



Cairns Regional Council  
State of the **Environment** Report  
2008/2009

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## Introduction

Cairns Regional Council is committed to producing a State of the Environment (SoE) report each year as part of its annual reporting process to the community.

State of Environment reports are critical tools that aim to help drive regional strategic change towards best practice management of the environment.

The overall aim of a State of the Environment (SoE) Report is to report on environmental indicators to provide environmental information in a consolidated source. The 2008/09 SoE Report is the synthesis of efforts by Council to address its environmental duty and deliver a transparent statement of Council's performance during the year.

This report provides an information base to support the community, industry and Government in working towards improved environmental management and the sustainable use of our resources.

The following document offers an insight to local data, along with Council initiatives and partnerships as it progresses the goal of caring for the environment.

In a region such as Far North Queensland our environment is also a key economic driver – meaning there is so much more at stake for both Government and the community. Council seeks to build on the following initiatives in coming years to help effect sustainable change and environmental resilience.

## Environmental Indicators

Environmental indicators are necessary to monitor the condition of the local environment and the human activities that affect it.

Core environmental indicators for reporting on the state of the environment were developed by the Environment Reporting Task Force of the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council (ANZECC) in 2000. The indicators used in this SoE Report, although modified to incorporate the unique character of the Cairns region, are premised upon the core environmental themes developed by the Department of the Environment and Heritage and are similar to those used for Commonwealth State of the Environment Reporting (ANZECC 2000).

## Environmental Sustainability Group

The information contained in this report has been prepared by Council's Environmental Sustainability Group (ESG). The aim of Environmental Sustainability Group (ESG) is to facilitate information sharing, systems review, environmental issues, review corporate programs/plan by Executive Management, raising environmental awareness within Council and to the community.

## Liveability Indicators

The indicators used in the Liveability section of this report are an information framework designed to check the progress the region is making towards becoming 'the best regional city in Australia'. From the first Liveability Report in 2005, seven of the original indicators have been

used as these cover a wide range of issues affecting the population. They are: Affordability, Accessibility, Diversity, Equity, Amenity, Well-being and Good Leadership.

### “At a Glance”

The former Cairns City and Douglas Shire Councils amalgamated to become the Cairns Regional Council in March 2008. The 2008/09 data set is the first complete round of data that has been compiled for Cairns Regional Council. Prior to this most data sets are only available for the former Cairns City Council.

<b>Data Category</b>	<b>2008/09</b>
<b>Water</b>	
Compliance with EPA sewage licensing requirements	97%
Recycled Water Use	650ML
Per capita daily water consumption (residential, industrial, commercial and agricultural)	447L/day
Average amount of water used per person (residential)	212L/day
<b>Energy</b>	
Fuel use by Council Vehicles (diesel/unleaded)	1,733,634
Diesel (L)	1,311,024
Unleaded (L)	422,609
GHG Emissions from Fuel use tonnes CO2	4,854
Electricity use by Council (kWh)	32,094,847
GHG Emissions from electricity use tonnes CO2	33,761
Street Lighting (kWh)	7,119,125
Buildings (kWh)	10,334,749
Water and Sewage (kWh)	14,640,973
<b>Habitat Protection</b>	
Number of plantings by Council	49,166
Trees provided to Landcare and community groups	27,689
Days of watering and maintenance	221
Days spent on site preparation	21
Number of seedlings potted	105,675
Hours spent on seed collection	248
<b>Pest Management</b>	
Number of days of pest mapping and survey	25
Number of Pest Treatments	325
Number of declared animals destroyed (feral)	709
Number Eastern Rainbow Fish Released	Nil
Number Midge/Mosquito complaints received	1,235

<b>Data Category</b>	<b>2008/09</b>
<b>Number of days worked on weed control</b>	
Weeds of National significance (assisted days)	99
Class 1 Weeds – Assist State Government (days)	42
High Priority Weeds (days)	138
<b>Human Settlement</b>	
Planning Applications received	517
Environmentally Relevant Activities licence approvals	53
Identification of unlicensed Environmentally Relevant Activities	No data available
Total number of Environmentally Relevant Activities	509
<b>Waste to Bedminster/Landfill (tonnes)</b>	
Domestic Kerbside Waste to Bedminster	48,913
Transfer Station General Waste to Bedminster	9,556
Domestic Kerbside Waste to Landfill	Nil
Transfer Station Waste (inert) to Landfill	2,318
Bio-solids to beneficial re-use	14,966
Compost Exported from Bedminster	23,797
Kerbside Recycling	10,877
<b>Recycled Material by Type (tonnes)</b>	
Aluminium cans	111
Cardboard	2,703
Glass	1,462
HDPE (High-density polyethylene)	159
Mixed plastics	168
PET (Polyethylene terephthalate)	174
Steel cans	255
<b>Recycling from Transfer Stations (tonnes)</b>	
Green waste	25,550
Metal	2,903
Tyres	15,494
Oil (litres)	51,760
Batteries	80

## Water

### Water Demand Management

In July 2009 the revised Water Demand Management Strategy 2009/2012 was endorsed, after the successful implementation of the 2006 strategy.

The aims of the Strategy are:

- To build on current demand management activities
- To achieve significant and sustained water savings by customers
- To continue to build a water conservation culture in the community
- To minimise losses and non revenue water in our distribution network
- To improve water accounting via metering, data management and reporting
- To ensure the region is leading by example in water conservation.

Since beginning to apply water demand management measures in 2006, the former Cairns City Council gross per capita water consumption has fallen about 15 per cent from 528 litres in 2006 to 447 litres in 2008. Gross per capita consumption figures are calculated using total water production data that includes residential, commercial and industrial consumption.

A range of demand management initiatives have, and will continue to be, employed across the region including –

- Education and communication campaigns
- Council water conservation initiatives
- Permanent water conservation measures (low level restrictions)
- Water conservation incentives for commercial customers
- The production and supply of recycled water
- Installation of district meters, pressure management, leak detection and repair programs
- Reduction of unbilled and illegal connections and volumetric charging for all connections

Council has also adopted the following revised policies -

### Water conservation Policy (1:01:25)

This policy encourages the adoption of water conservation principles and supports operational activities, Council assets and public facilities.

### **Recycled Water Policy (1:01:27)**

This policy applies to the supply and use of recycled water produced by Council Wastewater Treatment Plants.

### **Water savings in Council amenities**

Waterless urinals and water saving devices on taps and showerheads have been installed in:

- Council administration buildings in Mossman and Cairns
- Public amenities block at George Davis Park and Mill Street in Mossman
- Four Mile Park, Solander Boulevard, Mowbray Street, Market Park and Rex Smeal Park in Port Douglas
- Teamsters Park in Craiglie.

These devices are engineered to function without water and deliver low cost of ownership and maintenance. The waterless urinals will provide annual water savings of more than 600,000KL each year.

### **Climate Change and Sustainability**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (2007) asserted that it is now 'unequivocal' the world is warming and the most likely cause is the burning of fossil fuels for energy. It has also assessed that an increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme climatic events is virtually certain.

The panel identified that Far North Queensland was one of six key 'hot spots' in Australia where the impacts of climate change are likely to be significant. It also identified potentially large losses to the built environment of the region from flooding, sea-level rise and storm surges associated with tropical cyclones.

In addition, Far North Queensland is home to two World Heritage areas - the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforests. These iconic natural places contain unique biodiversity and wonder, attracting significant input to Australia's natural ecosystem services and tourism economy.

Per capita, Queensland is one of the highest emitters of greenhouse gases in the world. In 2007, Queensland was responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than any other state in Australia, and had the highest per capita emissions of all Australian states.

According to the Garnaut Climate Change Review conducted by Professor Ross Garnaut and commissioned by Australia's Commonwealth, State and territory Governments into the impacts of climate change on the Australian economy, the Queensland economy could shrink by more than 10 per cent by 2100 as a result of climate change.

## What is Council doing?

### Greenhouse Gas Mitigation - Cities for Climate Protection (CCP)

Council is committed to reducing its impact on climate change by actively reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As a “Cities for Climate Protection Leader”, Council has been working to improve its quadruple bottom line for more than a decade.

Reducing emissions saves on Council’s energy costs and its impact on the climate. It also improves the amenity of the built and natural environment for the broader community.

Council amalgamations enabled two Cities for Climate Protection Programs (CCP) to be integrated. CCP has been a National program for more than 10 years, empowering Local Governments to reduce GHG emissions. Although the Federal funding for the CCP Program has been withdrawn, Council has been proactive in ensuring that the GHG mitigation program adheres to the National Greenhouse Energy Reporting Act.

A GHG emissions inventory was completed in 2007/08 to benchmark Council’s emissions for comparisons into the future.

The inventory illustrates the breakdown of emissions across the following five corporate sectors:

- Buildings/facilities
- Streetlights
- Vehicle fleet
- Water & sewage electricity
- Corporate waste.

In addition, there are two categories of direct emissions which are community emissions:

- Landfill
- Waste water treatment.

The total greenhouse emissions for the 2007-08 financial year were 133,880 tonnes CO2 equivalent. The breakdown per sector is shown in Figure 1.

This includes energy emissions and direct waste emissions. The inclusion of landfill emissions has significantly increased Council’s carbon footprint.



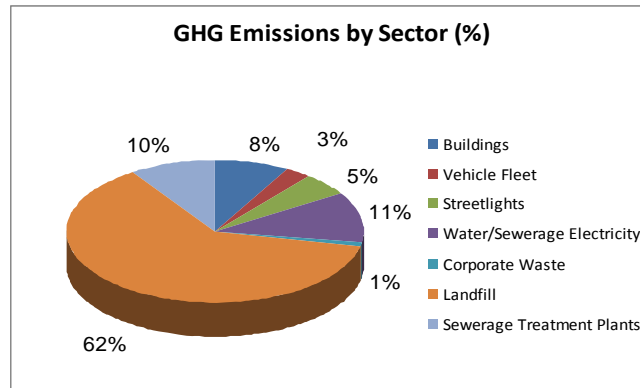


Figure 1 – GHG emissions for 2007/08 including landfill & waste water treatment

Figure 2 illustrates the profile of greenhouse emissions per corporate sector which excludes landfill. Total GHG emissions within these corporate sectors (within Council operations) totals 36,800 tonnes Co<sub>2</sub>-e.

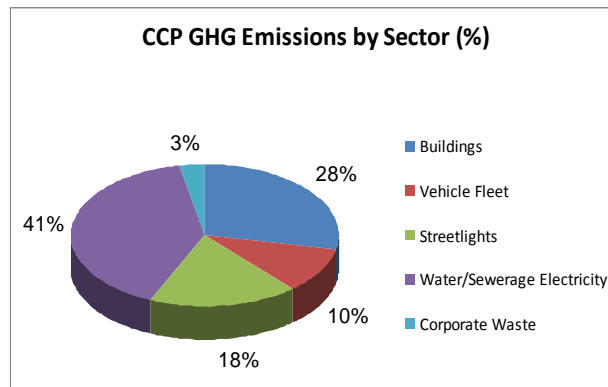


Figure 2 – GHG emissions for 2007/08 exc. landfill & waste water treatment

The next milestones in this process include the adoption of a greenhouse reduction target and a GHG Mitigation Action Plan which will be included in Council's Climate Change Strategy for implementation.

Council has been working in an aligned and strategic manner with the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils to share professional and resource capacity in GHG mitigation and sustainability across the region.

Some of the mitigation actions so far include:

- Timers on water boiling units
- C-Bus electrical system for Spence Street Administration building
- Solar public lighting/parks, boat ramps
- Renewable energy on library buildings
- Voltage reduction for building lighting circuits
- Replacement and upgrade of Building Management System at Spence Street.

Promotion and support for Earth Hour event – Cairns region saved about 15 tonnes of greenhouse causing carbon dioxide by switching off for Earth Hour in 2009:

- Shut down and switch off education program
- Energy audits of Council swimming pools
- Delamping unnecessary workshop lights
- Organic waste diversion from landfill
- Smart cars for vehicle fleet
- Paper reduction strategy.

### **Local Adaptation Pathways Program – Climate Adaptation Risk Assessment and Action Plan**

Cairns Regional Council is the first Local Government in North Queensland to complete a detailed climate change risk assessment and Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan. The project is critical to better understand and capture the range of climate change risks and opportunities that Council may encounter in the delivery of its services to the community and provide adaptation actions to address the risks.

Council was successful in receiving funding from the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change through round one of the Local Government Adaptation Pathways Program (LAPP) in May 2008. Consultants AECOM were commissioned for this project with a timeline from June 08 – July 09.

Objectives of the project were to:

- Assess the risks of climate change against a range of climate variables
- Identify the priority risks for further focus and investigation
- Formulate an action plan to provide adaptation strategies to high risk climate change impacts
- Identify any gaps in knowledge and barriers to implementation.

### **Scope of the Project**

The focus of the risk assessment was on investigating council's 'urban management systems'. Urban management systems were defined in this project as the local land use planning and development frameworks as well as the decision processes that define the form, and ongoing function of an urban community. This definition incorporates the planning, delivery and management of essential social and economic infrastructure and services that are provided by council.

The report contains a number of recommendations under the following categories:

- Corporate governance
- Land use planning and development
- Assets and operations
- Natural disaster planning and response
- Environment and community health.

Council has addressed a number of these recommendations and will use others to help guide decision-making based on a cost benefit analysis. The full report can be found on Council's website - [www.cairns.qld.gov.au](http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au)



*Figure 3 – One of Council's Smart Fortwo Cars*

### **ClimateSmart Home Living Program - Grid connect PV system installed on Gordonvale Library**

The ClimateSmart Living Project was offered to four Local Government areas in Queensland during 2008/09. Ergon Energy, with funding from the Department Environment Resource Management (DERM), partnered with Council to deliver energy efficiency outcomes for the township of Gordonvale.

Through the ClimateSmart Living Project Council aimed to:

- Become a leader in responsible and successful climate change initiatives
- Provide the community with knowledge and skills to manage energy use
- Reduce energy usage and consequent greenhouse gas emissions
- Facilitate sustained change in behaviour in energy usage within communities.

The ClimateSmart Living Program provided the opportunity for Council to further the scope of its environmental education and connect specifically with key sustainability educators in the Gordonvale area. Council officers were able to add value to work being undertaken at Gordonvale State School in relation to greenhouse mitigation and action planning.

In addition the partnership between Council, Ergon Energy and Department of Environment and Resource Management (formerly Environmental Protection Agency) provided an opportunity to share resources, information and also offered an increased capacity for community engagement. The following were key achievements in the duration of ClimateSmart Living in Gordonvale:

- A 2 kW Grid connect solar PV system was installed on the Gordonvale Library
- Energy education delivered to schools in the Gordonvale area
- Audits and recommendations for Council buildings
- Community Engagement.



*Figure 4 – Solar Panels on Gordonvale Library*

### **Energy and Emissions Information Management Project**

Council was successful in its Expression of Interest to Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) to participate in National Energy Information Management and Emissions Reporting project. ICLEI received 54 Expressions of Interest and 10 Local Governments were chosen to participate in this project.

Actions documented in this project will form a section of Council's Climate Change Strategy which will be developed in 2009/2010. The Climate Change Strategy aims to bring together action plans from greenhouse mitigation, adaptation and emissions information management to improve Council's climate change response.

This project has highlighted the need to invest in a centralised system to collect, manage and maintain primary emissions data to be able to progress as a leader in greenhouse mitigation. Such a system can assist Council in managing greenhouse gas emissions for environmental, social and financial benefit.

### **Earth Hour**

In 2009 Earth Hour was supported locally by Council in partnership with Ergon Energy, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Lincolne Scott, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Queensland Government ClimateSmart Home Service.

On 28 March 2009, Council joined more than 88 countries in turning off all non-essential lighting for Earth Hour. Nearly half of all Australians (47 per cent) participated in Earth Hour and 56 per cent (312) of local councils in Australia committed to Earth Hour. Approximately 85 per cent of Australia's population resides within these 312 local government areas.

A target of a 10 per cent reduction of electricity in the Cairns Region was achieved - a 3 per cent increase from the 2008 target. The 10 per cent reduction equates to a reduction of 20 megawatt hours of power - equivalent to switching off approximately 25,000 60-watt light bulbs. This saved approximately 15 tonnes of greenhouse gases, which is equivalent to taking nearly 25,000 unleaded-fuelled cars off the road for an hour.

### **Corporate Sustainability Policy**

The Corporate Sustainability Policy was adopted by Council on 11 February 2009.

In adopting a Corporate Sustainability Policy Council acknowledged the role it plays in reducing the impact of human based activities on the natural environment by considering sustainability within its strategic and operational responsibilities.

The aim of this policy is to embed sustainability principles into the operational function of the organisation.

A commitment to sustainability means following the principles of ecological sustainable development and creating objectives for sustainable practice which enhance the health of our community and natural environment, while ensuring social justice, quality of life and holistic prosperity.

The intent of the policy is to:

- Respond to the challenge of climate change
- Maintain and restore the natural environment
- Use our resources more efficiently
- Reduce our environmental impact
- Display strong leadership to the community
- Reduce financial losses associated with inefficient energy and resource consumption.

### **Grid connect solar PV system on Mossman and Gordonvale Libraries**

Two grid connected solar energy systems were installed at the Gordonvale and Mossman libraries in August 2008.

Installation of the systems is part of Council's Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Action Plan and quadruple bottom line approach. Benefits include reduced electricity bills, furthered community education opportunities and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

Each 2kW grid connect system reduces the libraries' annual electricity bill by more than \$500 and saves more than 3 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions a year.

## Solar toolkits for Mossman and Gordonvale Libraries

Council has two interactive toolkits, which are available for schools to hire from the Gordonvale and Mossman libraries as part of Council's ongoing involvement in the Climate Smart Living Project.

Featuring a solar-panelled briefcase donated by Ergon Energy, the interior holds a fan, radio, fluorescent lamp, liquid crystal display and a buzzer.

The Solar tool kits are the region's first educational tool kit to demonstrate the power of the sun.

The special briefcase also includes a Power Mate energy monitor and tailored literature on renewable energy and energy efficiency.



*Figure 5 – Students investigating Solar tool kit*

## Biodiversity

### Significance of Biodiversity in our Region

The 4,091 square kilometres of land administered by Council covers an area internationally recognised for its scenic beauty and outstanding richness of biodiversity. The region features a significant portion of two World Heritage listed areas, the rainforests of the Wet Tropics and the reefs and waters of the Great Barrier Reef. Diversity of life forms range from single-celled organisms to the giant *Stockwellia* trees of the East Mulgrave River valley.

Numerous migratory species, protected by international agreements, also reside for at least a part of the year in this region. These migratory species depend on the wetlands, waterways, coastal waters and terrestrial habitats from mangrove edges to mountain tops for food and shelter during their stop-over in the region.

Regional ecosystems and the Vegetation Management Act 1999 form the main legislative framework for the protection of vegetation in Queensland.



*Figure 6 – Mossman Gorge*

The Cairns Region contains 144 regional ecosystems across three bioregions with the vast amount housed in the Wet Tropics. Regional ecosystems of the Cape York Peninsular and Einasleigh Uplands bioregions only occur to a small extent in the north-western portion of the region. Fifteen of the 144 regional ecosystems of the Cairns Region have an Endangered status, 94 have Of Concern status with 35 identified as Not of Concern. Some 328 broad vegetation types are recognised.

The principle legislation for the conservation and protection of biodiversity in Queensland is the Nature Conservation Act 1992 (NCA). This Act is supported and reinforced by the Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC) at the Federal level.

There are 2,505 Vascular plants of the region listed as Rare & Threatened under the NCA, 299 Presumed Extinct under the NCA, 14 Endangered, 29 Vulnerable and 34 Rare.

Some 369 introduced exotic vascular plant species are recorded as naturalised in the Cairns Region. Some of these naturalised exotic plant species along with feral animals are a major threat to biodiversity.

Qualitative and quantitative information on the biodiversity of the Cairns Region is in most cases unknown at the genetic, species and ecosystem level. It is therefore difficult in most instances to detect changes or trends due to climate change or other factors as there are no baseline studies that can serve as a benchmark.

As part of the 2009/2014 Corporate Plan, Council has resolved to develop a Biodiversity Strategy for the region. This will assist in achieving Objectives 1.1 and 1.2 of the Corporate Plan:

- 1.1 Deliver improved management of the regions natural resources and biological diversity for sustainability and ecosystem health.
- 1.2 Achieve greater recognition of the natural environment as an integral part of the regions identity and fundamental to quality of life.

## Community Coastcare

### Revegetation of Saltwater Creek Catchments, Mossman Golf Club

The initial site for stage one was marked out by golf club representatives at the end of March 2009, prior to site preparation / spray works being carried out by Council staff.

During April 2009 a total of 2,750 native plants were planted on site by Council staff, 23 Miallo State School students, and 2 nursery volunteers.

### Riparian Rehabilitation, Reef Rescue – *Brillantasia lamium*, Whyanbeel Catchment

The funding provided for this project has complemented existing and other externally funded projects at Whyanbeel, with the assistance of the Whyanbeel Action Group. The total infestation in the Whyanbeel Catchment is estimated to be approximately 150 hectares.

Control works on *Brillantasia lamium* along Whyanbeel Creek have been undertaken over the last year with a total 36 hectares of *Brillantasia* having initial treatment at the top of the catchment. The program has focused on the riparian areas of the Whyanbeel Creek system.

A total of 5437 native trees have been planted to date, with further restoration works scheduled and to be funded in the near future. GIS mapping of the *Brillantasia* in Whyanbeel has been completed to enable ongoing management.



Figure 7 – Control Site before



Figure 8 – and after – revegetation





- develop an agreed planning framework between Council and QPIF for public works within/adjacent to Declared Fish Habitat Areas
- identify areas where there is provision for protection of fish habitats and meeting community requirements
- provide support for innovative techniques and restoration of mangrove communities (environmental offsetting)

The overall aim in developing this strategy is to replace Council's current fisheries development approval process for works outside of the current Code of Self-Assessable Development (MP02). The Strategy will provide a holistic approach to mangrove maintenance in urban environments that is supported by Council's planning instruments and QPIF's marine plant management policies.

QPIF has been successful in negotiating similar Urban Mangrove Management Strategies with Bundaberg and Brisbane City Councils. This has encouraged other local governments like Cairns Regional Council to jointly develop their own strategies with QPIF, to improve the management of mangrove systems which provides so many benefits to the community.

## Waste

### Waste Strategy

The new Waste Management Strategy is currently nearing completion involving consideration of the following stages:

- **Where are we now?** involves identifying current waste, recycling and composting rates, understanding the provision of waste management services within the strategy area.
- **Where do we want to get to?** where does Council want to be on a strategic perspective in relation to waste management? i.e. what level of recycling & composting is to be achieved, waste minimisation activity, diversion of residual waste from landfill and establishing the approach to meeting other government targets and the overall provision of services.
- **What do we need to do to get there?** this involves considering the options for reducing waste, increasing recycling and composting rates and managing residual waste to increase diversion from landfill. The development of specific Action plans will be required.

Since 2002 the former Cairns City Council had continued to improve waste management with the introduction of an advanced resource recovery facility (composting facility), opening a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF), increased kerbside dry recycling services and a range of initiatives to increase recycling and reuse.

The overall recycling rate (diversion from landfill) of municipal waste has increased over the past three years from 31 per cent in 2005/06 compared to 45 per cent diversion from landfill throughout 2007/08. The total volume of dry kerbside recycling diverted from landfill has increased over the past four years from 17 per cent in 2004/05 to 43 per cent in 2007/08.

While these measures are proving successful the amount of waste produced by the region is still increasing. The new Strategy will guide the way we manage our waste over the next five years.

Actions under consideration for the future include:

- To reduce growth in waste generation each year and achieve zero waste generation growth as a long term aspiration
- To achieve and maintain a kerbside dry recycling rate of product sorted at the MRF and sent for reprocessing
- To achieve and maintain an overall recycling rate (diversion from landfill)
- To build efficient recycling services with increased local markets and demand for recovered resources
- To optimise residual waste treatment and recovery and minimise waste sent to landfill
- To show leadership and coordination in regards to waste management in the region and provide best value services.

### **Glass Crusher Demonstration Project**

A glass crusher has been installed at the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) through a project jointly funded by the National Packaging Covenant and the Department of Environment and Resource Management to enable local alternative uses for glass to be developed.

Prior to this, glass collection and recycling in Cairns and North Queensland was difficult as the glass was transported to Brisbane for reprocessing. The long transportation distance also increased the risk of further glass breakage, resulting in loads being rejected.

The project is intended to evaluate the economic return, potential market and supply capacity in Cairns and surrounding Local Government regions for the use of crushed glass as an aggregate substitute or other media substitute.

The focus in this initial stage is to seek out all possible local markets for the crushed glass product and provide sample material for businesses to use in trials. The most likely uses could include:

- A substitute for sand for pipe embedment
- An aggregate for the construction of concrete and cement blocks
- Blast medium for abrasive blasting
- A filtering compound to be used instead of sand in sand filters.

## Recycling in our community

The Water and Waste education officer has worked closely with Gordonvale State School in bringing public awareness of “plastics” to the Gordonvale community. The officer negotiated with the local IGA and proposed a “recycling station” for people to deposit unwanted plastic bags. The Operations Manager of the IGA acknowledged that it was a great opportunity to work with the local community and organised a container and transport of the plastic bags to a recycling station in Townsville.

Students from Gordonvale State School decorated the container with environmental messages about the harmful effects of plastic bags entering our environment. There has been a fantastic community response, with plastic bags being deposited in and even being picked up to be reused at the IGA and other stores throughout Gordonvale.

The students have had excellent feedback from the community and have been encouraged to further sustainable practices for the Gordonvale area.



Figure 12 – Gordonvale State School students

## Human Settlement

### Major Strategic Planning Projects for the Region

#### Mount Peter

The Mount Peter area has been identified as the main urban growth corridor for Cairns with development expected to occur over the next 20-30 years to cater for a population of up to 50,000 people.

The Mount Peter Project is one of the largest master planning exercises undertaken in Queensland. Whilst the expected completion date for this Project is 2011, a large component of the planning was undertaken in 2009. In February 2009, the Mount Peter Enquiry By Design (EBD) Workshop was held and provided a collaborative forum for a diverse range of government and community stakeholders to positively contribute to the future design of Mount Peter.

Mount Peter's Vision, established in 2007, provided guidance during the EBD (which resulted in the EBD Outcomes Report and draft Urban Framework Plan) and continued to effect the development of the draft Structure Plan and other outputs. The Vision's six key themes that all played a part in assisting to build the draft Structure Plan and other outputs included:

- Integrated & sustainable infrastructure
- Unique natural environment
- Strong vibrant community
- Innovative urban structure and design
- Thriving economy and local employment
- Connected community

### **Port Douglas Master Planning**

Port Douglas is an iconic Australian destination, with all the attributes, opportunities and risks of a tropical waterfront destination set between two World Heritage areas.

Development associated with such a location requires a balance of considerations across elements including environment, heritage, economy, industry, community and the area's World Heritage status. Council has faced such a challenge with a proposed integrated development plan for the Port Douglas Waterfront.

Driven by the community's overwhelming desire to protect the local environment, unique character and iconic value, the master planning process also sought to facilitate outcomes that nurtures economic development and strengthen tourism appeal in the longer term.

A need for an integrated plan was identified by the former Douglas Shire Council and the community in order to provide certainty for the future of the Port Douglas Waterfront. A master planning process commenced which ensured ongoing collaboration with community, expert consultancies, State Agencies and Council.

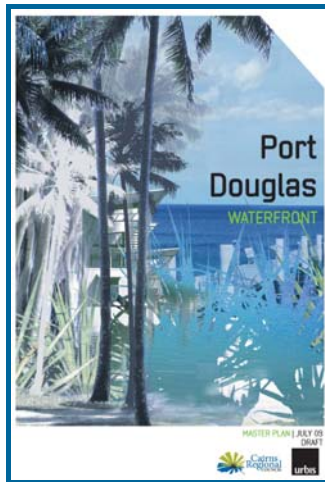
The Master Plan provides benefits for the community, economy, natural and physical environment and character, all of which contribute to the value of Port Douglas. Strategies within the plan provide guidance to ensure its benefits are realised with time. These strategies relate to access, land use and economics, environment and sustainability, physical character, public realm and streetscape, and phasing and implementation.

The intent of the plan is to provide a coherent and accessible waterfront that better meets needs of residents, businesses and tourists.

Key elements of the Waterfront will include:

- Protection and enhancement of existing environmental, economic and social assets of Port Douglas
- A walkable waterfront with the return of significant areas of waterfront to public space uses

- A working waterfront which plays an important economic and tourism role
- A quayside public plaza to provide a node for community events and improves pedestrian connections
- A reshaped quay line
- Increased public mooring



*Figure 10 – Port Douglas Waterfront Master Plan*

In recognition of the outstanding potential to cement the iconic characteristics, economic sustainability and environmental credentials of the town, Council appointed design specialists Urbis to prepare the draft master plan for the Port Douglas Waterfront.

Seeking to integrate existing values and features of the waterfront with a range of new initiatives, the plan aims to cement the western shoreline of the peninsular as one of the world's greatest waterfronts.

After an Enquiry By Design Workshop in October 2008 a Draft Master Plan was developed for community consultation. Public feedback on the initial plan – which occurred during February March – was considered in the final formulation of the July 2009 Draft Master Plan.

Both the Project Advisory Group and the Waterfront Management Committee were appointed to review the final draft and provide comment to Council in order to finalise the plan.

Council will consider adoption of the plan in November 2009.

### **Character and Heritage Study**

As part of ongoing efforts to improve local planning processes, throughout 2008/09 Council developed two complementary codes - the Character Precinct Code and the Multiple Dwelling (Small Scale Development) Code. These codes aim to manage development within identified character precincts.

The codes seek to balance the community's desire to retain the character of their neighbourhoods while still allowing development opportunity and increased density in the precincts which are located in close proximity to the CBD or an activity centre.

Strengthened demolition provisions within the Character Precinct Code aims to retain character housing and streetscape values. The code also seeks to ensure that new development is sympathetic to and respectful of the character and addresses key issues of renovation, extension and relocation and the raising and building underneath of character buildings.

The Multiple Dwelling (Small Scale Development) Code was developed to encourage in-fill development of between three to five dwellings. Streetscape values are maintained through the retention of the existing character building to the front of the property, with new development to the rear. This form of development offers an alternative to developing larger scale multiple dwellings and development potential to individual landowners who previously could not achieve the Residential 3 zoning potential due to the small lot size restrictions.

Council is committed to the continues review and improvement of planning controls with Council undertaking a Neighbourhood Character Study throughout 2009/10 which will inform a further round of amendments to the CairnsPlan. Evolution of the controls to manage development within character precincts is evidence of Council's commitment to delivering good planning policy.

### **Introduction of the Erosion and Sediment Control (ESC) a sub-unit of the Environmental Protection Unit (EPU).**

In response to community interest in focusing on erosion and sediment controls on large subdivisions and a departmental change in operations, Council's Environmental Protection Unit expanded to include two new positions to monitor erosion and sediment controls specifically on subdivisions. This new sub-unit also was responsible for monitoring ESC on individual building sites.

Since the inception of the unit in September 2008, the team has inspected every existing and new subdivision within the Council boundaries. Further to this strategy, the team has also endeavoured to meet every building company throughout the region to discuss compliance, regulation and statutory requirements.

### **Building Industry Environmental Awareness Campaign**

The Environmental Protection Unit conducted a building industry environmental awareness campaign prior to the Wet season in 2008. The objective was to advise the building industry of the upcoming wet season compliance program conducted by Environmental Protection Officers.

The awareness campaign comprised of taking information out to the builders, targeting new subdivision areas from Mossman through to Edmonton. Builders, subcontractors, developers and contractors were treated to a BBQ and discussions with the EP team.



Figure 11 – Awareness Campaign at Trinity Park

### Changes to the Environmental Protection Act 1994 and Environmental Protection Regulation 2008

The Environmental Protection Regulation 2008 underwent a 10 year review in 2007 and subsequently major changes were made to the regulation and to the *Environment Protection Act 1994*.

This has effected the operational requirements for Environmental Protection Unit including;

- New devolved delegations which charges Council with administering commercial nuisance
- Complete review of Environmentally Relevant Activities (ERA's) which included:
  - All ERAs subject to an annual return fee
  - New categories and thresholds for some ERAs

### Liveability

Liveability describes the overall attractiveness of an area as a place to live and is one of the key reasons people give for moving to or remaining in an area. Liveability often refers to the relationship people have with their environment that can be made up of urban, natural, built, places and people.

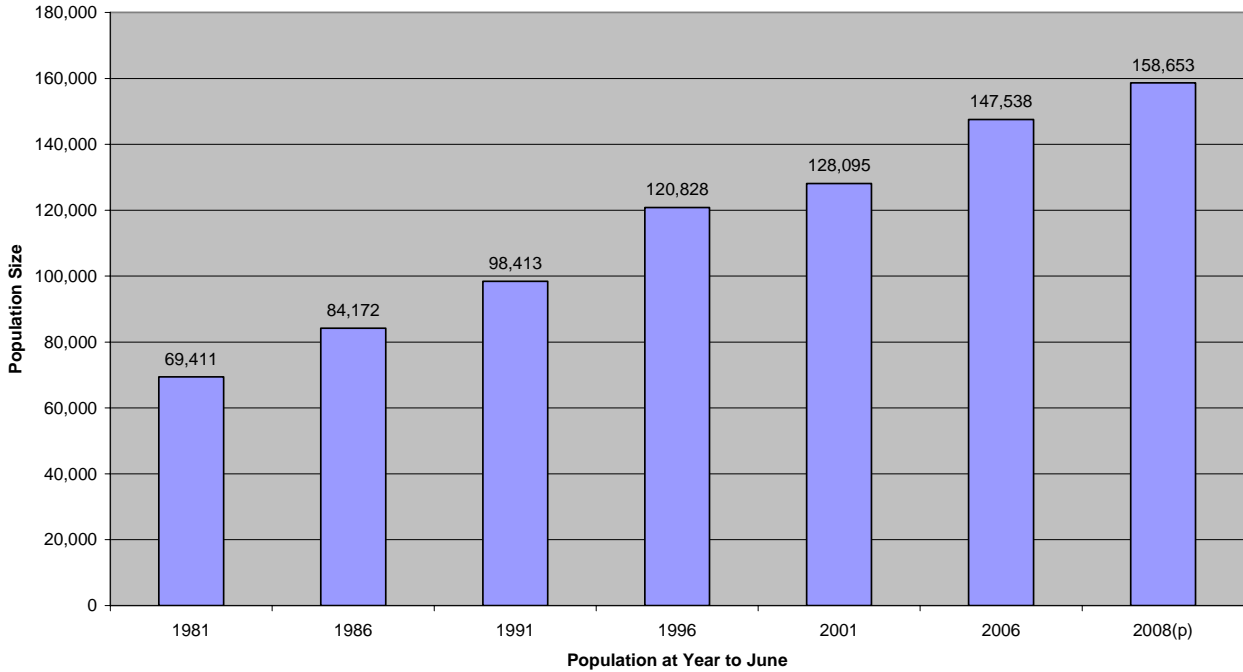
As much new data as is possible to obtain and/or generate has been used in the report below. Where data has traditionally been obtained from the 2006 census and where it has not changed, the measure has not been commented on. There will be a new national census in 2011 which will provide much more new data on population, housing, and migration etc.

### A Snap Shot of the Cairns Population

The estimated resident population of Cairns Regional Council at 30 June 2008 (predicted) was 158,653 people, an increase of 5 985 people or 3.9% over the year. This compares to a 3.5% increase over the previous year.

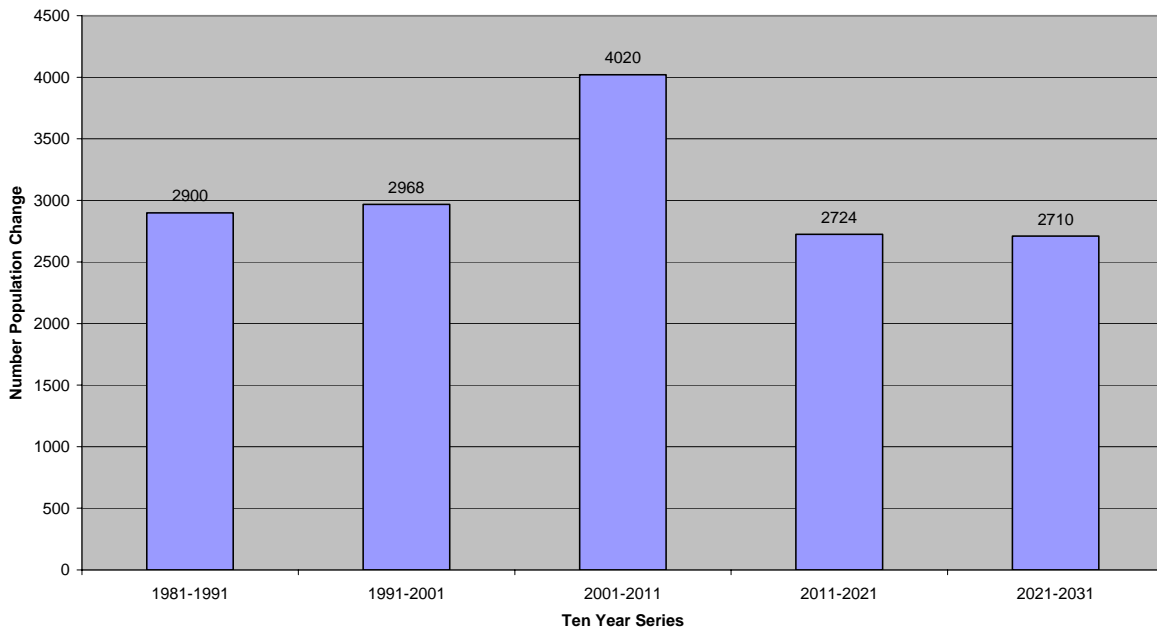


**Estimated Resident Population for Cairns Regional Council**



Projected population increases indicate that by June 30, 2016 the expected population of Cairns Regional Council will have grown to 182 684. By 2021 the population is expected to reach 195 540 and by 2026 the population is expected to grow to 208 532 – a growth rate between 2006 and 2026 of 1.7%.

**Annual Population Change Ten Year Series to June 30th**



The graph above shows by how many people the population of the Cairns Region has grown and how it is predicted to grow up to 2031. It is envisaged that the period between 2001 and 2011 will see the most people arrive in the region.

### Population change

People are living longer and we are having fewer children which points towards a dramatic change in the age structure of society. Australia is ageing and the Cairns Region is reflecting this change.

### Cairns Regional Council

Age group	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-64	65+
<b>2006</b>	21.5%	13.1%	31.9%	24.7%	8.8%
<b>2031</b>	17.3%	11.2%	27.8%	25.8%	17.9%

By 2031, the proportion of people aged over 65 years will have doubled. The age group distributions displayed in the table above are similar to those across Queensland. One difference between Cairns and the rest of the state however, is the proportion of people aged 65+ in Cairns will remain a smaller number than other places such as the Tablelands.

### Queensland

Age group	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-64	65+
<b>2006</b>	20.4%	14.1%	28.6%	24.8%	12.1%
<b>2031</b>	17.7%	21.1%	25.5%	24.4%	20.3%

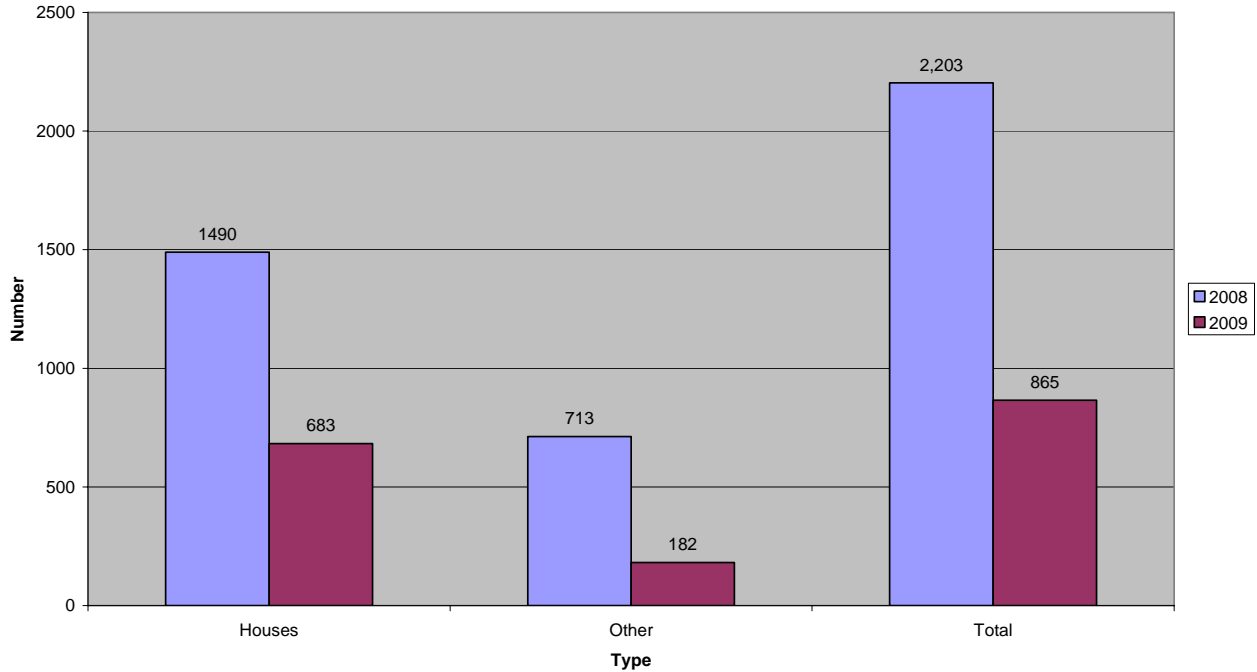
The median age of people in Cairns will rise from 35 years in 2006 to 41 years in 2031. The median age of people in Townsville, by way of comparison over the same time period, is predicted to increase from 33 years in 2006 to 39 years in 2031. The median age of people on the Tablelands however, is predicted to increase from 41 years in 2006 to 48 in 2031.

### Housing Updates

In the year to June 2009, Cairns was one of only four Local Government Areas (LGA) outside of South East Queensland to rate as one of the top 10 areas for dwelling approvals. However, between June 2008 and June 2009 the dwelling approval numbers fell. All of the top 10 LGAs for dwelling approvals (Brisbane, Gold Coast, Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich, Townsville, Logan, Fraser Coast, Cairns and Mackay) experienced this decline in the approvals.

Cairns (number nine in the top 10 list of areas for dwelling approvals) experienced a 60.7% decline for all dwelling approvals between 30 June 2008 to 30 June 2009, a 54.2% decline in approvals for houses and 74.5% decline in approvals for other types of dwelling such as townhouses or units over the same time period which was no doubt a symptom of the world wide global financial downturn.

### Dwelling Approvals

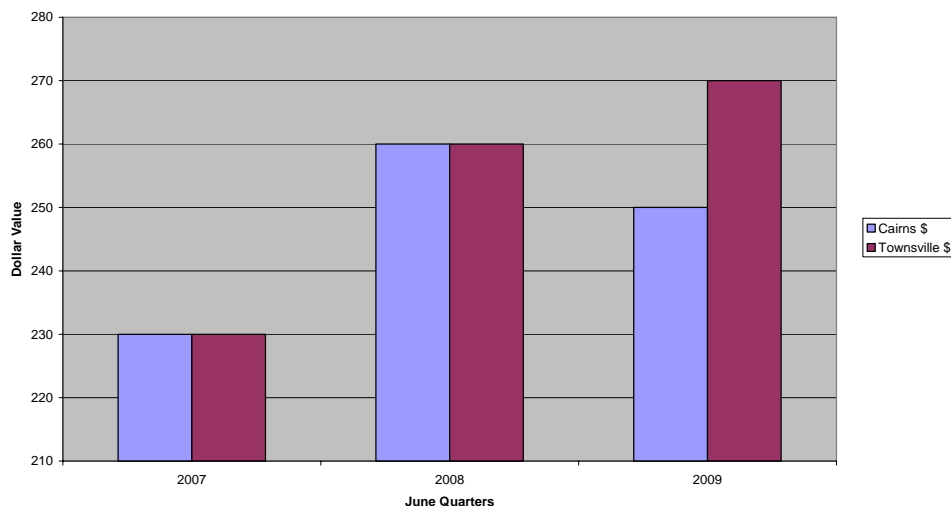


## Measures on Affordability

Affordability refers to the ability of Cairns Regional Council residents to access and live in appropriate and affordable accommodation.

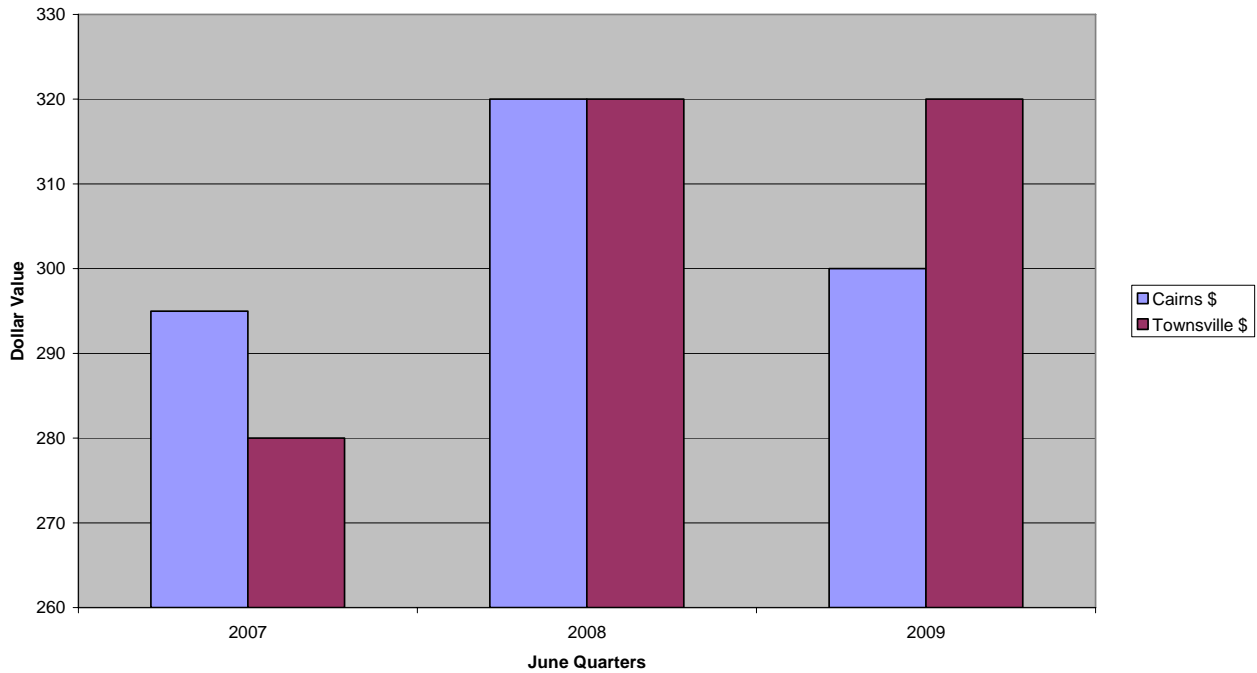
One way of measuring Affordability is to examine rents. Figures from Queensland's Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) show the average cost of renting in 2009 in the Cairns region has fallen compared to rental costs in 2008. Figures indicate the average cost of renting a two-bedroom unit was \$250 in the June 2009 quarter - down \$10 per week from June 2008 and the cost of a three-bedroom house fell by \$20 per week over the same time scale.

Rental Costs Cairns & Townsville Average Cost Per Two Bed Unit Over June Quarter 2007, 2008 & 2009



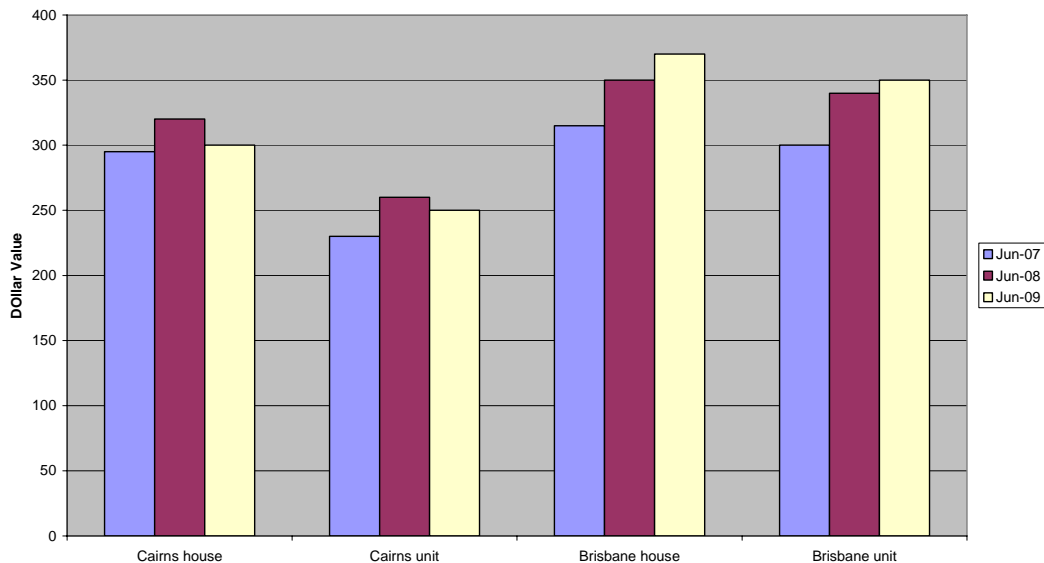
The graph above shows how the average cost of renting a two bedroom unit compares between Cairns and Townsville over a time period of three years. The rent in Cairns dropped by \$10 between June 2008 and June 2009 whereas the rents in Townsville rose by \$10 per week.

Rental Costs Three Bed House June Quarters 07, 08 & 09 Cairns and Townsville



The above graph displays the average cost of renting a three bedroom house in Cairns and Townsville over the June quarters from 2007, 2008 and 2009. Whilst the rental price in Cairns was on average \$15 higher per week in 2007, by 2009 the cost of renting in Cairns compared to Townsville had fallen with average weekly rents \$20 cheaper indicating that Cairns has more affordable rents.

Weekly Rental Costs for House & Units Brisbane and Cairns June Quarters 07, 08 and 09



When we compare the average rental costs of Brisbane to Cairns over the June quarters of 2007 through to 2009, it is clear how much more affordable Cairns is to Brisbane.

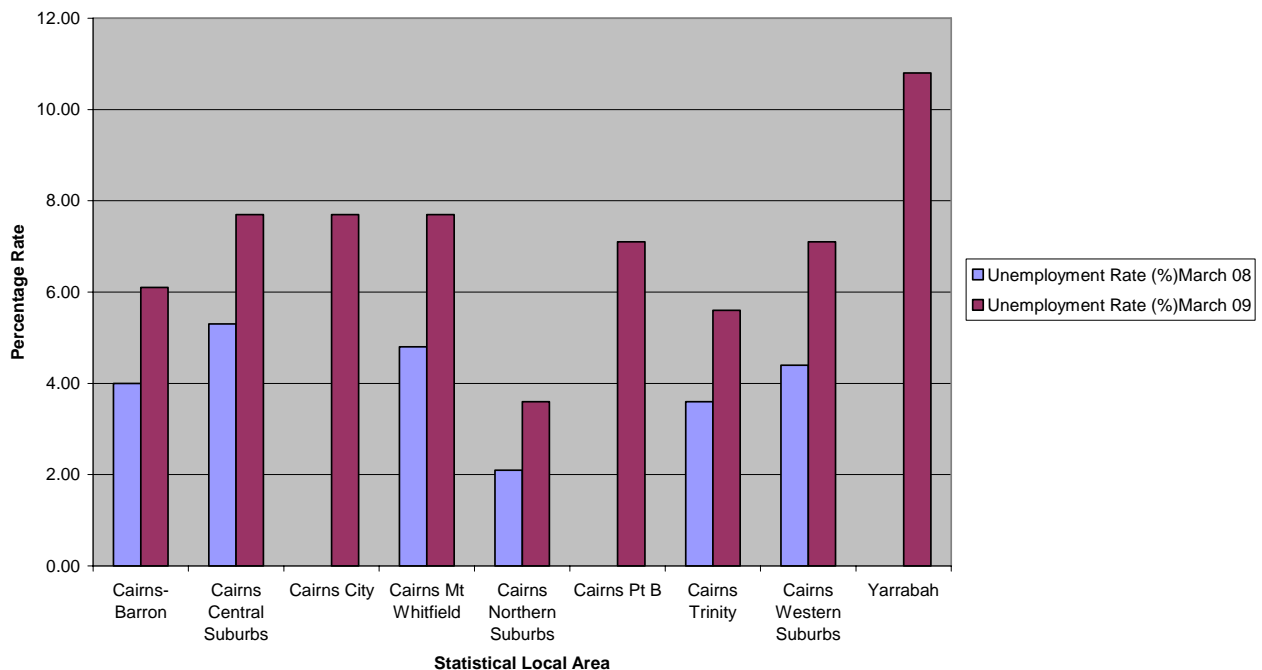
## Unemployment

The Cairns region has experienced some of the highest rates of unemployment in Australia. Data available from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (currently only available for the March 2008 and March 2009 time periods) shown below in the graph, displays how there has been a rise in the levels of unemployment over the time period.

Unemployment has affected different areas of Cairns in different ways. Where figures are available, the highest rate in 2008 was experienced in the central suburbs and the lowest rate in the northern suburbs. In 2009, nearly all the areas of Cairns were beginning to experience similar rates between 6.1% and 7.7% of the population of those areas. Once again, the northern suburbs still had the lowest rates of under 4%. By comparison, Yarrabah experienced the largest unemployment rates of the region with an unemployment rate of 10.8%.

With the decrease in building activity has come a slight fall in median house purchase prices to \$333 000 thereby making housing more affordable. However, unemployment rates in Cairns are still amongst the highest in Australia. In the June quarter 2009 there were 6 389 people unemployed. This represents an unemployment rate of 7.1% compared with Queensland which had a smoothed unemployment rate of 4.4%. Unfortunately but to be expected, these high unemployment rates have had a negative effect on the affordability measure.

Unemployment Rate March 08 to March 09



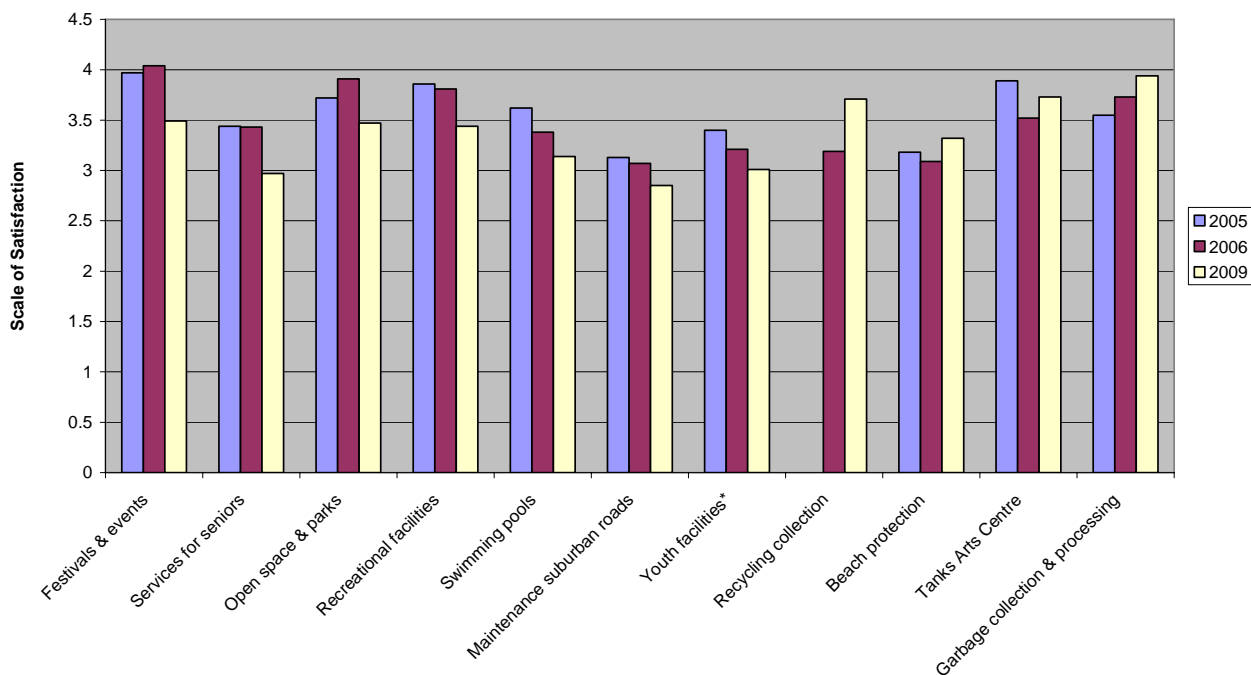
## Measures on Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the opportunities people have to gain entry to and use public spaces and facilities of interest to them.

One measure of accessibility would be the level of community satisfaction with the availability of relevant community facilities and services. In the 2009 community survey conducted by Council, respondents were given a list of 37 infrastructure, facilities and services to rate on a five point scale. The scale rated this list on two levels: importance to provide and Council's current handling. Council's current handling of the list below (11 infrastructure, facilities and services) were also asked in the 2005 and 2006 iterations of the community survey.

In the five point scale, three is the mid score and therefore, scores above three are positive reflections of Council's handling of the infrastructure, facilities and services. Scores below three are negative scores.

Rating of Council's Infrastructure, Facilities & Services



Nine out of the 11 areas described in the survey are positive over time. Services for seniors and maintenance of suburban roads have fallen to the negative.

The majority of the above scores show a downward shift in the perception of residents in regard to Council's current handling of the noted infrastructure, facilities and services over time. However, in regard to recycling, beach protection and garbage collection the shift has been positive.

During the last three years there has been a global financial downturn, Cairns has been the victim of many job losses such as the loss of a large ship building contract, local car dealerships taken into receivership and the downturn of some large building firms. In addition there have been some major changes to the local infrastructure such as the sale of the airport, move of swimming pools to outside of Council management contractors and there has been disruptive work to the Bruce Highway/Mulgrave Road. Added together, these changes to the external locus of control of Cairns residents may have a negative effect on the answers to assessment of related infrastructure and facilities maintenance questions within the survey. Conversely, however out of their control people might feel the global economic downturn is, they do have control on how much they recycle, how much and what they place in the garbage collection and what they can do to protect the region's beaches. Consequently, these items within the survey could show positive scores over time.

Another measure of Accessibility is the production of Cultural Resources. Cairns has theatres, libraries, live music events, art galleries and dance productions throughout the region. For example, The Civic Theatre hosted approximately 100 events that were attended by over 70,000 people and these events included many local productions as well as an array of touring shows. Such an array of differing cultural amenity is indicative of a thriving cultural centre.

## Measures on Diversity

Diversity describes the differences in populations in terms of cultural background, cultural practices, languages spoken, ethnicity etc.

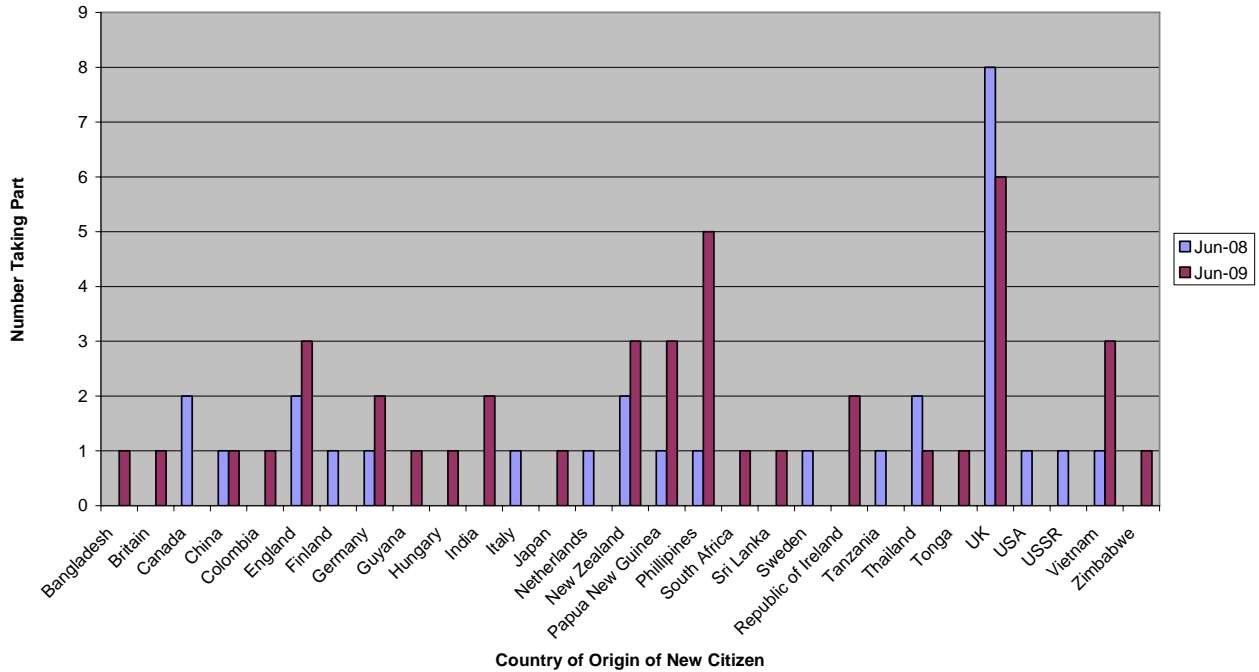
The number of services offered to international migrants in Cairns remained largely unchanged though very broad in aspect and outlook. Migrant Settlement Services receives funding from the Department of Immigration & Citizenship and acts as an umbrella service organisation offering help in interpretation, settlement, advocacy and access to health care, employment and education. Other services such as the St John's Community Care offer advice in aged care and disability care for migrants and family members of visa holders.

The local area multicultural programme (LAMP) which is partially funded by Council, offers assistance to migrant, refugee and multicultural communities through the development and implementation of access and equity strategies designed to increase community participation, the promotion of awareness and the encouragement of community cohesion.

There are numerous organisations offering services in housing, health, personal, social and family support, employment and access to indigenous people. Council has recently developed and launched an Indigenous Employment Strategy and engages the input of indigenous people in the governance of the region through the Indigenous Advisory Committee.

The region remains very diverse with over 40 cultural backgrounds and consequent languages accounted for.

Persons Taking Part in Citizenship Ceremonies in Cairns June 08 to June 09

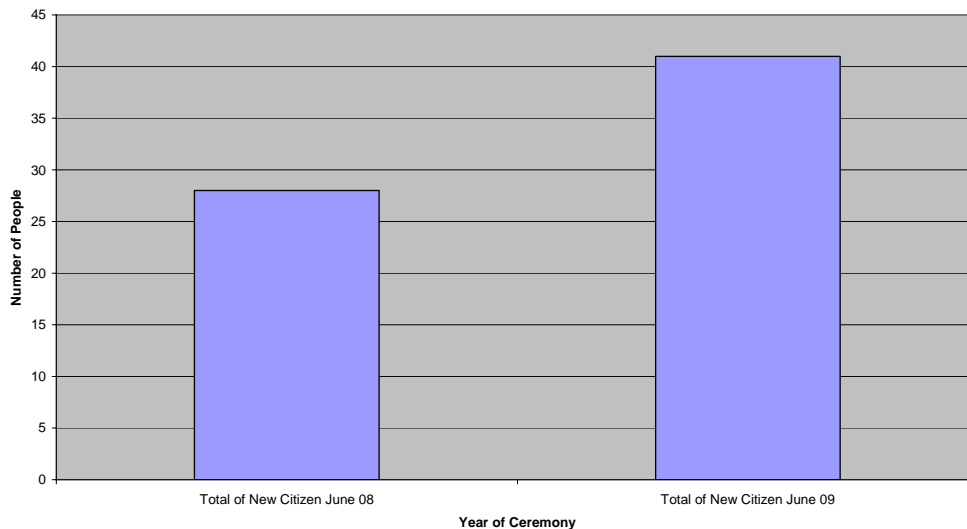


The diversity of the Cairns Regional community is very clearly demonstrated in the range of Countries of Origin of people becoming citizens in Cairns between June 2008 and June 2009.

Cairns is becoming an increasing popular place for people to become new Australian citizens and to settle.

The graph below clearly shows the increase in the number of people choosing to become Australian citizens in Cairns. The data is a snap shot of those people who choose Cairns as the venue for their citizenship ceremony.

Total number of People Made New Citizens in Cairns June 08 and June 09





## Measures on Equity

Equity relates to the differences in relative advantage or disadvantage between populations. One major measure is the Socio-Economic Index for Area data (SEIFA). SEIFA is calculated on a range of variables from the 2006 Census.

**The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage:** focuses primarily on disadvantage, and is derived from Census variables like low income, low educational attainment, unemployment, and dwellings without motor vehicles.

The indexes show an average ranking of an area. The socio-economic conditions of individual residents in any one area will vary, and there may be relatively advantaged residents living in areas labelled as disadvantaged, and vice versa

**The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage -** Within the SEIFA measurement index, the lower the score the more relatively disadvantaged a community or area is compared to an area with a higher score. The index scores have been standardised by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to have a mean of 1 000, so the nearer a score is to 1 000 (or higher), then the more advantaged a community is. The rank is where that community is in relation to all areas and communities in Queensland and Australia.

Name	Score	Rank in Australia	Rank in Queensland
Cairns (C)	1001	473	128
Douglas (S)	985	391	114
Yarrabah (S)	485	9	2
Wujal Wujal (S)	532	25	10

The table above shows the relative disadvantage of the listed communities – there are 156 separate communities listed for Queensland. At 128 and 114 respectively, Cairns and Douglas (data is not yet fully available for the amalgamated councils) are relatively un-disadvantaged.

### Socio-Economic Index of Disadvantage Cairns Regional Council compared to Queensland

The table below shows another way of displaying relative disadvantage. The table shows the percentage of the population in each QUINTILE (one fifth or 20% of the population) according to the Socio-Economic Index of Disadvantage. Quintile 1 represents the **most** disadvantaged group of people while Quintile 5 represents the **least** disadvantaged group of people. As a comparison, Queensland has 20% of the whole population in each QUINTILE.

Local Government Area	Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (least disadvantaged)
Cairns	23.6	20.1	18.6	18.8	19.0
Queensland	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0

By comparison, Cairns has more people than the state who could be described as the most disadvantaged and a slightly lower proportion of people who could be described as the least disadvantaged.

## Measures on Amenity and Well Being

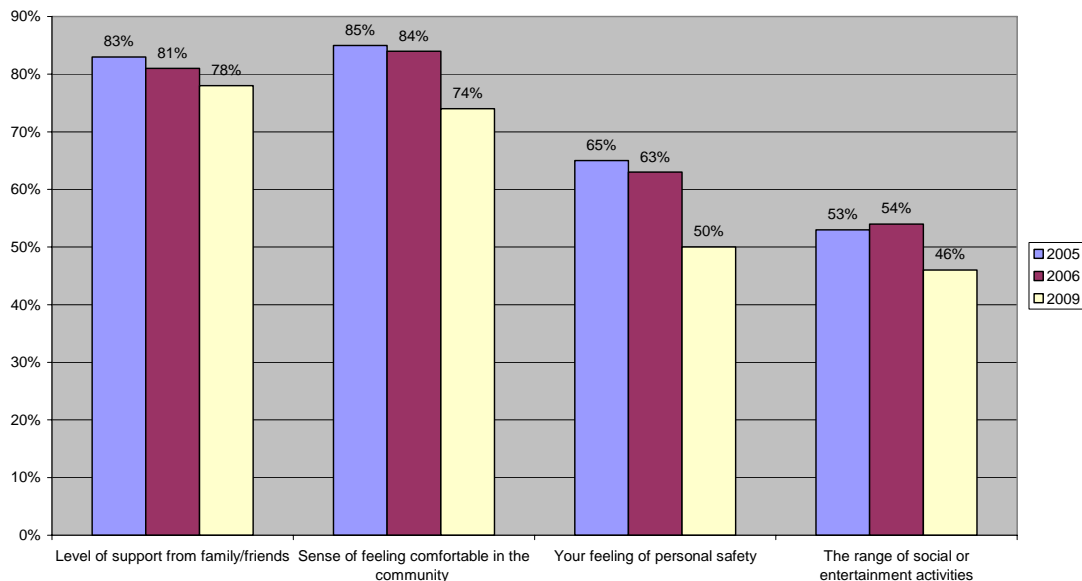
Both Amenity and Well-being measure the value a person attributes to their environment and a person's relationship with that (physical and spiritual) environment.

In the Cairns Community Survey respondents were asked to rate (on a five point scale) four factors in order to evaluate the influence of each in relation to their feelings about living in Cairns Region. The same four factors or questions were asked in the 2005 and 2006 surveys in the wider context of 20 factors.

The table below compares the number of respondents who answered good or excellent from the five point scale of Excellent, Good, Average/OK, Poor, Very Poor in regard to the four factors of:

- Level of support from family and friends
- Sense of feeling comfortable in the community
- Feelings of personal safety
- Range of social or entertainment activities

AMENITY - comparison of responses rated good or excellent



The graph above shows the trend of people's feelings over the life of the three community surveys.

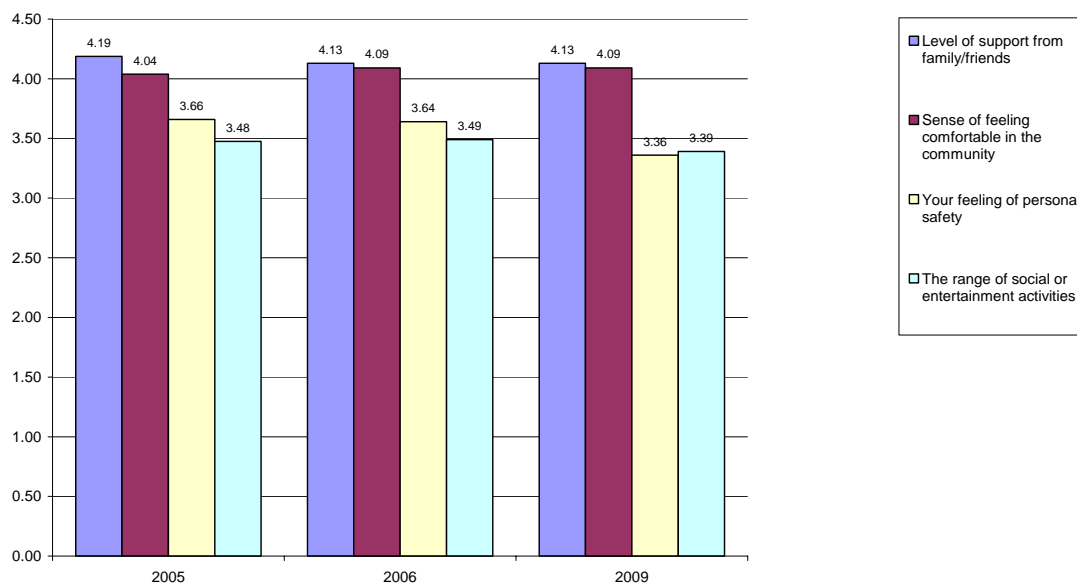
Three of the examples of Amenity; level of support from family and friends, sense of feeling comfortable in the community and feelings of personal safety returned scores of good or excellent for the majority of the responses in all three surveys. The factor "range of social or entertainment activities" began at 53% of respondents returning a score of good or excellent but fell to below 50% in the 2009 survey.

Please note that in the 2006 survey, these questions were asked in a slightly different context of four out of 20 whereas in the 2009 survey, the questions were asked individually.

<b>AMENITY (compares 5* point scale good/excellent) excludes Douglas</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2009</b>
Level of support from family/friends	4.19	4.13	4.13
Sense of feeling comfortable in the community	4.04	4.09	4.09
Your feeling of personal safety	3.66	3.64	3.36
The range of social or entertainment activities	3.48	3.49	3.39

\*A score of 3 or over indicates a positive rating

AMENITY mean ratings - comparison of 1 to 5 scale (5 excellent/1 very poor)



With the global financial downturn making the livelihood of many people uncertain feelings of uncertainty, of not feeling connected to the community, of not feeling secure and of not feeling supported will begin to dominate in people. If the financial situation is uncertain, those feelings may translate in a reduction or lessening of the range of social activities undertaken which, when asked about, may result in the assertion that there are fewer things to do.

Although the Amenity questions show a trend downwards over time, the mean scores for all the questions are still positive.

## Measures on Good Leadership

Seven areas of strategic performance were evaluated in the 2009 Community Survey. In the context of 'good leadership' Liveability Indicators have been measured against Council strategic performance. Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with the following statements on a five point scale of Excellent, Good, Average/OK, Poor, Very Poor.

The seven areas were:

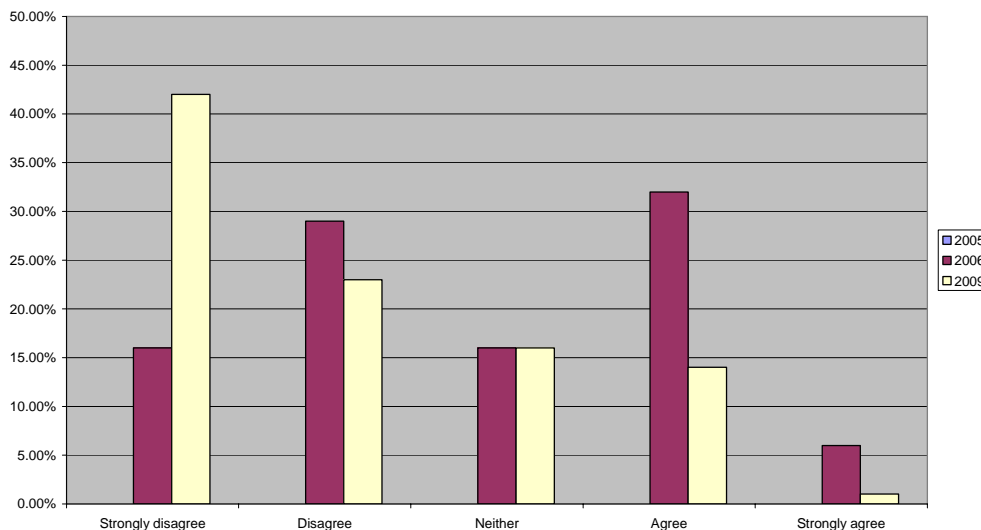
- Council is environmentally conscious
- Council protects and retains the region’s character and heritage
- Council keeps the community informed about policies, plans, programmes and activities
- Council provides opportunities for Community input and feedback on its policies, plans and programmes
- Council effectively lobbies and represents on behalf of the community with other levels of government
- Council is efficient and well managed
- Overall, Council provides value for money for the rates and charges you pay

Only the last question, “**overall value for money**”, was also asked in the 2005 and 2006 survey

Please note, the respondents would have rated the six other measures before rating ‘overall value for money’ and that percentage scores were not available from the 2005 survey.

<b>COUNCIL STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE – overall value for money</b>			
	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2009</b>
Strongly disagree	n/a	16%	42%
Disagree	n/a	29%	23%
Neither	n/a	16%	16%
Agree	n/a	32%	14%
Strongly agree	n/a	6%	1%

Responses to the question on overall value for money



% data on this question was not available from the 2005 survey

Those respondents indicating they strongly agreed or agreed that Council was value for money has fallen over time.

<b>COUNCIL STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE – mean rating</b>			
	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2009</b>
overall value for money	2.89	2.83	2.04

From the beginning of the surveys in 2005, evaluation of mean values assesses 3 as a positive score. The scores above therefore indicate that overall, Council was not felt to be value for money.

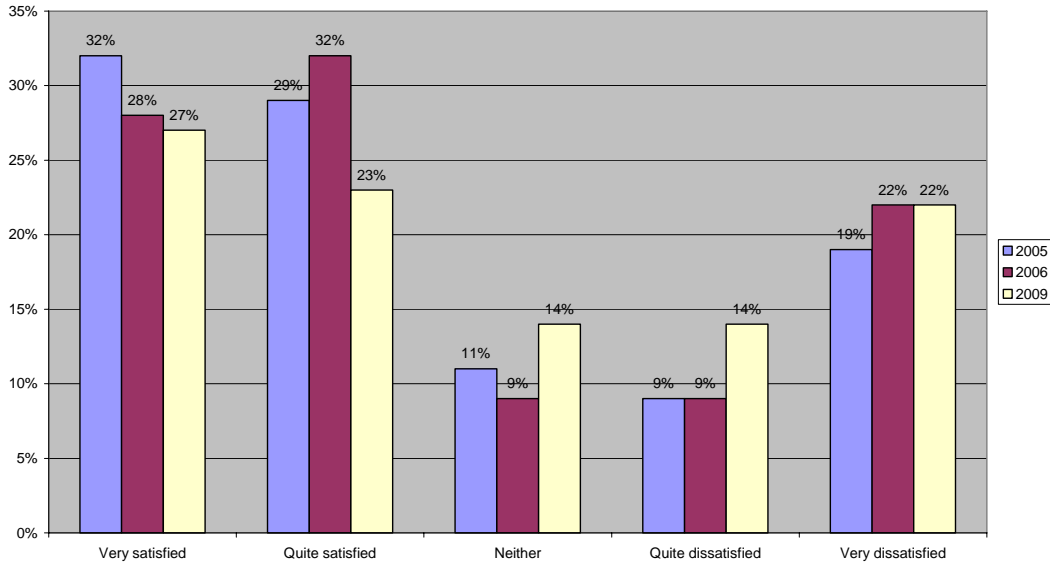
Mean rating comparison show similar levels of falling towards negativity as shown in the percentage responses.



Between the 2006 and 2009 surveys, the new Cairns Region was formed along with a new council. During that formation period and subsequent budget reviews, adverse publicity was generated in the media concerning rates rises, water pricing, water quality, reduction of council services and new Councillor salaries. All of these factors may have had a negative effect on respondent's attitudes and beliefs regarding value for money

Another question on Good Leadership asked of community survey respondents was on satisfaction with a Council contact.

Level of Satisfaction with Council contact 2005, 2006 & 2009



Levels of satisfaction of contact with council espoused by respondents have trended downwards and levels of dissatisfaction with this measure, over the life of the three surveys, is up. However, the percentage of respondents who recorded a satisfied score (very satisfied and quite satisfied) with Council over the three surveys is still higher than the percentage of respondents who recorded dissatisfaction (quite dissatisfied and very dissatisfied).

## Measures of a Great Place to Live

Cairns Regional Council is one of the top 10 largest growing Local Government Areas (LGA) in Queensland.

Cairns Regional Council will be the third largest growing LGA outside of South east Queensland in the 2006-2016 period.

Cairns Regional Council is the second FASTEST growing LGA in Queensland, experiencing 3.9% growth. The fastest is Ipswich with a growth of 4.1%. Townsville is the 8<sup>th</sup> fastest growing LGA with a 3.0% growth rate.

Cairns Regional Council is the largest growing LGA in regional Queensland. We experienced 3.0% growth in 2001-2006, 3.4% 2006-2007 and 3.9% in 2007-2008.

Cairns Regional Council is the fastest growing LGA in regional Queensland. We experienced 3.0% growth in 2001-2006, 3.9% 2006-2007 and 3.9% in 2007-2008.

Cairns Regional Council is the fourth most popular destination for overseas skilled visa holders to settle in with 930 visa holders, behind Mackay (1060 visa holders), Gold Coast (1600 visa holders) and Brisbane (12 420 visa holders).

Overall, Cairns is great place to live as can be seen by the pace and scope of its growth. Some levels of satisfaction have fallen over the last year or so but much of that can be traced back to insecurities over jobs and housing due to the downturn in the economy.