

DISASTER READY FUND – ROUND 4

EDA | 58/6/3-01 | #7898561

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council approves the submission of an application under the Disaster Ready Fund Round 4 for the Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan – Stage 1.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Queensland Government

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Disaster Ready Fund (DRF) is the Australian Government's primary disaster resilience and risk reduction initiative. The program supports projects that improve understanding of natural disaster risk, build resilience, adaptive capacity and preparedness, and reduce exposure to future disaster impacts and the associated recovery burden for governments and communities.

Round 4 of the DRF is currently open, with project proposals required to be submitted to the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA) by 1 July 2026. A national funding pool of \$139.477 million is available, with the Commonwealth able to fund up to 50% of eligible project costs. Applicants are required to provide a minimum 50% co-contribution, and each local government area may submit one application.

Projects submitted under the DRF must be identified in Council's Local Resilience Action Plan (LRAP). The LRAP therefore provides the project pipeline and prioritisation basis for Council's Round 4 DRF application.

Officers reviewed the DRF Round 4 guidelines, Council's LRAP, project priorities, available budget allocations, project readiness, deliverability, mandatory attachments, program timeframes and likely competitiveness. This review identified two Council projects as potentially suitable for consideration: University 2 Reservoir, which is Priority 1 in the LRAP and has an estimated total project value of \$53 million (ex GST); and the Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan - Stage 1, which is Priority 10 in the LRAP and has an estimated total project value of \$800,000 (ex GST).

The Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan - Stage 1 is recommended as Council's DRF Round 4 application. The project has a proportionate funding request, strong alignment with eligible non-infrastructure activity types, clear alignment with Commonwealth and Queensland priorities, and a strong level of application readiness. It will provide Council

with an evidence-based mitigation and adaptation framework to identify, prioritise and advocate for future disaster risk reduction investment across the local government area.

BACKGROUND:

The Disaster Ready Fund (DRF) provides funding for projects that reduce disaster risk, improve preparedness and build community resilience. Round 4 has \$139.477 million available nationally, comprising \$104.608 million for large-scale infrastructure projects and \$34.869 million for other eligible project types, including risk assessments, mitigation planning, modelling, feasibility studies and capability-building projects.

The Commonwealth may fund up to 50% of eligible project costs, with applicants required to provide a minimum 50% co-contribution. QRA is the Queensland lead agency and will assess Queensland projects before submitting up to 30 applications to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) for national consideration. As Queensland has 77 local government areas and each local government area may submit only one application, the State shortlisting process is highly competitive.

Round 4 gives priority to infrastructure, construction-ready projects and projects with insurance co-benefits. However, non-infrastructure projects remain eligible where they improve disaster risk understanding and support better long-term mitigation and adaptation decision-making.

Projects submitted under the DRF must be identified in Council's Local Resilience Action Plan (LRAP), which provides the key project pipeline and prioritisation basis for Council's Round 4 DRF consideration.

Officers reviewed the DRF Round 4 guidelines, Council's LRAP, project priorities, available budget allocations, application readiness, deliverability, mandatory attachments, program timelines and likely competitiveness. Following this review, two Council projects were identified as potentially suitable for consideration:

- University 2 Reservoir, which is Priority 1 in the LRAP and has an estimated total project value of \$53 million (ex GST); and
- Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan - Stage 1, which is Priority 10 in the LRAP and has an estimated total project value of \$800,000 (ex GST).

Projects listed as LRAP priorities 2 to 9 were not recommended for a DRF Round 4 application because they did not have an allocated budget and were not sufficiently shovel-ready, were not eligible under the DRF, or did not have sufficient project information available to provide confidence that a competitive application could be prepared within the required timeframe.

COMMENT:

The assessment process focused on identifying the project most likely to be eligible, deliverable and competitive under DRF Round 4, rather than selecting a project solely on the basis of its LRAP ranking.

University 2 Reservoir was considered because it is the highest ranked project in the LRAP and would provide clear resilience benefits by improving the reliability and redundancy of critical water infrastructure.

However, the University 2 Reservoir is considered highly unlikely to secure funding under DRF Round 4 due to the limited pool of overall funding available compared to the scale of funding needed to support successful delivery of the project. Whilst not recommended for DRF Round 4, given the criticality of the project and its Number 1 Priority status in the LRAP, Officers will continue to actively investigate alternate pathways for securing project funding including the Queensland Resilience and Risk Reduction Program and through Council's broader strategic advocacy work.

The Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan - Stage 1 was assessed as a strong DRF candidate. The project has a more proportionate funding request, strong alignment with the non-infrastructure project stream, strong application readiness and a clear pathway for delivery within the program timeframe.

The Plan will provide a coordinated, long-term framework for identifying, testing and prioritising mitigation and adaptation projects across the Cairns CBD and surrounding central suburbs, moving Council from individual project opportunities toward a more structured, evidence-based and place-based mitigation pipeline. It responds to increasing flood, storm tide and coastal hazard risks in an area that is critical to the region's housing, economy and essential infrastructure, including the hospital, airport and port. Through a design-led and evidence-based approach, the Plan will align land use planning, infrastructure planning, disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation and future capital works programming. This will strengthen Council's ability to demonstrate need, quantify benefits, sequence investment, support future grant applications and advocate to State and Commonwealth agencies for larger-scale resilience infrastructure funding.

For the reasons outlined above, it is recommended that the Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan progress as Council's DRF Round 4 application with an estimated funding request of \$400,000 ex GST (50% of total project value).

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended)

That Council approves the submission of an application under the Disaster Ready Fund Round 4 for the Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan – Stage 1.

Option 2

That Council **does not** approve the submission of an application under Disaster Ready Fund Round 4 for the Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan – Stage 1 and nominates an alternative project for submission.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The proposed Master Mitigation and Adaptation Plan - Stage 1 has an estimated total

project value of \$800,000 (ex GST). The proposed DRF funding request is \$400,000 (ex GST), with Council required to provide a matching co-contribution of \$400,000 (ex GST).

In respect of Council's \$400,000 (ex GST) co-contribution, \$200,000 (ex GST) has been provided for in Council's 2026/27 Operational Budget. Should the application be successful, a future operational budget allocation of \$200,000 (ex GST) will be required in the 2027/28 financial year. The exact balance of Council's co-contribution will need to be confirmed through the application and budget development process.

The project is expected to support improved long-term financial and economic resilience by strengthening Council's evidence base for mitigation investment, reducing exposure to future disaster impacts and supporting more targeted advocacy for external funding.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The project aligns with Council's LRAP and supports Council's broader disaster resilience, risk reduction, infrastructure planning and advocacy objectives. The 2026/27 Operational Plan includes a specific action to progress this Plan.

The Plan will assist Council to establish a prioritised mitigation and adaptation pipeline that can inform future operational planning, capital planning, grant applications and intergovernmental advocacy.

Policy:

The DRF is a contestable grant stream and accordingly, the *Applying for External Contestable Grant Funding General Policy* has been considered when formulating the recommendations contained herein.



Nick Masasso
Director – Economic Development & Advocacy