most precious natural wonders – the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest – makes this one of Australia's most popular destinations for domestic and international holiday visitors.

In the past 30 years, our population has nearly doubled - growing from 89,000 residents in 1992 to 172,272 in 2022. By 2050, it is projected to grow to 241,000 (based on State Government information released in June 2023). This is nearly 70,000 additional people.

People will always fall in love with Cairns and want to live here. We need to plan for this growth now, to make sure that everyone can live here tomorrow and enjoy what we love about Cairns today.

That's why Council is working on a multi-year project - the *Towards 2050: Shaping Cairns Growth Strategy (Growth Strategy)*.

This is a long-range, community-driven strategy that will establish a clear vision and guiding principles for the future growth and development of the Cairns local government area.

While the *Growth Strategy* is a plan for the future, it will also look at the past and present to help us understand how Cairns has grown and changed, and how it may continue to grow and change into the future. It will look at emerging trends and future challenges to help us prepare for what's to come.

The project began in October 2022 and will continue through to mid-2025. It will ultimately set the scene for a new planning scheme for the city, and identify appropriate and sustainable growth for the next three decades and beyond.

This *Growth Strategy Framework* document explains what's happened so far, what we have heard and found out, what's happening next and how you can continue to get involved in guiding Cairns' development into 2050.





## Growth brings opportunities and challenges

Planning for growth presents the opportunity to better plan for the future of Cairns and harness the opportunities of the future.

We need to ensure that what makes Cairns special is protected and that we continue to provide for our current and future populations. We need to consider the needs of those who live here now as well as our future residents.

Growth can deliver benefits including more and better jobs, diverse housing options, public spaces, roads and public transport, entertainment, health and education services. Thoughtful planning now will help us shape our growth in a positive way.

This doesn't mean that growth and change will occur everywhere; it is important to ensure that growth is sustainable, appropriately located, resilient to natural hazards and climate challenges.

We must protect our environmental values, the surrounding World Heritage areas and natural environment, be respectful of First Peoples culture and heritage, and be responsive to the changing needs of our community.

Good design and planning will help us protect and embrace many of the things that make Cairns special.

Planning for Cairns in 2050 requires consideration of key drivers and challenges of growth including:

- changing community demographics, household dynamics and shifting housing needs
- protecting our rural and natural landscapes to ensure development does not continue to expand into these valuable areas
- maintaining our lifestyle
- recognising the identity and character of the individual communities across the region
- protecting places of cultural heritage significance and recognising the values and aspirations of First Peoples
- ensuring future growth is risk-responsive
- responding and adapting to climate change and encouraging development that is suitable and resilient to our tropical climate
- using infrastructure more efficiently and ensuring it keeps pace with growth
- ensuring community infrastructure meets the needs of the community
- ensuring we maintain and build on our economic competitive advantage
- improving data availability and intelligence to provide for evidence-based integrated planning.

# The story of Cairns



## Where have we come from?

The Traditional Custodians of our region are the Djabugay; Yirrganydji; Buluwai, Gimuy Walubara Yidinji; Mandingalbay Yidinji; Gunggandji; Dulabed and Malanbara Yidinji; Bundabarra and Wadjanbarra Yidinji; Wanyurr Majay; Mamu and NgadjonJii peoples.

The diverse First Peoples of our region are collectively called the Bama – the Rainforest Peoples of Far North Queensland.

This unique region nurtured and supported the Traditional Custodians for tens of thousands of years. Their tenure and spiritual connection continue today and will continue in perpetuity.

We are all richer for having the local traditions, languages and stories of First Peoples as an integral part of our community and identity.

Initial European settlement in the region in the 1860s was driven by beche-de-mer fishing. The discovery of gold to the north (Palmer River in 1872) and Atherton Tablelands (Hodgkinson gold field in 1876) saw the population begin to climb.

Cairns was officially founded in 1876 and named after the State Governor of the day, Sir William Wellington Cairns. It was formally declared a town in 1903 with a registered population of 3,500.



Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, European and Chinese settlers opened up the region to agriculture, generating a large enough population base for the borough of Cairns to be declared a municipality.

The development of the Cairns to Herberton rail line in 1886, and subsequent expansion from Redlynch to Myola, is widely considered to be the catalyst for the city's expansion.

The rail line made travel through the difficult terrain easier and attracted a large number of immigrants during construction. Many of these immigrants settled in the region, establishing the sugarcane industry and extensive fruit orchards.

World War II had a profound impact on the Cairns region as it became a significant supply centre for the Pacific fleet and was at the forefront of the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Significant milestones in the modern history of Cairns were the listing of the Great Barrier Reef on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1981 followed by the Wet Tropics in 1988. Combined with the opening of the Cairns International Airport in 1984, the tourism industry flourished, prompting investment and more migration to the region, creating a rich multicultural community.

Tourism remains one of our most important industries, and Cairns is today renowned as a premier destination for national and international visitors.



*Each chapter of our story has added to the culture and character of the region.*



# Cairns is growing

Cairns is the primary service centre for the Far North Queensland (FNQ) region including provision of services such as health care and social assistance, construction, transport and education.

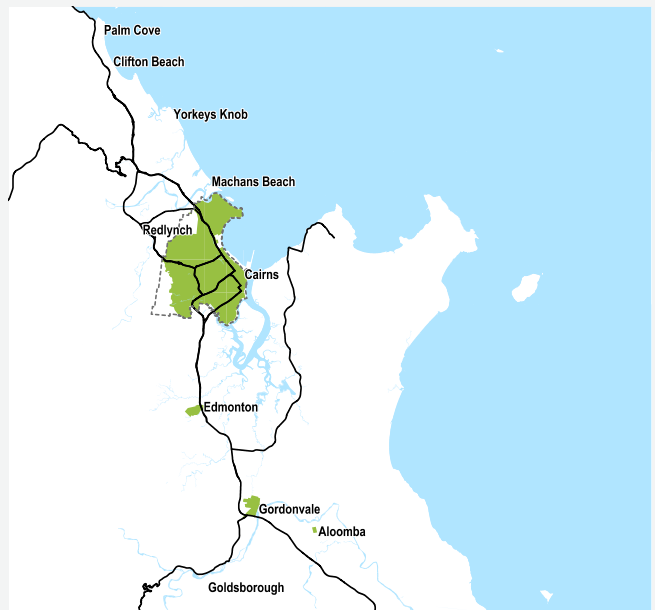
The FNQ region has established economic strengths in mining and agriculture, and a competitive advantage in emerging clean energy industries.

The Cairns area encompasses 1687km<sup>2</sup> of land on a narrow coastal strip between the Great Dividing Range and the Coral Sea. It extends from the Eubenangee Swamp near Mirriwinni in the south, to the Macalister Range near Ellis Beach (just north of Palm Cove) in the north.

1952



1971



1997

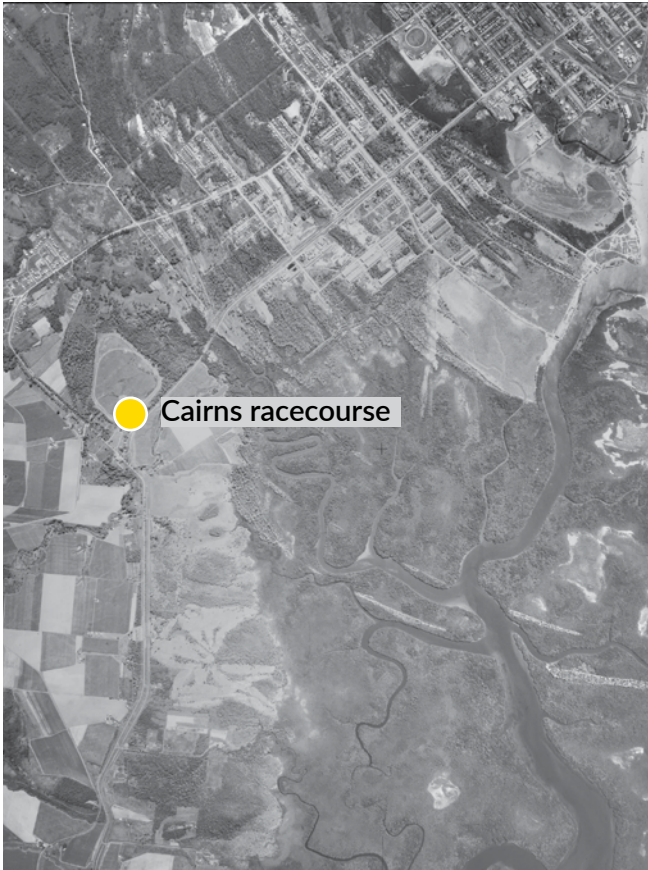


2023

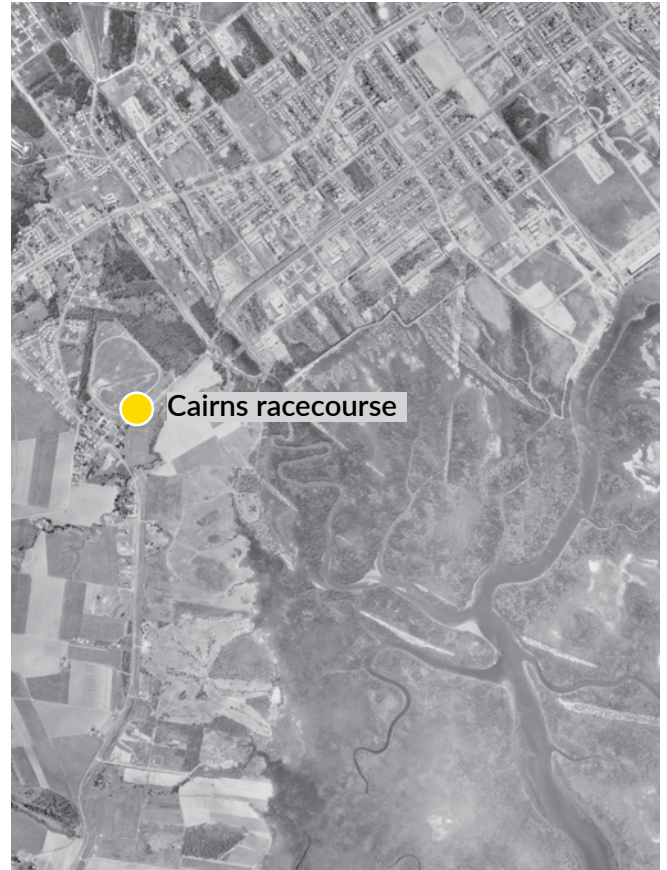




1952



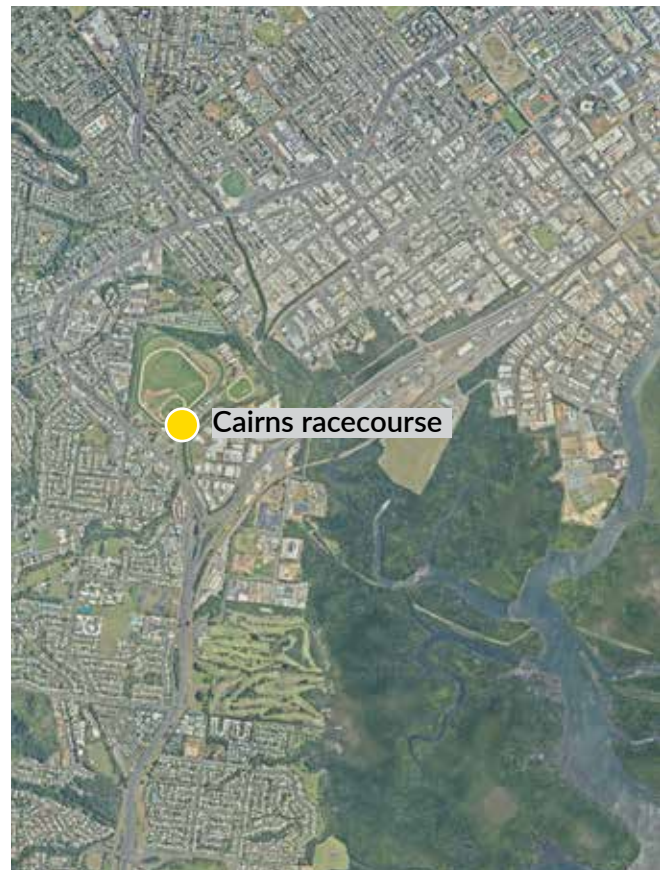
1971



1990

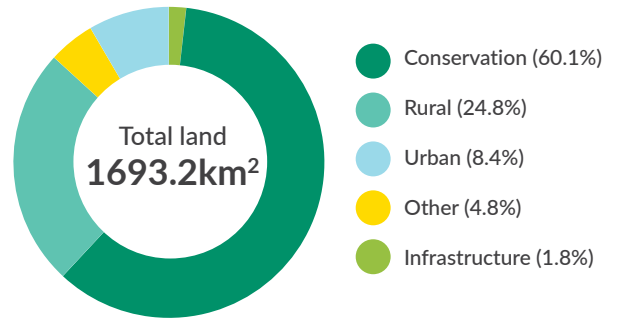
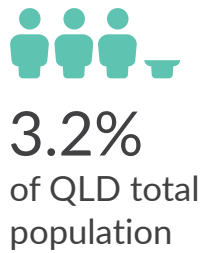
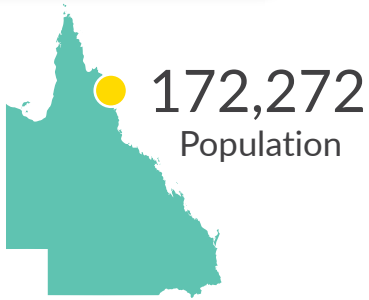


2021



# Cairns today

## Population



9.7%  
First Nations



22.3%  
born overseas



17.1%  
internal migration

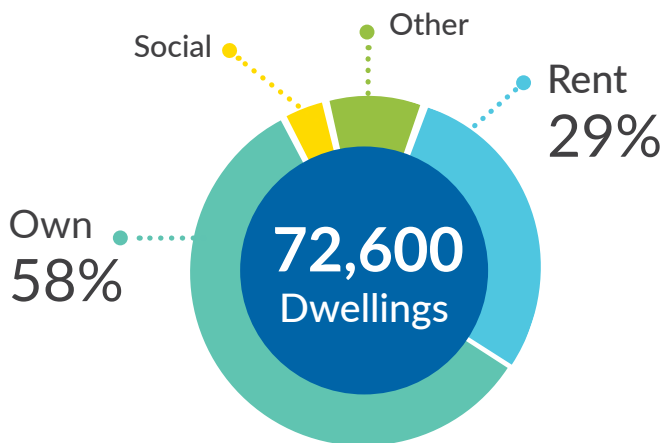


39 years  
median age



16.5%  
over 65 years

## Housing



\$510  
median weekly rent  
3 bedroom house

0.5% rental dwelling vacancy rate



\$1,588  
median monthly  
mortgage repayment



71%  
detached  
housing



10%  
semi-detached  
housing



16.8%  
apartments  
and flats



2.43  
average persons  
per household



37.1%  
households  
with children



27%  
lone person  
households

## Environment



**126km**  
length of  
coastline



**68%**  
remnant vegetation  
(113,548 hectares)



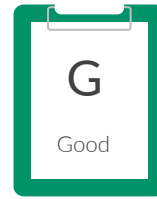
**45,657**  
Native seedlings  
raised by Council

Waterways  
Report card <sup>1</sup>



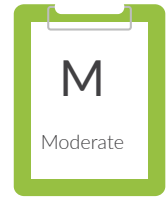
Freshwater  
basins

Estuaries



Good

Mulgrave  
Russel



Moderate

Barron

Trinity Inlet  
Russel Mulgrave

Barron

1. Source: Wet Tropics Waterways Report Card 2023.  
Other data sourced from Cairns Regional Council State of  
Environment Report 2023.

## Economy



**\$10.22B**  
Gross Regional  
Product (GRP)



**\$809**  
median personal  
weekly income

**\$1,950**  
median family  
weekly income



**84,907**  
local jobs



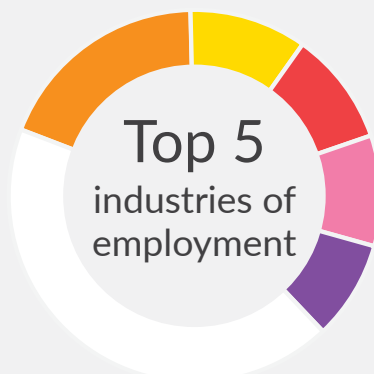
**65%**  
residents  
travel to work



**14,696**  
local GST-registered  
businesses



**65%**  
of population  
is working age  
(15-64)



**Top 5**  
industries of  
employment

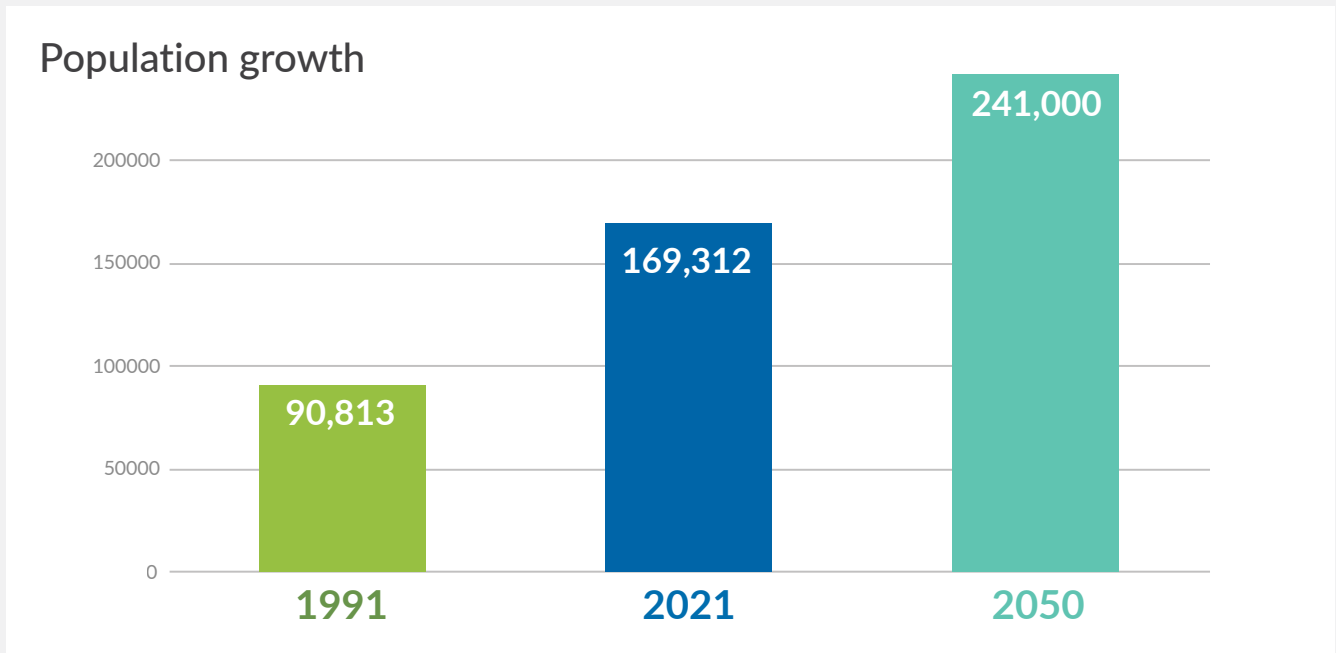
- Healthcare and social assistance (18.5%)
- Retail trade (10.2%)
- Education and training (9.9%)
- Accommodation and food services (9.6%)
- Construction (8.6%)


Population, housing and economy data  
sourced from Profile.id and Economy.id data  
sets as at August 2023.

# Cairns in 2050

Cairns is one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland.

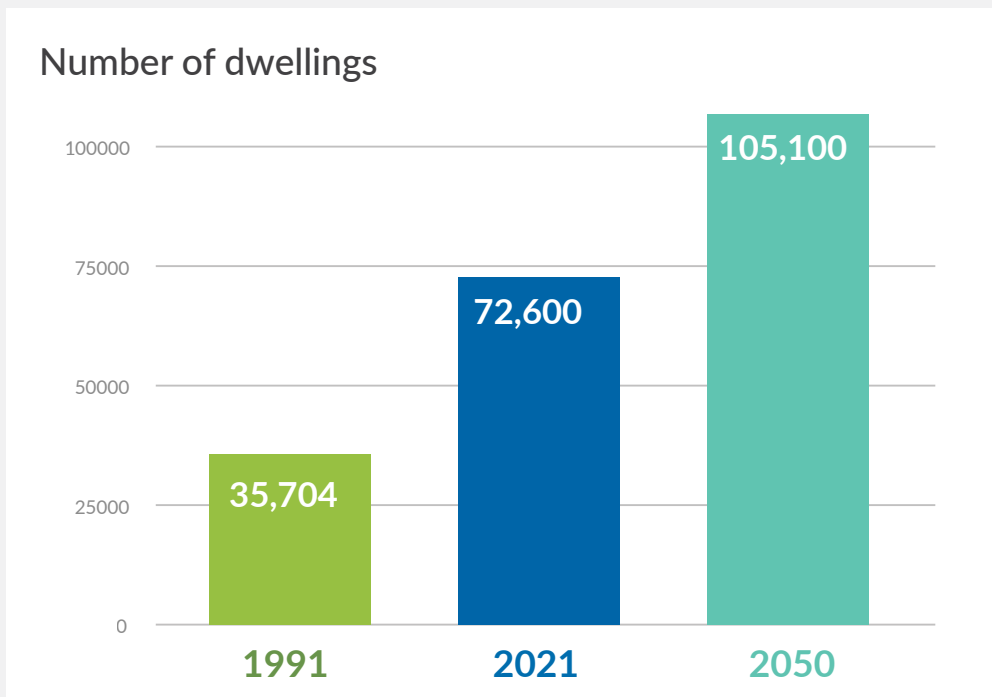
The city's population is expected to grow to 241,000 by the year 2050 (based on State Government information released in June 2023). This increase of nearly 70,000 additional people will create the need for approximately 32,500 new dwellings over the next 25-30 years.




 **86%**  
growth  
1991-2021

 **1.54%**  
annual growth  
Average of 2,616 new  
residents annually

 **42%**  
projected growth  
2021-2050



 **+36,896**  
new dwellings  
built 1991-2021

**+32,500**  
projected new  
dwellings required  
2021-2050

# How we are developing the *Growth Strategy*

## Planning framework

The Growth Strategy is an important part of Council's long-term planning and strategic framework. Planning for the future happens on many levels with each level providing rules or guidelines to direct and promote development outcomes.



# Corporate plan

Development of the *Growth Strategy* is underpinned by the principles contained in Council's 2021-2026 Corporate Plan.

It also aligns with other key Council strategies and initiatives including the Climate Strategy 2030, Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy, Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026 and annual operational plans.

The Corporate Plan aims to shape the future for Cairns by striving for better and equitable social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes for our community. It is centred around Council's core values (see right).

One of the Corporate Plan's key strategies is to ensure that decision making is collaborative, transparent and accountable.

In the context of the *Growth Strategy*, this means ensuring that community engagement is at the centre of every step we take. Over the life of the project, Council is committed to having conversations that capture the interest and imagination of everyone in Cairns.

Council's core values:



## Trust

Honouring the trust of our residents, each other and staff



## Responsibility

Transparency and responsibility to our community



## Cairns-ness

Safeguarding what makes Cairns, Cairns

# Project phases

*Towards 2050 Shaping Cairns* is being delivered in four phases between October 2022 and mid-2025.

It is being informed by extensive community and stakeholder input at each phase, as well as supporting technical studies.

*We are here*



## Phase 1

This phase focussed on defining what is important about Cairns now and what needs to be protected into the future.

It encompassed a wide range of community engagement activities to understand the community's needs and aspirations for the future, from a neighbourhood to a city-wide perspective.

It also involved project planning and the preparation of a Local Government Profile Paper, literature review and gaps analysis and project road map.

## Phase 2

Work in Phase 2 focused on understanding the existing conditions in Cairns and evaluating how Cairns could grow under existing policies.

Phase 2 included the development of 12 technical studies which provide the analysis and evidence base for the *Growth Strategy*.

The technical studies focus on the following areas:

- Housing
- Centres and employment
- Rural lands
- Community infrastructure
- Transport infrastructure
- Neighbourhood character
- Scenic amenity
- Hazard assessments

More information on these technical studies is available on page 17.

Engagement in Phase 2 included a Youth Summit, Community Summit and establishment of a Community Panel.

## Phase 3

This phase will focus on using the outcomes from the 12 technical studies to develop different scenarios for how Cairns can grow. We will evaluate these scenarios against the community's feedback and guiding principles.

A Draft *Growth Strategy* will be developed in this Phase with an opportunity for continued community review and feedback.

## Phase 4

This phase will finalise the *Growth Strategy*, taking account of community and stakeholder feedback throughout the previous phases.

# Community engagement

Community engagement is at the centre of every step we take as we develop the *Growth Strategy*.

Over the life of the project, Council aims to have conversations that capture the interest and imagination of everyone in Cairns.

Throughout the project, we are having conversations with:

- Traditional Custodians and First Peoples
- young people
- local community groups
- residents
- business owners
- local industry professionals
- visitors
- neighboring councils
- State and Federal government agencies.

## Phase 1

**Phase 1 engagement** included in-person and online engagement activities to capture responses that related to neighbourhoods as well as Cairns more broadly.

Feedback from Phase 1 engagement activities provided a first look at what the Cairns community values and how people would like to see Cairns grow.

A summary report of Phase 1 engagement activities and findings can be found on the *Towards 2050: Shaping Cairns Growth Strategy* project website ([www.haveyoursay.cairns.qld.gov.au/towards2050](http://www.haveyoursay.cairns.qld.gov.au/towards2050)).

## Phase 2

**Phase 2 engagement** explored the challenges and opportunities of future population growth for Cairns.

In this phase, we held a Youth Summit (5 May 2023) and Community Summit (6 May 2023) with a total of 117 community members comprising residents, school students, business people and representatives of local community-based organisations.

Summit participants worked individually and collectively to consider a range of questions around urban growth and planning principles.

The key insights from both Summits build on the findings from the Phase 1 engagement and relate to:

- young people's perspectives about priorities for the future (i.e. what they love and don't love about Cairns today, and their hopes and concerns for the future)
- perspectives about the opportunities and challenges of growth
- ideas for the future
- guiding principles, informed from Phase 1 engagement, that will help to shape Cairns in 2050.

A summary report of the Summit Outcomes can be found on the *Towards 2050* project website: [www.haveyoursay.cairns.qld.gov.au/towards2050](http://www.haveyoursay.cairns.qld.gov.au/towards2050).

Also in **Phase 2**, Council established the *Towards 2050* Community Panel. All Cairns residents aged over 16 years were invited to register, in order to capture broad community views representing a wide variety of interests, ages, abilities, lived experience, skills and knowledge. Registrations were open from May to mid-June and 766 people nominated.

The final 350 Panel members were chosen by The Sortition Foundation, an independent non-profit organisation that specialises in recruiting and selecting people to take part in these kind of panels. The 350 members reflect the diversity of the Cairns community, creating a 'mini Cairns public'.

Panel members were welcomed in late June 2023 and will play an active role in the project until it concludes. Members have begun learning about the present and future growth challenges facing Cairns.

Over the duration of the project, they will explore ideas and provide input through surveys, online polls, workshops and meetings.



1,731

Community members at pop-ups and community events.



4,205

Page views of the project's Have Your Say webpage.



1,053

The number of online survey responses received.



6,445

Views of the project video.



208

Comments on Council social media posts



## Phases 3 and 4

Community engagement will continue in **Phase 3** to understand and get input into the local issues relating to the technical studies.

Significant engagement in mid-2024 (**Phase 3**) will test the key directions and various growth scenarios created from the technical studies and guiding principles.

This will include a second round of Growth Summits with the community, stakeholders and young people together with a First Peoples gathering.

Conversations with First Peoples will continue throughout Phase 3 to ensure their interests are recognised through the planning process.

Following development of the Draft Growth Strategy, we will undertake further community and stakeholder engagement.

Feedback received on the Draft Growth Strategy will be taken into account to finalise the Final Growth Strategy in Phase 4.

## What people told us about their hopes for Cairns in 2050

- expanded infrastructure
- relaxed, friendly and diverse population
- connected and safe neighbourhoods
- a built environment that reflects the Cairns climate
- a thriving and protected natural environment
- resilience to natural hazards

*"Tropical weather, wonderful mother nature, multicultural community, festivals and tourist attractions."*

*"Being so close to nature, having beautiful rainforest, mountains and wildlife..."*

*"Cairns is a place well-connected to the traditional owners and their stories."*

*"A city that looks after its citizens and its natural environment, retains its tropical character."*

## What people love and think is special about Cairns

**92%** of the feedback we received mentioned one or more of these themes.

- our laid-back and relaxed lifestyle
- our unique environmental assets
- our tropical climate
- our community networks
- our location as a gateway to FNQ

## What people told us about their concerns for Cairns in 2050

- protecting the environment
- safety
- the impact of natural hazards
- planning, development and urban design matters
- managing increased traffic

*"Reliance on tourism for our local economy. Cairns needs diversification."*

*"Limited opportunities for our ambitious and intelligent future generations."*

# Technical studies

Twelve technical studies are being undertaken to provide us with contemporary information and help us understand our community's needs and how we can best respond to the challenges and opportunities of growth.

We are also relying on existing technical information including local infrastructure planning, environmental mapping and other recent strategies to ensure the full breadth of issues are being considered.



## The 12 technical studies include:

- Housing
- Centres and employment
- Rural lands
- Community infrastructure
- Transport infrastructure
- Neighbourhood character
- Scenic amenity
- Risk assessments:
  - Bushfire
  - Coastal erosion
  - Landslide
  - Stormtide
  - Flood



## These studies are looking at:

- how Cairns has grown in the past
- what we currently have and what our future needs are in terms of infrastructure, services and amenities
- the key emerging and future trends that will impact Cairns
- the competing interests that may arise as Cairns grows.

The technical studies are guided by the Queensland State Planning Policy (SPP). The SPP is an important tool which identifies the State's interests in land use planning and development, and is generally accompanied by state mapping.

Council is required to apply the SPP in a regional and local context when making or amending a Local Government Planning Scheme.

Sometimes, there are competing State interests and the SPP does not prioritise one State interest over another at a state-wide level. The responsibility of balancing these competing interests sits with Local Government.

As we turn our focus to future growth opportunities, there will be competing interests that need to be managed and resolved. The 12 technical studies, together with our guiding principles and outcomes from engagement, will help us find solutions that balance these competing interests.

The technical studies will be an important source of information for the community and decision-makers. They will help us understand our community's needs and make informed and transparent decisions about how to grow Cairns in a positive and sustainable way.

# Guiding principles for the next phase



The *Growth Strategy* will rely on best practice planning processes supported by extensive analysis and evidence to make informed decisions.

It is also critical that, as we move forward in the *Growth Strategy*, we are guided by and reflect what we've heard from our community.

In Phase 1, we heard from our community what they love about Cairns, and their hopes and concerns for the future. We tested some of these values and concepts further with our Youth Summit and Community Summit attendees.



This feedback has helped us shape the following guiding principles to move into the next phase of the project.

It will also provide direction in developing more detailed land use strategies that respond to the future challenges and opportunities for Cairns and our community.

## The guiding principles:

- Housing that meets our changing needs
- Supporting a thriving economy
- Recognising and respecting our diverse cultures and heritage
- Creating great tropical neighbourhoods
- Delivering sustainable infrastructure
- Improving our resilience to natural hazards and climate change
- Protecting our natural environment

# Housing that meets our changing needs

Understanding our projected population growth and the changing needs of our community means that we will need to provide housing differently in the future.

It is important that the *Growth Strategy* supports a diverse range of housing types, tenures and sizes to meet the needs of our population throughout different stages of life. This includes ensuring an adequate supply of housing that is safe, secure, affordable and accessible for current and future generations throughout the entire Cairns region.

The *Housing Study* will provide key insights into the current and future housing needs of Cairns, and identify population and demographic trends and considerations that will influence these needs into the future. It will also investigate supply capacity and identify innovative opportunities for housing choice, diversity and affordability to meet current and future needs as well as emerging trends.

Some key trends we expect to see for housing in Cairns to 2050 and beyond include:

- an overall decrease in the average household size
- an increase in single parent households
- an increase in lone person households driven by an ageing population and student population
- the growing ageing population (65+) requiring different housing choices
- a greater need for more diverse housing types, including more “gentle density” options such as semi-detached, townhouses and duplexes as well as more multi-family housing.

Decreasing household size alone will create more demand for housing, as more houses will be needed to accommodate the same number of people.

From 1996 to 2021, the impact of smaller household sizes has resulted in additional dwellings needed per year to house the same number of people. Together with the ageing population and increase in lone person households, we must ensure our housing is diverse, affordable and provides choice. We also need to ensure we have enough new dwellings to accommodate the additional 2,500 people per year that are anticipated to call Cairns home.

Housing affordability is also a key consideration in the *Growth Strategy*. In line with the rest of Australia, real estate costs have increased significantly over the last 3 years, with low vacancy rates resulting in increasing costs both to rent and buy.

The Cairns housing market must also accommodate trends such as the high proportion of renters compared to the rest of Queensland, which may reflect the transient nature of Cairns as a tourist and student region. As a tourist destination, Cairns has also seen a significant growth in short-term rentals. Over the last 5 years, this has removed between 5% to 7% of all Cairns houses from the longer-term rental or owner-occupier market.

*“Increased housing and amenities without losing the small town and friendly casual vibe/ community.”*

These factors will need to be investigated further within the Housing Study to ensure adequate, appropriate and well-located housing is provided to meet our future needs. While the findings of the Housing Study will be a key focal point of the *Growth Strategy*, there will also be a number of other considerations affecting how and where housing is delivered.

We heard through engagement that the natural environment is strongly valued by the Cairns community and many love the close connection their homes and suburbs have with nature. Protecting these values means we will need to grow efficiently by using existing urban areas and increasing densities, to ensure the region’s urban area does not extend into our precious natural environment and scenic landscapes.

*“More housing diversity (less detached 3-4 bed dwellings and more town houses, units etc. that have 1 or 2 bedrooms to accommodate people that aren’t a family/couple), improved affordability for housing”*

Housing in 2050 will need to be responsive to our tropical climate and the impacts of climate change. An understanding of the risks of hazards in our region such as flood, stormtide, bushfire, landslide, coastal erosion and heat will also shape the way our region grows and influence our housing moving forward.

# Supporting a thriving economy

Population growth brings with it opportunities to strengthen our economy and support diverse, innovative and emerging trends in employment and industries.

As our population grows, we will need increased employment opportunities and a focus on training and education to meet the knowledge, skills and technology requirements of future jobs.

To ensure our economy continues to grow, we need to support emerging industries and global trends whilst also focusing on our local priority sectors for growth.

The **Growth Strategy** will seek to advance Cairns Regional Council's Economic Development Strategy 2022–2026 (EDS) which identifies the future economic direction of Cairns and a number of priority industries and sectors.

It will need to ensure there is sufficient land to support and advance these priority industries into the future.

- aviation
- marine and defence
- health care and social assistance
- tourism
- construction
- manufacturing
- education and training
- arts and culture.

The **Growth Strategy** can support priority industries through ensuring we have sufficient land and infrastructure to accommodate growth of these sectors and meet their operational needs.

Vital to the success of employment lands is the consideration of clustering and co-locating associated activities, and supporting employment and economic growth in areas that are connected to housing and well accessed by transport and community facilities.

*"My kids can stay in Cairns and get access to a broad range of tertiary study and can find employment after study"*

*"Diversity in industries to allow more job opportunities for future generations"*

Our centres and employment lands provide the foundations of our region's economic and social life. By planning these well, we can ensure we have a thriving and productive region into the future.

Centres play a key role not only in employment, but in providing social services and facilities. Well-planned centres can be the heart of a local community. It will be critical that the **Growth Strategy** plans for a network of well-defined and functional centres close to the communities they serve, providing everything the community needs within their local neighbourhoods and surrounding suburbs.

The **Centres and Employment Land Study** will review the opportunities and challenges facing our centres and employment land in Cairns. It will analyse employment needs out to 2050, review existing centres and employment lands, and make recommendations on how to cater for centres and employment needs into the future.

*"Cairns economy experiences greater diversification with an emphasis on developing technologies and products that improve environmental sustainability across Australia"*

The rural industry plays a key role in our local economy and has strong connections to the history and identity of Cairns. Rural land comprises approximately 24.8% of our region and plays an important scenic amenity role while also providing inter-urban breaks.

These lands will be a key consideration as our region grows into the future. **The Rural Land Study** will help us understand the existing and future need and supply of rural land in Cairns, and provide recommendations for the protection these lands to support rural industry into the future.

# Recognising and respecting our diverse cultures and heritage

Cultural heritage underpins and enhances our identity, and provides valuable insights and connection to the past.

Cairns has long been a multicultural place with many languages, stories, lives and cultures. Around 10% of Cairns people identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with some First Peoples of Cairns able to trace their relationship with this land back thousands of years and have strong connection to country.

The *Growth Strategy* will proactively represent their interests in the planning process and development of a new planning scheme. This may include recognising cultural heritage sites and reflecting their values and aspirations through the strategy and policies.

Places recognised for their historic cultural heritage significance include buildings, memorials, structures, gardens, cemeteries, archaeological sites, streets, townscapes and culturally significant natural landscapes. These places are important because of their intrinsic aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social and spiritual values.

*“New development will complement our unique heritage, character and lifestyle”*

Places of significance are identified on heritage registers. The Queensland Heritage Register identifies those places that are special to the whole state, and the Local Heritage Register identifies places that are important to our local Cairns community.

*“The culture grows and thrives into an inclusive environment for everyone to feel secure and comfortable”*

Planning plays a key role in ensuring that development affecting a place of cultural heritage significance supports its long-term conservation through preservation, restoration, reconstruction or adaptive reuse and renewal. The adaptive re-use and renewal of heritage places can conserve the heritage significance of these places into the future.

Also important is the fact that the Cairns region is multicultural and cosmopolitan, with people from all over the world choosing to live and contribute to the region’s diverse lifestyle choices.

Through our engagement, we are looking to hear from as many people as we can to ensure the *Growth Strategy* reflects and responds to the needs of our diverse community especially through the planning for housing, employment and community infrastructure.

*“Protecting, embracing and celebrating our local First Nations heritage ”*



# Creating great tropical neighbourhoods

Cairns is known for its outstanding natural beauty and relaxed tropical lifestyle, with our urban areas set amongst and surrounded by our vast natural environment.

This makes for a unique character and style of built environment. Understanding what makes Cairns special and why people love to live here will be key in planning for a future that reflects our much-loved tropical lifestyle.

*"The suburb is very well designed for residential living. it is easy to access green spaces and parking that are within walking distance and it does not require to get in a car to go to parks"*

Our goal is to balance planning for growth with the anticipated challenges of our climate and ensuring that urban change does not compromise what we love about our region.

Where we live, our streets and local neighbourhoods are at the heart of how we experience our region on a daily basis. We need to ensure we create liveable tropical neighbourhoods that meet all our needs and promote a sense of community and belonging.

To do this, our neighbourhoods should be safe and healthy, walkable and highly accessible, close to employment, services and facilities. They should also meet recreational needs, connect with nature and promote a diverse and inclusive community.

Our neighbourhoods need to be designed specifically for living in the tropics - incorporating tropical design and the principles of Tropical Urbanism throughout our urban areas.

We've heard that our community love that their suburbs are green and leafy and that you can hear the sound of birds. Incorporating our natural environment into our urban areas and creating urban habitats will ensure we can enjoy this about our suburbs into the future.

*"More inclusive atmosphere for varying cultures. Better boutique shopping options (delis, butchers, wine shops). Still maintaining the small, coastal vibe, but with a cosmopolitan feel."*

Providing equitable access to key community infrastructure will play a vital role in ensuring our neighbourhoods function as they should.

**The Community Infrastructure Study** will look at our current community infrastructure, identify where new or improved facilities are needed, and how to make sure community infrastructure is well-located and meets the needs of our diverse and growing community.

Our region is made up of many local neighbourhoods, each with their own unique identity. The **Growth Strategy** will need to ensure this is enhanced moving forward. Additionally, we have a number of established areas with older traditional buildings and architectural styles that characterise building design at points in time and show the evolution of design in Cairns.

**The Neighbourhood Character Study** will identify neighbourhood character areas within the Cairns region and make recommendations for how the **Growth Strategy** can protect these areas into the future.

*"That there is a considered balance between development, the environment and the unique community nature and history of the region"*

# Delivering sustainable infrastructure

When planning for the future population of Cairns, a key consideration is planning efficient, safe and sustainable infrastructure.

Infrastructure plays a critical role in how a community plans for the future and can shape and influence the way it grows.

Future population growth needs to be planned in the right locations where there is efficient access to roads, active and public transport networks, sewer, water and energy to allow for well-planned, sustainable and affordable communities.

The delivery of infrastructure should be appropriately designed and located to maximise the use of existing infrastructure, while balancing the needs of our growing population. Future housing and density will need to be accommodated in areas that are well-connected and have access to essential services, recreation and community and social infrastructure.

Increasing density within existing areas and consolidating growth will limit urban sprawl and support the efficient delivery of infrastructure by using existing networks.

*"I would like to see Cairns become less reliant on cars and more reliant on public transport and to increase the walkability for the suburbs not just the city"*

Additionally, growth occurring in the right locations will ensure that we are reducing our costs and being financially responsible by making the most of existing and planned services.

Well-planned infrastructure - including efficient and reliable public transport, cycleways and pedestrian walkways - and providing more choice for how we get around will allow us to be less reliant on private vehicle use and promote active and walkable communities.

Council is working with the Department of Transport and Main Roads to plan for our future transport needs. The transport planning will consider future trends and challenges, and ways to support sustainable, efficient and affordable transport outcomes.

*"Better public facilities including public spaces and arts precincts"*

An outcome of the planning will be a **Transport Study** that sets out the priorities for developing the city's transport system across all modes and will be used to guide future investment decisions for transport services and infrastructure to support the city as it grows.

*"To grow but with planning and foresight to have the required infrastructure to cope with the demand..."*

The **Growth Strategy** is informed and supported by other Council strategies, including the Cairns Water Security Strategy adopted in 2015, Waste Reduction and Recycling Strategy 2018-2027, and the Cairns Cycling and Walking Strategy. These, along with any future initiatives, will provide key insights into managing our infrastructure needs into the future.





# Improving our resilience to natural hazards and climate change

The Cairns region, due to its location and climate, is prone to natural hazards and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Our changing climate will mean that our community will experience weather events more frequently. Our ability to cope with and adapt to these challenges will play a vital role in the social, environmental and economic resilience of our community.

Firstly, we need to understand the risk of natural hazards in our region and the impacts of these hazards on our urban areas and natural environment. This will help us understand where we need to avoid hazards, what impacts we can tolerate and how to mitigate the impacts of hazards to ensure we improve our resilience into the future.

*“Modern Eco City addressing impacts of climate change head on and demonstrating the application of new technology for other cities. Let’s see more clean and green incentives / programs”*

The State Planning Policy provides guidance to local government on how to plan for and mitigate the risk of natural hazards using a fit for purpose risk-based approach.

This approach involves identifying the extent of the hazard, assessing the likelihood and impact of the hazard, and developing planning responses to avoid or mitigate the risks and impacts.

By using this approach, we can manage how we live with natural hazards now and into the future.

*“That Cairns is resilient in the face of natural disasters”*

A series of risk assessment studies will be undertaken to help us address the risks and impacts of hazards moving forward. These studies are:

- **Flood risk assessment study**
- **Storm tide risk assessment study**
- **Landslide risk assessment study**
- **Coastal erosion risk assessment study**
- **Bushfire risk assessment study**

*“Climate change manifesting in extreme weather events and locals being confident in able to manage flooding, tidal surge and cyclone damage. Council developing disaster mitigation plans. For extreme events, worse than what has happened historically”*

The outputs of these risk assessments will directly influence how our region grows and drive planning strategies to reduce our exposure to natural hazards and improve our resilience.

The **Growth Strategy** will take an integrated hazard approach that considers not only planning strategies but other mitigation and adaptation options to ensure we take a coordinated approach to addressing the impacts of all hazards together.

The **Growth Strategy** will also be informed and supported by a number other strategies, such as the Cairns Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy and Cairns Climate Change Strategy.

The **Growth Strategy** will also consider the role that urban planning can play in mitigating the impacts of climate change on our region through how and where our region grows, promoting climate responsive design and identifying strategies to reduce impacts such as ways to decrease urban heat.

By planning for safety and resilience to hazards and considering the impacts of climate change, we can make our region a safer and more resilient place to live.

# Protecting our natural environment

Cairns is defined by its green and blue – the mountain ranges to the west and the ocean to the east.

Set amongst two World Heritage Areas, the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforest, it is a truly unique natural environment.

The rainforests of the Wet Tropics contain some of the oldest continually-surviving tracts of tropical rainforest in the world, and contain many plant and animal species found nowhere else on the planet.

The Great Barrier Reef is an international icon, known for its abundance and diversity of corals, fish and other marine life. In addition to these World Heritage areas, the Cairns region contains significant freshwater habitats and biodiversity within important wetlands, mangroves and coastal vegetation.

*“I hope urban sprawl doesn’t take over. The hills surrounding Cairns should remain undeveloped”*

The Cairns lifestyle is shaped by our setting amongst these outstanding natural areas. People chose to live in Cairns to appreciate and connect with this environment and all it has to offer.

Our community engagement has reinforced how much the Cairns community values the natural environment, and how important it is that we protect it for future generations. The ability to connect with nature and provide linkages for habitat and incorporate our natural environment throughout our urban areas is also important.



Growth in population and urban areas, including fragmentation and degradation of habitat, the impacts of climate change and interruption to natural processes are key threats to our natural environment. Planning for growth will need to ensure these key threats are considered and that our natural environment is prioritised and protected.

*“More of an environmental focus and conscious development with minimal destruction. More green spaces and trees throughout suburbs. More affordable housing”*

There is a strong legislative and planning framework through all levels of government for the protection of our World Heritage areas and other natural areas. Additionally, the State Planning Policy provides mapping of matters of national and state environmental significance including wildlife habitat, significant wetlands, protected areas, regulated vegetation and high value waters.

*“The marine environment is protected, our reef is healthy and thriving. We have retained our tropical ambience and focused on endemic plantings to enhance wildlife habitat...”*

The **Growth Strategy** will use this existing data to ensure these areas continue to be protected, considering urban consolidation and greater density within existing urban areas to ensure planning for growth does not compromise our natural environment.

The vegetated mountain ranges, fast-flowing rivers, deep gorges, waterfalls and expansive coastline not only provide critical habitat and ecological significance, but also views and vistas that offer spectacular scenery in this particularly beautiful region. The **Scenic Amenity Study** will identify and confirm all of the scenic landscape types within our region and provide recommendations on how these can be maintained and protected into the future.

# How you can get involved

The *Towards 2050 Shaping Cairns Growth Strategy* project will be underway until April 2025.

It is a community-led plan and community engagement is at the centre of every step we take. We need to work together to make sure that Cairns in 2050 is the best it can be.

As the project progresses through Phases 3 and 4, there will be many ways for residents, businesses and community groups to get involved, provide input and help shape the future of Cairns.

Community engagement will continue in Phase 3 to understand and get input into the local issues relating to the technical studies.

This phase will include a second round of Growth Summits with the community, stakeholders and young people together with a First Peoples gathering.

Phase 4 engagement will take account of the feedback and input throughout the previous phases to finalise the *Growth Strategy*.

For updates and notification of future engagement opportunities, register on the project website: [www.haveyoursay.cairns.qld.gov.au/towards2050](http://www.haveyoursay.cairns.qld.gov.au/towards2050)

You can also contact the *Towards 2050* Project Team by email at [towards2050@cairns.qld.gov.au](mailto:towards2050@cairns.qld.gov.au) or free call 1300 692 247.



**Towards  
2050**

**Growth  
Strategy  
Framework**

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