ORDINARY MEETING 11 NOVEMBER 2026	5.4

DRAFT STATE PLANNING POLICY 2026 - RETROSPECTIVE ENDORSEMENT OF COUNCIL SUBMISSION

PGS | 70/6/1 | #7974517

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council retrospectively endorses the submission provided by Cairns Regional Council to the Queensland Government on the draft State Planning Policy 2026, as attached to this report.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, 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:

This report seeks retrospective Council endorsement of a submission lodged by Cairns Regional Council in response to the Queensland Government's consultation on the draft State Planning Policy 2026 (SPP).

The draft SPP proposes significant changes to the State's planning framework, including the introduction of Strategic Aspirations, revised approaches to natural hazards, environmental matters, housing, economic development and implementation requirements. Council officers reviewed the draft SPP and prepared a submission that generally supports the draft State Planning Policy 2026 and its focus on housing delivery, economic development and infrastructure investment and identifies several areas where amendments or additional guidance are considered necessary to achieve balanced planning outcomes for the Cairns region.

Key themes raised in the submission include:

- Recognition of natural values and agriculture within the Strategic Aspirations.
- Further guidance for emerging industries, including data centres.
- Clarification of potential conflicts between housing outcomes and early rising and night-time economy objectives.
- Retention of an avoid-first approach to natural hazard planning.
- Stronger recognition of heat-related risk.
- Increased emphasis on environmental values and biodiversity.
- Appropriate implementation and transitional arrangements for local governments.

The submission was lodged prior to Council consideration to ensure Cairns Regional Council participated in the State consultation process within the prescribed timeframe.

This report now seeks formal Council endorsement of the submission.

BACKGROUND:

The Queensland Government released the draft State Planning Policy 2026 for public consultation and invited feedback from local governments and stakeholders. The draft SPP is intended to replace the current State Planning Policy and will guide how state interests are integrated into local planning instruments and development assessment processes.

The draft policy introduces a new structure, including Strategic Aspirations and revised policy positions relating to housing, economic development, infrastructure, natural hazards, environmental matters and implementation requirements.

Due to the consultation timeframe, Council officers prepared and lodged a submission on behalf of Council on 26 October 2026. Amendments were made to the submission following consultation with Councillors which was subsequently lodged with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning on 6 November 2026, this report seeks formal Council endorsement of this version of the submission.

COMMENT:

Council's submission generally supports the draft State Planning Policy 2026 and its focus on housing delivery, economic development and infrastructure investment. The submission identifies a number of matters where clarification, refinement or additional policy guidance is considered necessary to ensure the policy can be effectively implemented at a local level. Key matters raised in the submission include:

Strategic Aspirations - Support for the proposed strategic directions, while advocating for stronger recognition of environmental values and agriculture and clarity on emerging industries to better reflect regional Queensland priorities.

Housing and Economic Development - Support for measures that facilitate housing supply and economic growth, with requests for further guidance where competing land use outcomes may create conflict.

Natural Hazards and Resilience - Advocacy for maintaining a strong risk-based planning approach that prioritises avoiding development in areas subject to unacceptable natural hazard risk.

Heat and Climate Resilience - Support for greater recognition of heat-related risk and planning measures that improve community resilience and urban liveability.

Environmental Values - Recommendation that environmental and biodiversity values remain a prominent and clearly articulated component of the State planning framework.

Implementation and Transition - Request for practical implementation pathways, appropriate transition arrangements and support for local governments responsible for applying the new policy framework. Particularly the implications associated with implementing a new SPP while local governments are concurrently undertaking planning scheme review and amendment projects under the Scheme Supply Fund.

Overall, the submission seeks to ensure the final State Planning Policy achieves the State's objectives for housing and economic growth while maintaining appropriate consideration of environmental values, natural hazards, resilience and local implementation challenges.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended)

That Council retrospectively endorses the submission provided by Cairns Regional Council to the Queensland Government on the draft State Planning Policy 2026, as attached to this report.

Option 2

That Council further amend or withdraw aspects of the submission.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

Failure to participate in State planning policy reform processes may result in regional issues and local government implementation challenges not being adequately considered. The submission is intended to proactively advocate for planning outcomes that support the Cairns region whilst managing environmental, community and economic risks.

Retrospective endorsement of the submission provides transparency regarding Council's position and confirms the matters raised on Council's behalf.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

There are no direct financial implications arising from endorsement of the submission. The submission encourages the State to provide financial support to local governments to implement the new SPP, similar to the current Scheme Supply Fund, which has greatly assisted in the preparation of contemporary scheme amendments.

The draft SPP has the potential to influence future planning scheme amendments, development outcomes and infrastructure investment decisions across the region. Accordingly, the issues raised in the submission may have long-term implications for economic development, housing supply, investment certainty and infrastructure planning.

Community and Cultural Heritage:

The submission advocates for planning outcomes that support housing supply, economic development, community resilience and protection of the environmental values that contribute to the region's identity and liveability.

The submission also seeks planning settings that appropriately balance growth with local community expectations and place-based values.

Natural Environment:

Several matters raised in the submission relate directly to the protection of environmental values, biodiversity, landscape character and climate resilience.

The submission seeks stronger recognition of natural assets within the Strategic Aspirations and Environment State Interest and advocates for greater consideration of heat-related risk and natural hazard management.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

This report aligns with Council's Corporate Plan themes relating to:

- Economy
- Natural Assets
- Liveability
- Serving the Community

The submission advocates for a balanced planning framework that supports sustainable growth while protecting the environmental attributes that underpin the region's economy and lifestyle.

Statutory:

The draft State Planning Policy is prepared under the provisions of the Planning Act 2016 and provides direction regarding the integration of State interests within local planning frameworks.

Council is a key stakeholder in the implementation of the State Planning Policy through planning scheme preparation, amendment and development assessment responsibilities.

Policy:

The State Planning Policy informs how State interests are integrated into Council's planning scheme and development assessment functions. Council's submission seeks a clear, balanced and practical framework that can be effectively implemented by local government.

CONSULTATION:

Council Officers consulted with Councillors in the finalisation of an amended submission which was lodged with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning on 6 November 2026.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Cairns Regional Council's submission to the Queensland Government on the draft State Planning Policy 2026 - #7969304.



Sean Lisle
Acting Director, Planning, Growth and Sustainability

Attachment 1: Cairns Regional Council's submission to the Queensland Government on the draft State Planning Policy 2026 - #7969304

ENQUIRIES: Deb Wellington
PHONE: 4044 3521
OUR REF: #7969304

6 November 2026

Hon Jarrod Bleijie MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations
Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning
PO Box 15009
City East QLD 4002

Via email: planningforqueensland@dsdip.qld.gov.au

Dear Deputy Premier

Cairns Regional Council Submission on draft State Planning Policy 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the draft State Planning Policy 2026 (the draft SPP). Please find attached Cairns Regional Council's (Council) amended submission following consideration by Councillors. Council had been provided the opportunity by Department to lodge the amended submission following the closing date to replace the original submission which was lodged to meet the properly made requirements.

Council have reviewed the draft policy and provide the following feedback.

1. Strategic Aspirations

The draft SPP introduces Strategic Aspirations to guide how competing or complementary interests are considered in practice. The Strategic Aspirations prioritise housing, economy and infrastructure as state interests.

Council supports the State's focus on addressing Queensland's housing supply challenges, supporting economic growth and facilitating investment in critical infrastructure. These are important objectives for both the State and local governments. However, Council considers that the Strategic Aspirations would benefit from a more balanced recognition of natural values and biodiversity to support the achievement of ecological sustainability.

The absence of Strategic Aspirations relating to natural values may be detrimental to effectively balancing state interests in a region like Cairns, where environmental assets are fundamental to the region's identity, liveability and economy. These values underpin a significant tourism sector and are consistently identified by the

community as matters of high importance that require careful protection and balance alongside growth and development objectives.

Furthermore, the *State Planning Policy* is the key tool for advancing the purpose of the *Planning Act 2026*, which is to achieve Ecological Sustainability and as such it is expected that the Strategic Aspirations should include natural values to assist in achieving this purpose.

Additionally, Council considers that the Strategic Aspirations would benefit from greater inclusion of the State interest in Agriculture.

Attracting emerging industries has been elevated to a Strategic Aspiration with the policy statement to *identify, protect and promote emerging industries*. It is noted that the definition of emerging industries includes data centres. Given the new and rapidly evolving nature of these industries, further guidance should be provided to support this policy position.

For your consideration:

- The Strategic Aspirations would be strengthened through recognition of natural values alongside housing, infrastructure and economic objectives, reflecting the role these assets play in supporting liveability, resilience and long-term economic prosperity.
- The Strategic Aspirations would be strengthened and appropriately balanced by including a complementary aspiration relating to agriculture.
- The SPP should include additional guidance, including locational, for emerging industries, particularly for data centres. This would both support investment certainty and facilitate appropriate land use outcomes.

2. Early rising and Night-time economy

The Tourism State Interest includes policy statements to promote the early rising culture and night-time economies in centres, and to protect these locations from encroachment by sensitive land uses. This appears to be a conflict with the Housing State Interest, which seeks to promote higher density housing in and around city, town, retail and mixed-use centres.

For your consideration:

- Provide clarification within the policy statements to ensure that they do not create a conflict between the interests and ensure reverse amenity issues are managed appropriately.

3. Natural hazards

The draft SPP flips the approach to natural hazards from an ‘avoid, then mitigate’ to a ‘mitigate and only where mitigation can not achieve a tolerable level, avoid’ approach to development within hazard areas.

Fundamentally, development should not be located within areas where a hazard is an intolerable risk to people or property. In practice, local government planning schemes identify appropriate mitigation measures that can make a development tolerable within a hazard area (e.g. floor levels in response to storm tide or flood inundation).

Council is concerned that a mitigation-led approach may result in increased risk, cost and implementation responsibilities being borne by local governments and property owners over time - who may be required to undertake larger, costly, potentially settlement scale mitigation projects to ensure mitigation, or end users through their ability (or not) to insure a property and associated affordability and mortgage-ability.

Sound and consistent hazards policy facilitates investment confidence. Uncertainty will result in unquantified financial liability which will be realised through insurability, mortgage-ability and investment confidence.

The Insurance Council of Australia has strongly advocated for an avoid first approach to development and natural hazards and the importance that land use planning has in managing natural hazard risk and insurability and affordability.

For your consideration:

- Retain the current policy position of avoid and where not possible to avoid, mitigate the risk to an acceptable or tolerable level.

4. Extreme heat

The draft SPP does reference and recognise urban heat under the State interest of Environment, Heritage and Efficient Growth, in relation to locating and designing development to minimise the adverse impacts of urban heat island effect on residential areas, centres, industrial precincts, infrastructure and the built environment.

It is considered that the urban heat provisions are narrowly framed, lack clear definitions and policy.

Despite extreme heat / heatwaves being responsible for deaths annually, urban heat has not been recognised as a Natural Disaster within the draft SPP. However, extreme heat / heatwaves are recognised in the FNQ Regional Plan 2026 as a hazard.

Council has been active with the Local Government Association of Queensland in advocating for the adverse impacts of increasing heat to be recognised and reflected in policy.

For your consideration:

- Recognise and define extreme heat as a natural hazard within the SPP.
- Include specific policies for the identification and mitigation heat-related risk.
- Include clearer guidance on urban cooling, shading and design responses that mitigate heat-related impacts.

5. Environmental Matters

Environmental matters have been re-organised into a new State interest for Environment, Heritage and Efficient Growth.

The draft SPP lead-in statement does not clearly articulate the State significance of environmental values and place-based attributes as important considerations in their own right. While Council acknowledges the importance of facilitating efficient growth to support housing supply, infrastructure delivery and economic outcomes, the lead-in statement places limited emphasis on the broader environmental, landscape and regional values that contribute to Queensland's liveability, resilience and identity.

The policy statements relating to environmental matters have also been substantially reduced when compared with the current SPP.

Efficient growth, housing, infrastructure and economic development outcomes are already strongly represented throughout the draft SPP, including within other State interests and the new Strategic Aspirations. Their inclusion within the Environment, Heritage and Efficient Growth State interest has the potential to dilute the visibility and strategic prominence of environmental considerations, rather than providing a clear framework for balancing competing policy objectives.

Council supports efficient growth and economic development outcomes. However, it is concerned that combining efficient growth with environmental matters, particularly within the context of the revised SPP structure and the increased role of the Strategic Aspirations, may unintentionally reduce the emphasis placed on environmental values, biodiversity, landscape character and other regionally significant natural assets.

This is particularly important for the Cairns region, which is internationally recognised for its exceptional natural environment, environmental diversity and unique relationship between urban communities and surrounding natural landscapes.

For consideration:

- Review the framing of the Environment, Heritage and Efficient Growth State interest to ensure environmental values retain clear visibility and strategic prominence alongside growth objectives.
- Strengthen the lead-in statement to clearly recognise the significance of environmental values, biodiversity, landscape character and regionally

distinctive natural attributes as matters of State interest that contribute to Queensland's long-term prosperity, resilience and liveability.
- Retain or incorporate key elements of the current SPP policy framework that support consideration of matters of recognised environmental significance within regional and local planning frameworks.

6. Implementation

The draft notes that a Local government may be required to review and update their planning scheme once the draft SPP comes into effect to ensure the planning scheme continues to integrate the State's interests.

Any implementation or transitional arrangements or requirements should take into account that almost all Queensland Local governments are currently undertaking amendments to their planning schemes under the Scheme Supply Fund (SSF) and will also need to integrate the new Queensland Housing Code into their planning schemes at some point over the next three years.

The State have advised that guidance material is being prepared but may not be finalised at the time the SPP is proposed to be adopted. A lot of the detail to support the policy statements sits within the guidance material and it would be useful for local governments to understand the full quantum of change to inform any approach to integrating the draft SPP prior to the new SPP being in effect (and prevailing to the extent of an inconsistency with a local government planning scheme).

For your consideration:

- Allow amendments to planning schemes being undertaken under the SSF to continue under the current SPP.
- Where there are requirements for amendments to planning schemes, ensure that sufficient time is provided to allow for a holistic and integrated approach.
- Local governments should be afforded consultation during the preparation of associated guidance material.
- Resourcing to support local governments to implement the new SPP should be considered, similar to the current Scheme Supply Fund, which has greatly assisted in the preparation of contemporary scheme amendments.

Should you have any further enquiries or require additional information, please contact Council's Acting Executive Manager Growth and Sustainability, Ms Debbie Wellington, on the above phone number.

Yours sincerely

Ken Gouldthorp

Ken Gouldthorp
Chief Executive Officer