Cairns is the capital of Tropical North Queensland (TNQ), the largest region in northern Australia and the strategic national gateway to the Pacific, Asia and beyond. The city itself has a resident population of 166,862 people.

To unlock significant opportunities for TNQ, and position Cairns as an economic powerhouse in the north, a City Deal is required to fast track catalytic investments. This will ensure that infrastructure projects are linked with urban governance and land use reform, while taking into consideration workforce planning and liveability factors.

The implementation of a City Deal for Cairns aligns with and supports the implementation of a number of key strategies at Local, State and Federal Government level. These include:

- The National Population Policy framework, which identifies City Deals as a platform for managing growth through better urban planning;
- The northern Australia agenda, which is focused on growing the northern Australian economy through long-term investment and support;
- The Far North Queensland Regional plan, 2009-2031;
- The Cairns 2050 Shared Vision; and

While acknowledging that City Deals are historically driven by Federal Government, in preparing for a Cairns City Deal the Cairns Regional Council has undertaken a substantial amount of background work, developing the platform required to demonstrate widespread support across local government, business and the community.

This support is documented through the Cairns 2050 Shared Vision, which was created in partnership with a diverse range of stakeholders and launched by Cairns Regional Council in November 2018.

The Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia has recommended the establishment of a City Deal for Cairns to accelerate growth and Cairns Regional Council has endorsed a City Deal proposal.

To establish a City Deal for Cairns, the Queensland and Federal Governments are now required to join Cairns Regional Council in signing a Statement of Intent.
OUR RECOMMENDATION

In June 2018 the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia released its report ‘Northern Horizons – Unleashing Our Tourism Potential’. A key recommendation from that report was the establishment of a City Deal for Cairns. To action this recommendation, Cairns Regional Council has endorsed a new Cairns Region City Deal proposal which highlights projects that are critical to securing the economic future of the city. Using the Cairns 2050 Shared Vision as its foundation, the proposal carries the support of State Member for Cairns Michael Healy and Federal Member for Leichhardt the Hon Warren Entsch, and was developed with input and consultation with a broad range of key stakeholders.

To progress the Cairns City Deal initiative, the Queensland and Federal Governments are required to join Cairns Regional Council in signing a Statement of Intent to establish a City Deal for Cairns. The Statement of Intent will provide a starting point for a deal.

BACKGROUND

City Deals are a mechanism to bring together the three levels of government, the community and private enterprise to create place-based partnerships, delivering on the opportunities and challenges in Australia’s cities. They work to align the planning, investment and governance necessary to accelerate economic growth and job creation, stimulate urban renewal, and drive economic reforms to secure prosperity and liveability for Australian cities.

Importantly for Cairns, for every 100,000 Australians choosing to live in a regional city instead of a metropolitan capital, it is estimated an additional $50 billion is released into the Australian economy over 30 years in reduced congestion costs and increased consumption. The savings in congestion costs alone are estimated to be $292 million per year or $4.9 billion over 30 years.

With a resident population of 166,862 people and an average 30,000 additional visitors staying in the city on any given night, Cairns is one of the largest and most dynamic regional cities in Australia and is well placed to deliver on these national benefits of regional migration.

Unique liveability and solid economic fundamentals have seen Cairns experience significant population growth (2.3% per annum in the 15 years to 2016), well in excess of the national growth rate. Combined with significant private investment and renewed business confidence, the region’s unemployment rate has reduced significantly in recent years.

Cairns’ unique combination of economic potential, geographic location and liveability means the city is strategically positioned as a growth centre for both northern Australia and the State of Queensland. In order to realise this potential, Cairns requires the three levels of government to work together to deliver the projects, policies and investments that will make a catalytic difference to the region.

NEXT STEPS

In June 2018 the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia released its report ‘Northern Horizons – Unleashing Our Tourism Potential’. A key recommendation from that report was the establishment of a City Deal for Cairns. To action this recommendation, Cairns Regional Council has endorsed a new Cairns Region City Deal proposal which highlights projects that are critical to securing the economic future of the city. Using the Cairns 2050 Shared Vision as its foundation, the proposal carries the support of State Member for Cairns Michael Healy and Federal Member for Leichhardt the Hon Warren Entsch, and was developed with input and consultation with a broad range of key stakeholders.

To progress the Cairns City Deal initiative, the Queensland and Federal Governments are required to join Cairns Regional Council in signing a Statement of Intent to establish a City Deal for Cairns. The Statement of Intent will provide a starting point for a deal.

That in 2020-2021 the Federal and Queensland Governments join Cairns Regional Council in signing a Statement of Intent, establishing a City Deal for Cairns, formalising a tripartite agreement to establish a set of catalytic priorities for the region.